

World War II



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Germany invading Poland, September 1, 1939.

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World War II, also called **Second World War**, conflict that involved virtually every part of the world during the years 1939–45. The principal belligerents were the Axis powers—Germany, Italy, and Japan—and the Allies—

France, Great Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union, and, to a lesser extent, China. The war was in many respects a continuation, after an uneasy 20-year hiatus, of the disputes left unsettled by World War I. The 40,000,000–50,000,000 deaths incurred in World War II make it the bloodiest conflict, as well as the largest war, in history.



Churchill, Winston; Truman, Harry; Stalin, Joseph

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, U.S. Pres. Harry S. Truman, and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin meeting at Potsdam, Germany, in July 1945 to discuss the postwar order in Europe.

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Along with World War I, World War II was one of the great watersheds of 20th-century geopolitical history. It resulted in the extension of the Soviet Union's power to nations of eastern Europe, enabled a communist movement to eventually achieve power in China, and marked the decisive shift of power in the world away from the states of western Europe and toward the United States and the Soviet Union.

Axis initiative and Allied reaction

The outbreak of war

By the early part of 1939 the German dictator Adolf Hitler had become determined to invade and occupy Poland. Poland, for its part, had guarantees of French and British military support should it be attacked by Germany. Hitler intended to invade Poland anyway, but first he had to neutralize the possibility that the Soviet Union would resist the invasion of its western neighbour. Secret negotiations led on August 23–24 to the signing of the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact in Moscow. In a secret protocol of this pact, the Germans and the Soviets agreed that Poland should be divided between them, with the western third of the country going



atomic bombing of Hiroshima

A gigantic mushroom cloud rising above Hiroshima, Japan, on August 6, 1945, after a U.S. aircraft dropped an atomic bomb on the city, immediately killing more than 70,000 people.

U.S. Air Force photograph

to Germany and the eastern two-thirds being taken over by the U.S.S.R.

Having achieved this cynical agreement, the other provisions of which stupefied Europe even without divulgence of the secret protocol, Hitler thought that Germany could attack Poland with no danger of Soviet or British intervention and gave orders for the invasion to start on August 26. News of the signing, on August 25, of a formal treaty of mutual assistance between Great Britain and Poland (to supersede a previous though temporary agreement) caused him to postpone the start of hostilities for a few days. He was still determined, however, to ignore the diplomatic efforts of the western powers to restrain him. Finally, at 12:40 PM on August 31, 1939, Hitler ordered hostilities against Poland to start at 4:45 the next morning. The invasion began as ordered. In response, Great Britain and France declared war on Germany on September 3, at 11:00 AM and at 5:00 PM, respectively. World War II had begun.

Forces and resources of the European combatants, 1939

In September 1939 the Allies, namely Great Britain, France, and Poland, were together superior in industrial resources, population, and military manpower, but the German Army, or Wehrmacht, because of its armament, training, doctrine, discipline, and fighting spirit, was the most efficient and effective fighting force for its size in the world. The index of military strength in September 1939 was the number of divisions that each nation could mobilize. Against Germany's 100 infantry divisions and six armoured divisions, France had 90 infantry divisions in metropolitan France, Great Britain had 10 infantry divisions, and Poland had 30 infantry divisions, 12 cavalry brigades, and one armoured brigade (Poland had also 30 reserve infantry divisions, but these could not be mobilized quickly). A division contained from 12,000 to 25,000 men.

It was the qualitative superiority of the German infantry divisions and the number of their armoured divisions that made the difference in 1939. The firepower of a German infantry division far exceeded that of a French, British, or Polish division; the standard German division included 442 machine guns, 135 mortars, 72 antitank guns, and 24 howitzers. Allied divisions had a firepower only slightly greater than that of World War I. Germany had six armoured divisions in September 1939; the Allies, though they had a large number of tanks, had no armoured divisions at that time.

The six armoured, or panzer, divisions of the Wehrmacht comprised some 2,400 tanks. And though Germany would subsequently expand its tank forces during the first years of the war, it was not the number of tanks that Germany had (the Allies had almost as many in September 1939) but the fact of



Adolf Hitler

Adolf Hitler reviewing troops on the Eastern Front, 1939.

Heinrich Hoffmann, Munich



German Pz. IV (foreground) and Pz. III (background) tanks, 1942.

U.S. Army photograph



Stuka

German Junkers Ju 87 “Stuka” dive-bomber.

their being organized into divisions and operated as such that was to prove decisive. In accordance with the doctrines of General Heinz Guderian, the German tanks were used in massed formations in conjunction with motorized artillery to punch holes in the enemy line and to isolate segments of the enemy, which were then surrounded and captured by motorized German infantry divisions while the tanks ranged forward to repeat the process: deep drives into enemy territory by panzer divisions were thus followed by mechanized infantry and foot soldiers. These tactics were supported by dive bombers that attacked and disrupted the enemy’s supply and communications lines and spread panic and confusion in its rear, thus further paralyzing its defensive capabilities. Mechanization was the key to the German blitzkrieg, or “lightning war,” so named because of the unprecedented speed and mobility that were its salient characteristics. Tested and well-trained in maneuvers, the German panzer divisions constituted a force with no equal in Europe.

The German Air Force, or Luftwaffe, was also the best force of its kind in 1939. It was a ground-cooperation force designed to support the Army, but its planes were superior to nearly all Allied types. In the rearmament period from 1935 to 1939 the production of German combat aircraft steadily mounted. The table shows the production of German aircraft by years.

German aircraft production by year

year	combat	types	other types
1933	0		368
1934	840		1,128
1935	1,823		1,360
1936	2,530		2,582
1937	2,651		2,955
1938	3,350		1,885
1939	4,733		3,562

The standardization of engines and airframes gave the Luftwaffe an advantage over its opponents. Germany had an operational force of 1,000 fighters and 1,050 bombers in September 1939. The Allies actually had more planes in 1939 than Germany did, but their

strength was made up of many different types, some of them obsolescent. The corresponding table shows the number of first-line military aircraft available to the Allies at the outbreak of war.

Allied air strength, September 1939

aircraft	British	French	Polish
bombers	536	463	200
fighters	608	634	300
reconnaissance	96	444	—
coastal command	216	—	—
fleet air arm	204	194	—

Great Britain, which was held back by delays in the rearmament program, was producing one modern fighter in 1939, the Hurricane. A higher-performance fighter, the Spitfire, was just coming into production and did not enter the air war in numbers until 1940.

The value of the French Air Force in 1939 was reduced by the number of obsolescent planes in its order of battle: 131 of the 634 fighters and nearly all of the 463 bombers. France was desperately trying to buy high-performance aircraft in the United States in 1939.

At sea the odds against Germany were much greater in September 1939 than in August 1914, since the Allies in 1939 had many more large surface warships than Germany had. At sea, however, there was to be no clash between the Allied and the German massed fleets but only the individual operation of German pocket battleships and commerce raiders.



Bismarck battleship

The Bismarck shortly after commissioning in 1940.

*Courtesy of the Marineschule Murwik,
Flensburg, Ger.*

Technology of war, 1918–39

When World War I ended, the experience of it seemed to vindicate the power of the defensive over the offensive. It was widely believed that a superiority in numbers of at least three to one was required for a successful offensive. Defensive concepts underlay the construction of the Maginot Line between France and Germany and of its lesser counterpart, the Siegfried Line, in the interwar years. Yet by 1918 both of the requirements for the supremacy of the offensive were at hand: tanks and planes. The battles of Cambrai (1917) and Amiens (1918) had proved that when tanks were used in masses, with surprise, and on firm and open

terrain, it was possible to break through any trench system.

The Germans learned this crucial, though subtle, lesson from World War I. The Allies on the other hand felt that their victory confirmed their methods, weapons, and leadership, and in the interwar period the



Maginot Line

Main entrance to the Schoenenbourg Fort on the Maginot Line, Bas-Rhin department, Alsace region, France.

John C. Watkins V

French and British armies were slow to introduce new weapons, methods, and doctrines. Consequently, in 1939 the British Army did not have a single armoured division, and the French tanks were distributed in small packets throughout the infantry divisions. The Germans, by contrast, began to develop large tank formations on an effective basis after their rearmament program began in 1935.

In the air the technology of war had also changed radically between 1918 and 1939. Military aircraft had increased in size, speed, and range, and for operations at sea, aircraft carriers were developed that were capable of accompanying the fastest surface ships. Among the new types of planes developed was the dive bomber, a plane designed for accurate low-altitude bombing of enemy strong points as part of the tank-plane-infantry

combination. Fast low-wing monoplane fighters were developed in all countries; these aircraft were essentially flying platforms for eight to 12 machine guns installed in the wings. Light and medium bombers were also developed that could be used for the strategic bombardment of cities and military strongpoints. The threat of bomber attacks on both military and civilian targets led directly to the development of radar in England. Radar made it possible to determine the location, the distance, and the height and speed of a distant aircraft no matter what the weather was. By December 1938 there were five radar stations established on the coast of England, and 15 additional stations were begun. So, when war came in September 1939, Great Britain had a warning chain of radar stations that could tell when hostile planes were approaching.

The war in Europe, 1939–41

The campaign in Poland, 1939

The German conquest of Poland in September 1939 was the first demonstration in war of the new theory of high-speed armoured warfare that had been adopted by the Germans when their rearmament began. Poland was a country all too well suited for such a demonstration. Its frontiers were immensely long—about 3,500 miles in all; and the stretch of 1,250 miles adjoining German territory had recently been extended to 1,750 miles in all by the German occupation of Bohemia-Moravia and of Slovakia, so that Poland's southern flank became exposed to invasion—as the northern flank, facing East Prussia, already was. Western Poland had become a huge salient that lay between Germany's jaws.

It would have been wiser for the Polish Army to assemble farther back, behind the natural defense line formed by the Vistula and San rivers, but that would have entailed the abandonment of some of the most valuable western parts of the country, including the Silesian coalfields and most of the main industrial zone, which lay west of the river barrier. The economic argument for delaying the German

approach to the main industrial zone was heavily reinforced by Polish national pride and military overconfidence.

When war broke out the Polish Army was able to mobilize about 1,000,000 men, a fairly large number. The Polish Army was woefully outmoded, however, and was almost completely lacking in tanks, armoured personnel carriers, and antitank and anti-aircraft guns. Yet many of the Polish military leaders clung to the double belief that their preponderance of horsed cavalry was an important asset and that they could take the offensive against the German mechanized forces. They also tended to discount the effect of Germany's vastly superior air force, which was nearly 10 times as powerful as their own.

The unrealism of such an attitude was repeated in the Polish Army's dispositions. Approximately one-third of Poland's forces were concentrated in or near the Polish Corridor (in northeastern Poland), where they were perilously exposed to a double envelopment—from East Prussia and the west combined. In the south, facing the main avenues of a German advance, the Polish forces were thinly spread. At the same time, nearly another one-third of Poland's forces were massed in reserve in the north-central part of the country, between Łódź and Warsaw, under the commander in chief, Marshal Edward Rydz-Śmigły. The Poles' forward concentration in general forfeited their chance of fighting a series of delaying actions, since their foot-marching army was unable to retreat to their defensive positions in the rear or to man them before being overrun by the invader's mechanized columns.

The 40-odd infantry divisions employed by the Germans in the invasion counted for much less than their 14 mechanized or partially mechanized divisions: these consisted of six armoured divisions; four light divisions, consisting of motorized infantry (infantry wholly transported by trucks and personnel carriers) with two armoured units; and four motorized divisions. The Germans attacked with about 1,500,000 troops in all. It was the deep and rapid thrusts of these mechanized forces that decided the issue, in conjunction with the overhead pressure of the Luftwaffe, which wrecked the Polish railway system and destroyed most of the Polish Air Force before it could come into action. The Luftwaffe's terror-bombing of Polish cities, bridges, roads, rail lines, and power stations completed the disorganization of the Polish defenses.

On September 1, 1939, the German attack began. Against northern Poland, General Fedor von Bock commanded an army group comprising General Georg von Küchler's 3rd Army, which struck southward from East Prussia, and General Günther von Kluge's 4th Army, which struck eastward across the base of the Corridor. Much stronger in troops and in tanks, however, was the army group in the south under General Gerd von Rundstedt, attacking from Silesia and from the Moravian and Slovakian border: General Johannes Blaskowitz's 8th Army, on the left, was to drive eastward against Łódź; General Wilhelm List's 14th Army, on the right, was to push on toward Kraków and to turn the Poles' Carpathian flank; and General Walther von Reichenau's 10th Army, in the centre, with the bulk of the group's armour, was to deliver the decisive blow with a northwestward thrust into the heart of Poland. By September 3, when Kluge in the north had reached the Vistula and Küchler was approaching the Narew River, Reichenau's armour was already beyond the Warta; two days later his left wing was well to

the rear of Łódź and his right wing at Kielce; and by September 8 one of his armoured corps was in the outskirts of Warsaw, having advanced 140 miles in the first week of war. Light divisions on Reichenau's right were on the Vistula between Warsaw and Sandomierz by September 9, while List, in the south, was on the San above and below Przemyśl. At the same time, the 3rd Army tanks, led by Guderian, were across the Narew attacking the line of the Bug River, behind Warsaw. All the German armies had made progress in fulfilling their parts in the great enveloping maneuver planned by General Franz Halder, chief of the general staff, and directed by General Walther von Brauchitsch, the commander in chief. The Polish armies were splitting up into uncoordinated fragments, some of which were retreating while others were delivering disjointed attacks on the nearest German columns.

German invasion of Poland in World War II

German soldiers breaking down a
barricade at the Polish border at the
outbreak of World War II, 1939.

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

On September 10 the Polish commander in chief, Marshal Edward Rydz-Śmigły, ordered a general retreat to the southeast. The Germans, however, were by that time not only tightening their net around the Polish forces west of the Vistula (in the Łódź area and, still farther west, around Poznań) but also penetrating deeply into eastern Poland. The Polish defense was already reduced to random efforts by isolated bodies of troops when another blow fell: on

September 17, 1939, Soviet forces entered Poland from the east. The next day, the Polish government and high command crossed the Romanian frontier on their way into exile. The Warsaw garrison held out against the Germans until September 28, undergoing terror-bombings and artillery barrages that reduced parts of the city to rubble, with no regard for the civilian population. The last considerable fragment of the Polish Army resisted until October 5; and some guerrilla fighting went on into the winter. The Germans took a total of 700,000 prisoners, and about 80,000 Polish soldiers escaped over neutral frontiers. Approximately 70,000 Polish soldiers were killed and more than 130,000 wounded during the battle, whereas the Germans sustained about 45,000 total casualties. Poland was conquered for partition between Germany and the U.S.S.R., the forces of which met and greeted each other on Polish soil. On September 28 another secret German–Soviet protocol modified the arrangements of August: all Lithuania was to be a Soviet sphere of influence, not a German one; but the dividing line in Poland was changed in Germany's favour, being moved eastward to the Bug River.

The Baltic states and the Russo-Finnish War, 1939–40

Profiting quickly from its understanding with Germany, the U.S.S.R. on October 10, 1939, constrained Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to admit Soviet garrisons onto their territories. Approached with similar demands, Finland refused to comply, even though the U.S.S.R. offered territorial compensation elsewhere for the cessions that it was requiring for its own strategic reasons. Finland's armed forces amounted to about 200,000 troops in 10 divisions. The Soviets eventually brought about 70 divisions (about 1,000,000 men) to bear in their attack on Finland, along with about 1,000 tanks. Soviet troops attacked Finland on November 30, 1939.

The invaders succeeded in isolating the little Arctic port of Petsamo in the far north but were ignominiously repulsed on all of the fronts chosen for their advance. On the Karelian Isthmus, the massive reinforced-concrete fortifications of Finland's Mannerheim Line blocked the Soviet forces' direct land route from Leningrad into Finland. The Soviet planners had grossly underestimated the Finns' national will to resist and the natural obstacles constituted by the terrain's numerous lakes and forests.

The western powers exulted overtly over the humiliation of the Soviet Union. One important effect of Finland's early successes was to reinforce the tendency of both Hitler and the western democracies to underestimate the Soviet military capabilities. But in the meantime, the Soviet strategists digested their hard-learned military lessons.

On February 1, 1940, the Red Army launched 14 divisions into a major assault on the Mannerheim Line. The offensive's weight was concentrated along a 10-mile sector of the line near Summa, which was pounded by a tremendous artillery bombardment. As the fortifications were pulverized, tanks and sledge-carried infantry advanced to occupy the ground while the Soviet Air Force broke up attempted Finnish counterattacks. After little more than a fortnight of this methodical process, a breach was made through the whole depth of the Mannerheim Line. Once the Soviets had forced a passage on the Karelian Isthmus, Finland's eventual collapse was certain. On March 6 Finland sued for peace, and a week later the Soviet terms were accepted: the Finns had to cede the entire Karelian Isthmus, Viipuri, and their part of the Rybachy Peninsula to the Soviets. The Finns had suffered about 70,000 casualties in the campaign, the Soviets more than 200,000.

The war in the west, September 1939–June 1940

During their campaign in Poland, the Germans kept only 23 divisions in the west to guard their frontier against the French, who had nearly five times as many divisions mobilized. The French commander in chief, General Maurice-Gustave Gamelin, proposed an advance against Germany through neutral Belgium and the Netherlands in order to have room to exercise his ponderous military machine. He was overruled, however, and French assaults on the 100-mile stretch of available front along the Franco-German frontier had barely dented the German defenses when the collapse of Poland prompted the recall of Gamelin's advanced divisions to defensive positions in the Maginot Line. From October 1939 to March 1940, successive plans were developed for counteraction in the event of a German offensive through Belgium—all of them based on the assumption that the Germans would come across the plain north of Namur, not across the hilly and wooded Ardennes. The Germans would indeed have taken the route foreseen by the French if Hitler's desire for an offensive in November 1939 had not been frustrated, on the one hand, by bad weather and, on the other, by the hesitations of his generals; but in March 1940 the bold suggestion of General Erich von Manstein that an offensive through the Ardennes should, in fact, be practicable for tank forces was adopted by Hitler, despite orthodox military opinion.

Meanwhile, Hitler's immediate outlook had been changed by considerations about Scandinavia. Originally he had intended to respect Norway's neutrality. Then rumours leaked out, prematurely, of British designs on Norway—as, in fact, Winston Churchill, first lord of the Admiralty, was arguing that mines should be laid in Norwegian waters to stop the export of Swedish iron ore from Gällivare to Germany through Norway's rail terminus and port of Narvik. The British Cabinet, in response to Churchill, authorized at least the preparation of a plan for a landing at Narvik; and in mid-December 1939 a Norwegian politician, Vidkun Quisling, leader of a pro-Nazi party, was introduced to Hitler. On January 27, 1940, Hitler ordered plans for an invasion of Norway, for use if he could no longer respect Norway's neutrality.

After France's failure to interrupt the German conquest of Poland, the western powers and the Germans were so inactive with regard to land operations that journalists began to speak derisively, over the next six months, of the "phony war." At sea, however, the period was somewhat more eventful. German U-boats sank the British aircraft carrier *Courageous* (September 17) and the battleship *Royal Oak* (October 14). The U-boats' main warfare, however, was against merchant shipping: they sank more than 110 vessels in the first four months of the war. Both the Germans and the British, meanwhile, were engaged in extensive mine laying.

In surface warfare at sea, the British were on the whole more fortunate than the Germans. A German pocket battleship in the Atlantic, the *Admiral Graf Spee* sank nine ships before coming to a tragic end: having sustained and inflicted damage in an engagement with three British cruisers off the Río de la Plata on Dec. 13, 1939, she made off to Montevideo and obtained leave to spend four days there for repairs; the British mustered reinforcements for the two cruisers still capable of action after the engagement, namely the *Ajax* and the *Achilles*, and brought the *Cumberland* to the scene in time; but, on December 17, when the *Graf Spee* put to sea again, her crew scuttled her a little way out of the harbour before the fight could be resumed.

The invasion of Norway

British plans for landings on the Norwegian coast in the third week of March 1940 were temporarily postponed. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, however, was by that time convinced that some aggressive action ought to be taken; and Paul Reynaud, who succeeded Édouard Daladier as France's premier on March 21, was of the same opinion. (Reynaud had come into office on the surge of the French public's demand for a more aggressive military policy and quicker offensive action against Germany.) It was agreed that mines should be laid in Norwegian waters and that the mining should be followed by the landing of troops at four Norwegian ports, Narvik, Trondheim, Bergen, and Stavanger.

Because of Anglo-French arguments, the date of the mining was postponed from April 5 to April 8. The postponement was catastrophic. Hitler had on April 1 ordered the German invasion of Norway to begin on April 9; so, when on April 8 the Norwegian government was preoccupied with earnest protest about the British mine laying, the German expeditions were well on their way.

On April 9, 1940, the major Norwegian ports from Oslo northward to Narvik (1,200 miles away from Germany's naval bases) were occupied by advance detachments of German troops. At the same time, a single parachute battalion (the first ever employed in warfare) took the Oslo and Stavanger airfields, and 800 operational aircraft overawed the Norwegian population. Norwegian resistance at Narvik, at Trondheim (the strategic key to Norway), at Bergen, at Stavanger, and at Kristiansand had been overcome very quickly; and Oslo's effective resistance to the seaborne forces was nullified when German troops from the airfield entered the city.

Simultaneously, along with their Norwegian enterprise, the Germans on April 9 occupied Denmark, sending troopships, covered by aircraft, into Copenhagen harbour and marching over the land frontier into Jutland. This occupation was obviously necessary for the safety of their communications with Norway.

Allied troops began to land at Narvik on April 14. Shortly afterward, British troops were landed also at Namsos and at Åndalsnes, to attack Trondheim from the north and from the south, respectively. The Germans, however, landed fresh troops in the rear of the British at Namsos and advanced up the Gudbrandsdal from Oslo against the force at Åndalsnes. By this time the Germans had about 25,000 troops in Norway. By May 2, both Namsos and Åndalsnes were evacuated by the British. The Germans at Narvik held out against five times as many British and French troops until May 27. By that time the German offensive in France had progressed to such an extent that the British could no longer afford any commitment in Norway, and the 25,000 Allied troops were evacuated from Narvik 10 days after their victory. The Norwegian king Haakon VII and his government left Norway for Britain at the same time. Hitler garrisoned Norway with about 300,000 troops for the rest of the war. By occupying Norway, Hitler had ensured the protection of Germany's supply of iron ore from Sweden and had obtained naval and air bases with which to strike at Britain if necessary.

What was to happen in Norway became a less important question for the western powers when, on May 10, 1940, they were surprised by Hitler's long-debated stroke against them through the Low Countries.

The invasion of the Low Countries and France

France's 800,000-man standing army was thought at the time to be the most powerful in Europe. But the French had not progressed beyond the defensive mentality inherited from World War I, and they relied primarily on their Maginot Line for protection against a German offensive. The Maginot Line was an extremely well-developed chain of fortifications running from the Swiss frontier opposite Basel northward along the left bank of the Rhine and then northwestward no farther than Montmédy, near the Belgian frontier south of the Ardennes Forest. The line consisted of a series of giant pillboxes and other defensive installations constructed in depth, equipped with underground supply and communications facilities, and connected by rail lines, with all its heavy guns pointed east at the German frontier. Depending heavily on the line as a defense against German attack, the French had 41

divisions manning it or backing it, whereas only 39 divisions were watching the long stretch of frontier north of it, from Montmédy through the Ardennes and across Flanders to the English Channel.

In their plan for the invasion of France and the Low Countries, the Germans kept General Wilhelm von Leeb's Army Group C facing the Maginot Line so as to deter the French from diverting forces from it, while launching Bock's Army Group B into the basin of the Lower Maas River north of Liège and Rundstedt's Army Group A into the Ardennes. Army Group B comprised Küchler's 18th Army, with one armoured division and airborne support, to attack the Netherlands, and Reichenau's 6th, with two armoured divisions, to advance over the Belgian plain. These two armies would have to deal not only with the Dutch and Belgian armies but also with the forces that the Allies, according to their plan, would send into the Low Countries, namely two French armies and nine British divisions. Rundstedt's Army Group A, however, was much stronger, comprising as it did Kluge's 4th Army, List's 12th, and General Ernst Busch's 16th, with General Maximilian von Weichs's 2nd in reserve, besides a large armoured group under Paul Ludwig von Kleist and a smaller one under General Hermann Hoth, and amounting in all to 44 divisions, seven of them armoured, with 27 divisions in reserve. Army Group A thus amounted to more than 1,500,000 men and more than 1,500 tanks, and it would strike at the weak hinge of the Allies' wheel into Belgium—that is to say, at two French armies, General Charles Huntziger's 2nd and General André Corap's 9th, which together mustered only 12 infantry and four horsed cavalry divisions and stood, respectively, east and west of Sedan on the least-fortified stretch of the French frontier. Against this weak centre of the Allied line were thus massed nearly two-thirds of Germany's forces in the west and nearly three-quarters of its tank forces.

The Dutch Army comprised 10 divisions and the equivalent of 10 more in smaller formations, and thus totaled more than 400,000 men. It apparently had a good chance of withstanding the German invasion, since the attacking German army comprised only seven divisions, apart from the airborne forces it would use. The Dutch, however, had a wide front, a very sensitive and loosely settled rear, very few tanks, and no experience of modern warfare. On May 10, the German attack on the Netherlands began with the capture by parachutists of the bridges at Moerdijk, at Dordrecht, and at Rotterdam and with landings on the airfields around The Hague. On the same day, the weakly held Peel Line, south of the westward-turning arc of the Maas, was penetrated by the German land forces; and on May 11 the Dutch defenders fell back westward past Tilburg to Breda, with the consequence that the French 7th Army, under General Henri Giraud, whose leading forces had sped forward across Belgium over the 140 miles to Tilburg, fell back to Breda likewise. The German tanks thus had a clear road to Moerdijk, and by noon on May 12 they were in the outskirts of Rotterdam. North of the Maas, meanwhile, where the bulk of the Dutch defense was concentrated, the Germans achieved a narrow breach of the Geld Valley line on May 12, whereupon the Dutch, unable to counterattack, retreated to the "Fortress of Holland" Line protecting Utrecht and Amsterdam. Queen Wilhelmina and her government left the country for England on May 13; and the next day the Dutch commander in chief, General Henri Gerard Winkelmann, surrendered to the Germans, who had threatened to bomb Rotterdam and Utrecht, as places in the front line of the fighting, if resistance continued. In fact, Rotterdam was bombed, after the capitulation, by 30 planes through a mistake in the Germans' signal communications.

The news of the German onslaught in the Low Countries, dismaying as it was to the Allies, had one effect that was to be of momentous importance to their fortunes: Chamberlain, whose halfhearted conduct of the war had been bitterly criticized in the House of Commons during the debate of May 7–8 on the campaign in Norway, resigned office in the evening of May 10 and was succeeded as prime minister by Churchill, who formed a coalition government.

For the first phase of the invasion of the Belgian plain north of Liège, Reichenau had four army corps, one armoured corps, and only 500 airborne troops; but he also had massive cooperation from the German Luftwaffe, whose dive bombers and fighters played a major role in breaking down the Belgian defenses. West of the Maastricht “appendix” of indefensible Dutch territory separating Belgium from Germany, the fortress of Eben Emael, immediately opposite Maastricht, and the line of the Albert Canal constituted the Belgians’ foremost defensive position. On May 10 German airborne troops landed in gliders on the top of the fortress and on bridges over the canal. On May 11 the Belgian front was broken, the German tanks running on westward and some of the infantry turning southward to take Liège from the rear, while the Belgians made a general retreat to the Antwerp–Namur, or Dyle, Line. French and British divisions had just arrived on this Dyle Line, and General René Prioux’s two tank divisions went out from it to challenge the German advance. After a big battle on May 14, however, Prioux’s tanks had to retire to the consolidated Dyle Line; and on May 15, notwithstanding a successful defense against a German attack, Gamelin ordered the abandonment of the position, because events farther to the south had made it strategically untenable.

The chances for success of the German offensive against France hinged on a German advance through the hilly and dense Ardennes Forest, which the French considered to be impassable to tanks. But the Germans did succeed in moving their tank columns through that difficult belt of country by means of an amazing feat of staff work. While the armoured divisions used such roads through the forest as were available, infantry divisions started alongside them by using field and woodland paths and marched so fast across country that the leading ones reached the Meuse River only a day after the armoured divisions had.

The decisive operations in France were those of Rundstedt’s Army Group A. Kleist’s tanks on May 10 took only three hours to cover the 30 miles from the eastern border of independent Luxembourg to the southeastern border of Belgium; and on May 11 the French cavalry divisions that had ridden forward into the Ardennes to oppose them were thrown back over the Semois River. By the evening of May 12 the Germans were across the Franco-Belgian frontier and overlooking the Meuse River. The defenses of this sector were rudimentary, and it was the least-fortified stretch of the whole French front. Worse still, the defending French 2nd and 9th armies had hardly any antitank guns or antiaircraft artillery with which to slow down the German armoured columns and shoot down their dive bombers. Such was the folly of the French belief that a German armoured thrust through the Ardennes was unlikely.

On May 13 Kleist’s forces achieved a threefold crossing of the Meuse River. At Sedan wave after wave of German dive bombers swooped on the French defenders of the south bank. The latter could not stand

the nerve-racking strain, and the German troops were able to push across the river in rubber boats and on rafts. The tremendous air bombardment was the decisive factor in the crossings. A thousand aircraft supported Kleist's forces, while only a few French aircraft intervened in a gallant but hopeless effort to aid their troops on the ground. Next day, after the tanks had been brought across, Guderian widened the Sedan bridgehead and beat off French counterattacks. On May 15 he broke through the French defenses into open country, turning westward in the direction of the English Channel. On May 16 his forces swept on west for nearly 50 miles. His superiors tried to put on the brake, feeling that such rapid progress was hazardous, but the pace of the German drive upset the French far more, and their collapse spread as Reinhardt's corps joined in the pressure. When more German tanks crossed the Meuse between Givet and Namur, the breach of the French front was 60 miles wide.

Driving westward down the empty corridor between the Sambre and the Aisne rivers, Guderian's tanks crossed the Oise River on May 17 and reached Amiens two days later. Giraud, who on May 15 had superseded Corap in command of the French 9th Army, was thus frustrated in his desperate plan of checking the Germans on the Oise; and Kleist, meanwhile, by lining the Aisne progressively with tanks until the infantry came up to relieve them, was protecting the southwestern flank of the advance against the danger of a counteroffensive from the south. Indeed, when the Germans, on May 15, were reported to be crossing the Aisne River between Rethel and Laon, Gamelin told Reynaud that he had no reserves in that sector and that Paris might fall within two days' time. Thereupon Reynaud, though he postponed his immediate decision to move the government to Tours, summoned General Maxime Weygand from Syria to take Gamelin's place as commander in chief; but Weygand did not arrive until May 19.

Guderian's tanks were at Abbeville on May 20, and on May 22 he turned northward to threaten Calais and Dunkirk, while Reinhardt, swinging south of the British rear at Arras, headed for the same objectives, the remaining ports by which the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) could be evacuated.

The evacuation from Dunkirk

For the Allies, all communication between their northern and southern forces was severed by the arc of the westward German advance from the Ardennes to the Somme. The Allied armies in the north, having fallen back from the Dyle Line to the Escaut (Schelde), were being encircled, and already on May 19 the British commander, Viscount Gort, was considering the withdrawal of the BEF by sea. On May 21, however, to satisfy orders from London for more positive action, he launched an attack from Arras southward against the right flank of the Germans' corridor; but, though it momentarily alarmed the German high command, this small counterstroke lacked the armoured strength necessary for success. Meanwhile, Guderian's tanks had swept up past Boulogne and Calais and were crossing the canal defense line close to Dunkirk when, on May 24, an inexplicable order from Hitler not only stopped their advance but actually called them back to the canal line just as Guderian was expecting to drive into Dunkirk.

Dunkirk was now the only port left available for the withdrawal of the mass of the BEF from Europe, and the British Cabinet at last decided to save what could be saved. The British Admiralty had been collecting every kind of small craft it could find to help in removing the troops, and the British retreat to the coast now became a race to evacuate the troops before the Germans could occupy Dunkirk. Evacuation began on May 26 and became still more urgent the next day, when the Belgians, their right wing and their centre broken by Reichenau's advance, sued for an armistice. On May 27, likewise, bombing by the Luftwaffe put the harbour of Dunkirk out of use, so that many of the thousands of men thronging the 10-mile stretch of beaches had to be ferried out to sea by petty craft pressed into service by the Royal Navy and manned largely by amateur seamen, though the harbour's damaged breakwater still offered a practicable exit for the majority. By June 4, when the operation came to an end, 198,000 British and 140,000 French and Belgian troops had been saved; but virtually all of their heavy equipment had to be abandoned, and, of the 41 destroyers participating, six were sunk and 19 others damaged. The men who were saved represented a considerable part of the experienced troops possessed by Great Britain and were an inestimable gain to the Allies. The success of the near-miraculous evacuation from Dunkirk was due, on the one hand, to fighter cover by the Royal Air Force from the English coast and on the other to Hitler's fatal order of May 24 halting Guderian. That order had been made for several reasons, chiefly: Hermann Göring, head of the Luftwaffe, had mistakenly assured Hitler that his aircraft alone could destroy the Allied troops trapped on the beaches at Dunkirk; and Hitler himself seems to have believed that Great Britain might accept peace terms more readily if its armies were not constrained into humiliating surrender. Three days passed before Walther von Brauchitsch, the German Army commander in chief, was able to persuade Hitler to withdraw his orders and allow the German armoured forces to advance on Dunkirk. But they met stronger opposition from the British, who had had time to solidify their defenses, and almost immediately Hitler stopped the German armoured forces again, ordering them instead to move south and prepare for the attack on the Somme–Aisne line.

The campaign in northern France was wound up by Küchler's forces, after both Guderian and Reichenau had been ordered southward. Altogether, the Germans had taken more than 1,000,000 prisoners in three weeks, at a cost of 60,000 casualties. Some 220,000 Allied troops, however, were rescued by British ships from France's northwestern ports (Cherbourg, Saint-Malo, Brest, and Saint-Nazaire), thus bringing the total of Allied troops evacuated to about 558,000.

There remained the French armies south of the Germans' Somme–Aisne front. The French had lost 30 divisions in the campaign so far. Weygand still managed to muster 49 divisions, apart from the 17 left to hold the Maginot Line, but against him the Germans had 130 infantry divisions as well as their 10 divisions of tanks. The Germans, after redispersing their units, began a new offensive on June 5 from their positions on the Somme. The French resisted stiffly for two days, but on June 7 the German tanks in the westernmost sector, led by Major General Erwin Rommel, broke through toward Rouen, and on June 9 they were over the Seine. On June 9 the Germans attacked on the Aisne: the infantry forced the crossings, and then Guderian's armour drove through the breach toward Châlons-sur-Marne before

turning eastward for the Swiss frontier, thus isolating all the French forces still holding the Maginot Line.

Italy's entry into the war and the French Armistice

Italy had been unprepared for war when Hitler attacked Poland, but if the Italian leader, Benito Mussolini, was to reap any positive advantages from partnership with Hitler it seemed that Italy would have to abandon its nonbelligerent stance before the western democracies had been defeated by Germany singlehanded. The obvious collapse of France convinced Mussolini that the time to implement his Pact of Steel with Hitler had come, and on June 10, 1940, Italy declared war against France and Great Britain. With about 30 divisions available on their Alpine frontier, the Italians delayed their actual attack on southeastern France until June 20, but it achieved little against the local defense. In any case, the issue in France had already been virtually settled by the victory of Italy's German ally.

Meanwhile, Reynaud had left Paris for Cagé, near Tours; and Weygand, after speaking frankly and despondently to Churchill at the Allied military headquarters at Briare on June 11, told Reynaud and the other ministers at Cagé on June 12 that the battle for France was lost and that a cessation of hostilities was compulsory. There was little doubt that he was correct in this estimate of the military situation: the French armies were now splitting up into fragments. Reynaud's government was divided between the advocates of capitulation and those who, with Reynaud, wanted to continue the war from French North Africa. The only decision that it could make was to move itself from Tours to Bordeaux.

The Germans entered Paris on June 14, 1940, and were driving still deeper southward along both the western and eastern edges of France. Two days later they were in the Rhône valley. Meanwhile, Weygand was still pressing for an armistice, backed by all the principal commanders. Reynaud resigned office on June 16, whereupon a new government was formed by Marshal Philippe Pétain, the revered and aged hero of the Battle of Verdun in World War I. In the night of June 16 the French request for an armistice was transmitted to Hitler. While discussion of the terms went on, the German advance went on too. Finally, on June 22, 1940, at Rethondes, the scene of the signing of the Armistice of 1918, the new Franco-German Armistice was signed. The Franco-Italian Armistice was signed on June 24. Both armistices came into effect early on June 25.

The Armistice of June 22 divided France into two zones: one to be under German military occupation and one to be left to the French in full sovereignty. The occupied zone comprised all northern France from the northwestern frontier of Switzerland to the Channel and from the Belgian and German frontiers to the Atlantic, together with a strip extending from the lower Loire southward along the Atlantic coast to the western end of the Pyrenees; the unoccupied zone comprised only two-fifths of France's territory, the southeast. The French Navy and Air Force were to be neutralized, but it was not required that they be handed over to the Germans. The Italians granted very generous terms to the French: the only French territory that they claimed to occupy was the small frontier tract that their forces had succeeded in overrunning since June 20. Meanwhile, from June 18, General Charles de

Gaulle, whom Reynaud had sent on a military mission to London on June 5, was broadcasting appeals for the continuance of France's war.

The collapse of France in June 1940 posed a severe naval problem to the British, because the powerful French Navy still existed: strategically, it was of immense importance to the British that these French ships not fall into German hands, since they would have tilted the balance of sea power decidedly in favour of the Axis—the Italian Navy being now also at war with Britain. Mistrustful of promises that the French ships would be used only for “supervision and minesweeping,” the British decided to immobilize them. Thus, on July 3, 1940, the British seized all French ships in British-controlled ports, encountering only nominal resistance. But when British ships appeared off Mers el-Kébir, near Oran on the Algerian coast, and demanded that the ships of the important French naval force there either join the Allies or sail out to sea, the French refused to submit, and the British eventually opened fire, damaging the battleship *Dunkerque*, destroying the *Bretagne*, and disabling several other vessels. Thereupon, Pétain's government, which on July 1 had installed itself at Vichy, on July 4 severed diplomatic relations with the British. In the eight following days, the constitution of France's Third Republic was abolished and a new French state created, under the supreme authority of Pétain himself. The few French colonies that rallied to General de Gaulle's Free French movement were strategically unimportant.

The Battle of Britain

With France conquered, Hitler could now turn his forces on Germany's sole remaining enemy: Great Britain, which was protected from the formidable German Army by the waters of the English Channel. On July 16, 1940, Hitler issued a directive ordering the preparation and, if necessary, the execution of a plan for the invasion of Great Britain. But an amphibious invasion of Britain would only be possible, given Britain's large navy, if Germany could establish control of the air in the battle zone. To this end, the Luftwaffe chief, Göring, on August 2 issued the “Eagle Day” directive, laying down a plan of attack in which a few massive blows from the air were to destroy British air power and so open the way for the amphibious invasion, termed Operation “Sea Lion.” Victory in the air battle for the Luftwaffe would indeed have exposed Great Britain to invasion and occupation. The victory by the Royal Air Force (RAF) Fighter Command blocked this possibility and, in fact, created the conditions for Great Britain's survival, for the extension of the war, and for the eventual defeat of Nazi Germany.

The forces engaged in the battle were relatively small. The British disposed some 600 frontline fighters to defend the country. The Germans made available about 1,300 bombers and dive bombers, and about 900 single-engined and 300 twin-engined fighters. These were based in an arc around England from Norway to the Cherbourg Peninsula in northern coastal France. The preliminaries of the Battle of Britain occupied June and July 1940, the climax August and September, and the aftermath—the so-called Blitz—the winter of 1940–41. In the campaign, the Luftwaffe had no systematic or consistent plan of action: sometimes it tried to establish a blockade by the destruction of British shipping and ports; sometimes, to destroy Britain's Fighter Command by combat and by the bombing of ground

installations; and sometimes, to seek direct strategic results by attacks on London and other populous centres of industrial or political significance. The British, on the other hand, had prepared themselves for the kind of battle that in fact took place. Their radar early warning, the most advanced and the most operationally adapted system in the world, gave Fighter Command adequate notice of where and when to direct their fighter forces to repel German bombing raids. The Spitfire, moreover, though still in short supply, was unsurpassed as an interceptor by any fighter in any other air force.

Supermarine Spitfire

Supermarine Spitfire, Britain's premier fighter plane from 1938 through World War II.

Quadrant/Flight

The British fought not only with the advantage—unusual for them—of superior equipment and undivided aim but also against an enemy divided in object and condemned by circumstance and by lack of forethought to fight at a tactical disadvantage. The German bombers lacked the bomb-load capacity to strike permanently devastating blows and also proved, in daylight, to be easily

vulnerable to the Spitfires and Hurricanes. Britain's radar, moreover, largely prevented them from exploiting the element of surprise. The German dive bombers were even more vulnerable to being shot down by British fighters, and long-range fighter cover was only partially available from German fighter aircraft, since the latter were operating at the limit of their flying range.

The German air attacks began on ports and airfields along the English Channel, where convoys were bombed and the air battle was joined. In June and July 1940, as the Germans gradually redeployed their forces, the air battle moved inland over the interior of Britain. On August 8 the intensive phase began, when the Germans launched bombing raids involving up to nearly 1,500 aircraft a day and directed them against the British fighter airfields and radar stations. In four actions, on August 8, 11, 12, and 13, the Germans lost 145 aircraft as against the British loss of 88. By late August the Germans had lost more than 600 aircraft, the RAF only 260, but the RAF was losing badly needed fighters and experienced pilots at too great a rate, and its effectiveness was further hampered by bombing damage done to the radar stations. At the beginning of September the British retaliated by unexpectedly launching a bombing raid on Berlin, which so infuriated Hitler that he ordered the Luftwaffe to shift its attacks from Fighter Command installations to London and other cities. (For contemporary descriptions of the devastation of London, see BTW: London Classics: London in World War II.) These assaults on London, Coventry, Liverpool, and other cities went on unabated for several months. But already, by September 15, on which day the British believed, albeit incorrectly, that they had scored their greatest success by destroying 185 German aircraft, Fighter Command had demonstrated to the Luftwaffe that it could not gain air ascendancy over Britain. This was because British fighters were simply shooting down German bombers faster than German industry could produce them. The Battle of Britain was thus won, and the invasion of England was postponed indefinitely by Hitler. The British had lost more than 900 fighters but had shot down about 1,700 German aircraft.

During the following winter, the Luftwaffe maintained a bombing offensive, carrying out night-bombing attacks on Britain's larger cities. By February 1941 the offensive had declined, but in March

and April there was a revival, and nearly 10,000 sorties were flown, with heavy attacks made on London. Thereafter German strategic air operations over England withered.

Central Europe and the Balkans, 1940–41

The continued resistance of the British caused Hitler once more to change his timetable. His great design for a campaign against the U.S.S.R. had originally been scheduled to begin about 1943—by which time he should have secured the German position on the rest of the European continent by a series of “localized” campaigns and have reached some sort of compromise with Great Britain. But in July 1940, seeing Great Britain still undefeated and the United States increasingly inimical to Germany, he decided that the conquest of the European part of the Soviet Union must be undertaken in May 1941 in order both to demonstrate Germany’s invincibility to Great Britain and to deter the United States from intervention in Europe (because the elimination of the U.S.S.R. would strengthen the Japanese position in the Far East and in the Pacific). Events in the interval, however, were to make him change his plan once again.

While the invasion of the U.S.S.R. was being prepared, Hitler was much concerned to extend German influence across Slovakia and Hungary into Romania, the oil fields of which he was anxious to secure against Soviet attack and the military manpower of which might be joined to the forces of the German coalition. In May 1940 he obtained an oil and arms pact from Romania; but, when Romania, after being constrained by a Soviet ultimatum in June to cede Bessarabia and northern Bukovina to the U.S.S.R., requested a German military mission and a German guarantee of its remaining frontiers, Hitler refused to comply until the claims of other states against Romania had been met. Romania was compelled to cede southern Dobruja to Bulgaria on August 21 (an act that was formalized in the Treaty of Craiova on September 7); but its negotiations with Hungary about Transylvania were broken off on August 23. Since, if war had broken out between Romania and Hungary, the U.S.S.R. might have intervened and won control over the oil wells, Hitler decided to arbitrate immediately: by the Vienna Award of August 30, Germany and Italy assigned northern Transylvania, including the Szekler district, to Hungary, and Germany then guaranteed what was left of Romania. In the face of the Romanian nationalists’ outcry against these proceedings, the king, Carol II, transferred his dictatorial powers to General Ion Antonescu on Sept. 4, 1940, and abdicated his crown in favour of his young son Michael two days later. Antonescu had already repeated the request for a German military mission, which arrived in Bucharest on October 12.

Though Hitler had apprised the Italian foreign minister, Galeazzo Ciano, of his intention to send a military mission to Romania, Ciano had not apprised Mussolini. So, since the latter’s Balkan ambitions had been continually restrained by Hitler, particularly with regard to Yugoslavia, the sudden news of the mission annoyed him. On Oct. 28, 1940, therefore, having given Hitler only the barest hints of his project, Mussolini launched seven Italian divisions (155,000 men) from Albania into a separate war of his own against Greece.

The result was exasperating for Hitler. His ally's forces were not only halted by the Greeks, a few miles over the border, on Nov. 8, 1940, but were also driven back by General Alexandros Papagos' counteroffensive of November 14, which was to put the Greeks in possession of one-third of Albania by mid-December. Moreover, British troops landed in Crete, and some British aircraft were sent to bases near Athens, whence they might have attacked the Romanian oil fields. Lastly, the success of the Greeks caused Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, who had hitherto been attentive to overtures from the Axis powers, to revert to a strictly neutral policy.

Anticipating Mussolini's appeal for German help in his "separate" or "parallel" war, Hitler in November 1940 drew Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia successively into the Axis, or Tripartite, Pact that Germany, Italy, and Japan had concluded on September 27 (see *below* Japanese policy, 1939–41); and he also obtained Romania's assent to the assembling of German troops in the south of Romania for an attack on Greece through Bulgaria. Hungary consented to the transit of these troops through its territory lest Romania take Hungary's place in Germany's favour and so be secured in possession of the Transylvanian lands left to it by the Vienna Award. Bulgaria, however, for fear of Soviet reaction, on the one hand, and of Turkish, on the other (Turkey had massed 28 divisions in Thrace when Italy attacked Greece), delayed its adhesion to the Axis until March 1, 1941. Only thereafter, on March 18, did the Yugoslav regent, Prince Paul, and his ministers Dragiša Cvetković and Aleksandar Cincar-Marković agree to Yugoslavia's adhesion to the Axis.

Meanwhile, the German 12th Army had crossed the Danube from Romania into Bulgaria on March 2, 1941. Consequently, in accordance with a Greco-British agreement of February 21, a British expeditionary force of 58,000 men from Egypt landed in Greece on March 7, to occupy the Olympus–Vermion line. Then, on March 27, 1941, two days after the Yugoslav government's signature, in Vienna, of its adhesion to the Axis Pact, a group of Yugoslav Army officers, led by General Dušan Simović, executed a coup d'état in Belgrade, overthrowing the regency in favour of the 17-year-old king Peter II and reversing the former government's policy.

Almost simultaneously with the Belgrade coup d'état, the decisive Battle of Cape Matapan took place between the British and Italian fleets in the Mediterranean, off the Peloponnesian mainland northwest of Crete. Hitherto, Italo-British naval hostilities in the Mediterranean area since June 1940 had comprised only one noteworthy action: the sinking in November at the Italian naval base of Taranto of three battleships by aircraft from the British carrier *Illustrious*. In March 1941, however, some Italian naval forces, including the battleship *Vittorio Veneto*, with several cruisers and destroyers, set out to threaten British convoys to Greece; and British forces, including the battleships *Warspite*, *Valiant*, and *Barham* and the aircraft carrier *Formidable*, likewise with cruisers and destroyers, were sent to intercept them. When the forces met in the morning of March 28, off Cape Matapan, the *Vittorio Veneto* opened fire on the lighter British ships but was soon trying to escape from the engagement, for fear of the torpedo aircraft from the *Formidable*. The battle then became a pursuit, which lasted long into the night. Finally, though the severely damaged *Vittorio Veneto* made good her escape, the British

sank three Italian cruisers and two destroyers. The Italian Navy made no more surface ventures into the eastern Mediterranean.

The German attack on Greece, scheduled for April 1, 1941, was postponed for a few days when Hitler, because of the Belgrade coup d'état, decided that Yugoslavia was to be destroyed at the same time. While Great Britain's efforts to draw Yugoslavia into the Greco-British defensive system were fruitless, Germany began canvassing allies for its planned invasion of Yugoslavia and Greece. Italy agreed to collaborate in the attack, and Hungary and Bulgaria agreed to send troops to occupy the territories that they coveted as soon as the Germans should have destroyed the Yugoslav state.

On April 6, 1941, the Germans, with 24 divisions and 1,200 tanks, invaded both Yugoslavia (which had 32 divisions) and Greece (which had 15 divisions). The operations were conducted in the same way as Germany's previous blitzkrieg campaigns. While massive air raids struck Belgrade, List's 12th Army drove westward and southward from the Bulgarian frontiers, Kleist's armoured group northwestward from Sofia, and Weichs's 2nd Army southward from Austria and from western Hungary. The 12th Army's advance through Skopje to the Albanian border cut communications between Yugoslavia and Greece in two days; Niš fell to Kleist on April 9, Zagreb to Weichs on April 10; and on April 11 the Italian 2nd Army (comprising 15 divisions) advanced from Istria into Dalmatia. After the fall of Belgrade to the German forces from bases in Romania (April 12), the remnant of the Yugoslav Army—whose only offensive, in northern Albania, had collapsed—was encircled in Bosnia. Its capitulation was signed, in Belgrade, on April 17.

In Greece, meanwhile, the Germans took Salonika (Thessaloníki) on April 9, 1941, and then initiated a drive toward Ioánnina (Yannina), thus severing communication between the bulk of the Greek Army (which was on the Albanian frontier) and its rear. The isolated main body capitulated on April 20, the Greek Army as a whole on April 22. Two days later the pass of Thermopylae, defended by a British rear guard, was taken by the Germans, who entered Athens on April 27. All mainland Greece and all the Greek Aegean islands except Crete were under German occupation by May 11, the Ionian islands under Italian. The remainder of Britain's 50,000-man force in Greece was hastily evacuated with great difficulty after leaving all of their tanks and other heavy equipment behind.

The campaign against Yugoslavia brought 340,000 soldiers of the Yugoslav Army into captivity as German prisoners of war. In the campaign against Greece the Germans took 220,000 Greek and 20,000 British or Commonwealth prisoners of war. The combined German losses in the Balkan campaigns were about 2,500 dead, 6,000 wounded, and 3,000 missing.

German airborne troops began to land in Crete on May 20, 1941, at Máleme, in the Canea-Suda area, at Réthimnon, and at Iráklion. Fighting, on land and on the sea, with heavy losses on both sides, went on for a week before the Allied commander in chief, General Bernard Cyril Freyberg of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, was authorized to evacuate the island. The last defenders were overwhelmed at Réthimnon on May 31. The prisoners of war taken by the Germans in Crete numbered more than 15,000

British or Commonwealth troops, besides the Greeks taken. In battles around the island, German air attacks sank three light cruisers and six destroyers of the British Mediterranean fleet and damaged three battleships, one aircraft carrier, six light cruisers, and five destroyers.

Both the Yugoslav and the Greek royal governments went into exile on their armies' collapse. The Axis powers were left to dispose as they would of their conquests. Yugoslavia was completely dissolved: Croatia, the independence of which had been proclaimed on April 10, 1941, was expanded to form Great Croatia, which included Srem (Syrmia, the zone between the Sava and the Danube south of the Drava confluence) and Bosnia and Hercegovina; most of Dalmatia was annexed to Italy; Montenegro was restored to independence; Yugoslav Macedonia was partitioned between Bulgaria and Albania; Slovenia was partitioned between Italy and Germany; the Baranya triangle and the Bačka went to Hungary; the Banat and Serbia were put under German military administration. Of the independent states, Great Croatia, ruled by Ante Pavelić's nationalist Ustaše ("Insurgents"), and Montenegro were Italian spheres of influence, although German troops still occupied the eastern part of Great Croatia. A puppet government of Serbia was set up by the Germans in August 1941.

While Bulgarian troops occupied eastern Macedonia and most of western Thrace, the rest of mainland Greece, theoretically subject to a puppet government in Athens, was militarily occupied by the Italians except for three zones, namely the Athens district, the Salonika district, and the Dimotika strip of Thrace, which the German conquerors reserved for themselves. The Germans also remained in occupation of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Melos, and Crete.

Other fronts, 1940–41

Egypt and Cyrenaica, 1940–summer 1941

The contemporary course of events in the Balkans, described above, nullified the first great victory won by British land forces in World War II, which took place in North Africa. When Italy declared war against Great Britain in June 1940, it had nearly 300,000 men under Marshal Rodolfo Graziani in Cyrenaica (present-day Libya), to confront the 36,000 troops whom the British commander in chief in the Middle East, General Sir Archibald Wavell, had in Egypt to protect the North African approaches to the Suez Canal. Between these forces lay the Western Desert, in which the westernmost position actually held by the British was Mersa Matruh (Marsā Maṭīūḥ), 120 miles east of the Cyrenaican frontier. The Italians in September 1940 occupied Sīdī Barrānī, 170 miles west of Mersa Matruh; but, after settling six divisions into a chain of widely separated camps, they did nothing more for weeks, and during that time Wavell received some reinforcements.

Wavell, whose command included not only Egypt but also the East African fronts against the Italians, decided to strike first in North Africa. On December 7, 1940, some 30,000 men, under Major General Richard Nugent O'Connor, advanced westward, from Mersa Matruh, against 80,000 Italians; but, whereas the Italians at Sīdī Barrānī had only 120 tanks, O'Connor had 275. Having passed by night through a gap in the chain of forts, O'Connor's forces stormed three of the Italian camps, while the 7th

Armoured Division was already cutting the Italians' road of retreat along the coast to the west. On December 10 most of the positions closer to Sīdī Barrānī were overrun; and on December 11 the reserve tanks made a further enveloping bound to the coast beyond Buqbuq, intercepting a large column of retreating Italians. In three days the British had taken nearly 40,000 prisoners.

Falling back across the frontier into Cyrenaica, the remnant of the Italian forces from Sīdī Barrānī shut itself up in the fortress of Bardia (Bardīyah), which O'Connor's tanks speedily isolated. On January 3, 1941, the British assault on Bardia began, and three days later the whole garrison of Bardia surrendered—45,000 men. The next fortress to the west, Tobruk (Ṭubruq), was assaulted on January 23 and captured the next day (30,000 more prisoners).

To complete their conquest of Cyrenaica, it remained for the British to take the port of Benghazi. On February 3, 1941, however, O'Connor learned that the Italians were about to abandon Benghazi and to retreat westward down the coast road to Agheila (al-'Uqaylah). Thereupon he boldly ordered the 7th Armoured Division to cross the desert hinterland and intercept the Italian retreat by cutting the coast road well to the east of Agheila. On February 5, after an advance of 170 miles in 33 hours, the British were blocking the Italians' line of retreat south of Beda Fomm (Bayḍā' Fumm); and in the morning of February 6, as the main Italian columns appeared, a day of battle began. Though the Italians had, altogether, nearly four times as many cruiser tanks as the British, by the following morning 60 Italian tanks had been crippled, 40 more abandoned, and the rest of Graziani's army was surrendering in crowds. The British, only 3,000 strong and having lost only three of their 29 tanks, took 20,000 prisoners, 120 tanks, and 216 guns.

The British, having occupied Benghazi on February 6 and Agheila on February 8, could now have pushed on without hindrance to Tripoli, but the chance was foregone: the Greek government had accepted Churchill's reiterated offer of British troops to be sent to Greece from Egypt, which meant a serious reduction of British strength in North Africa.

The reduction was to have serious consequences, because on February 6, the very day of Beda Fomm, a young general, Erwin Rommel, had been appointed by Hitler to command two German mechanized divisions that were to be sent as soon as possible to help the Italians. Arriving in Tripolitania, Rommel decided to try an offensive with what forces he had. Against the depleted British strength, he was rapidly and brilliantly successful. After occupying Agheila with ease on March 24 and Mersa Bréga (Qasr al-Burayqah) on March 31, he resumed his advance on April 2—despite orders to stand still for two months—with 50 tanks backed by two new Italian divisions. The British evacuated Benghazi the next day and began a precipitate retreat into Egypt, losing great numbers of their tanks on the way (a large force of armour, surrounded at Mechili, had to surrender on April 7). By April 11 all Cyrenaica except Tobruk had been reconquered by Rommel's audacious initiative.

Tobruk, garrisoned mainly by the 9th Australian Division, held out against siege; and Rommel, though he defeated two British attempts to relieve the place (May and June 1941), was obliged to suspend his

offensive on the Egyptian frontier, since he had overstretched his supply lines.

East Africa

Wavell, the success of whose North African strategy had been sacrificed to Churchill's recurrent fantasy of creating a Balkan front against Germany (Greece in 1941 was scarcely less disastrous for the British than the Dardanelles in 1915), nevertheless enjoyed one definitive triumph before Churchill, doubly chagrined at having lost Cyrenaica for Greece's sake and Greece for no advantage at all, removed him, in the summer of 1941, from his command in the Middle East. That triumph was the destruction of Italian East Africa and the elimination, thereby, of any threat to the Suez Canal from the south or to Kenya from the north.

In August 1940 Italian forces mounted a full-scale offensive and overran British Somaliland. Wavell, however, was already assured of the collaboration of the former Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie in raising the Ethiopians in patriotic revolt against the Italians; and, whereas in June he had disposed only of meagre resources against the 200,000 men and 325 aircraft under the Duca d'Aosta, Amedeo di Savoia, his troops in the Sudan were reinforced by two Indian divisions before the end of the year. After Haile Selassie and a British major, Orde Wingate, with two battalions of Ethiopian exiles, had crossed the Sudanese frontier directly into Ethiopia, General William Platt and the Indian divisions invaded Eritrea on January 19, 1941 (the Italians had already abandoned Kassala); and, almost simultaneously, British troops from Kenya, under General Alan Cunningham, advanced into Italian Somaliland.

Platt's drive eastward into Eritrea was checked on February 5, at Keren, where the best Italian troops, under General Nicolangelo Carnimeo, put up a stiff defense facilitated by a barrier of cliffs. But when Keren fell on March 26, Platt's way to Asmara (Asmera), to Massawa (Mitsiwa), and then from Eritrea southward into Ethiopia was comparatively easy. Meanwhile, Cunningham's troops were advancing northward into Ethiopia; and on April 6 they entered the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa. Finally, the Duca d'Aosta was caught between Platt's column and Cunningham's; and at Amba Alaji, on May 20, he and the main body of his forces surrendered.

Iraq and Syria, 1940–41

In 1940 Prince 'Abd al-Ilāh, regent of Iraq for King Fayṣal, had a government divided within itself about the war; he himself and his foreign minister, Nuri as-Said, were pro-British, but his prime minister, Rashid Ali al-Gailani, had pro-German leanings. Having resigned office in January 1941, Rashid Ali on April 3 seized power in Baghdad with help from some army officers and announced that the temporarily absent regent was deposed. The British, ostensibly exercising their right under the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930 to move troops across Iraqi territory, landed troops at Basra on April 19 and rejected Iraqi demands that these troops be sent on into Palestine before any further landings. Iraqi troops were then concentrated around the British air base at Ḥabbānīyah, west of Baghdad; and on May 2 the British commander there opened hostilities, lest the Iraqis should attack first. Having won the upper hand at Ḥabbānīyah and been reinforced from Palestine, the British troops from the air base marched

on Baghdad; and on May 30 Rashid Ali and his friends took refuge in Iran. 'Abd al-Ilāh was reinstated as regent; Nuri became prime minister; and the British military presence remained to uphold them.

German military supplies for Rashid Ali were dispatched too late to be useful to him; but they reached Iraq via Syria, whose high commissioner, General H.-F. Dentz, was a nominee of the Vichy government of France. Lest Syria and Lebanon should fall altogether under Axis control, the British decided to intervene there. Consequently, Free French forces, under General Georges Catroux, with British, Australian, and Indian support, were sent into both countries from Palestine on June 8, 1941; and a week later British forces invaded Syria from Iraq. Dentz's forces put up an unexpectedly stiff resistance, particularly against the Free French, but were finally obliged to capitulate: an armistice was signed at Acre on July 14. By an arrangement of July 25 the Free French retained territorial command in Syria and Lebanon subject to strategic control by the British.

The beginning of lend-lease

On June 10, 1940, when Italy entered the war on the German side and when the fall of France was imminent, U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt declared that the United States would "extend to the opponents of force the material resources of this nation." After France fell, he pursued this policy by aiding the British in their struggle against Germany. Roosevelt arranged for the transfer of surplus American war matériel to the British under various arrangements, including the exchange of 50 old American destroyers for certain British-held Atlantic bases, and he facilitated the placing of British orders for munitions in the United States. The British decided to rely on the United States unreservedly and without regard to their ability to pay. By December 1940 they had already placed orders for war materials that were far more than they could possibly muster the dollar exchange to finance.

Churchill suggested the concept of lend-lease to Roosevelt in December 1940, proposing that the United States provide war materials, foodstuffs, and clothing to the democracies (and particularly to Great Britain). Roosevelt assented, and a bill to achieve this purpose was passed by the Congress in early 1941. The Lend-Lease Act not only empowered the president to transfer defense materials, services, and information to any foreign government whose defense he deemed vital to that of the United States, but also left to his discretion what he should ask in return. An enormous grant of power, it gave Roosevelt virtually a free hand to pursue his policy of material aid to the "opponents of force." Congress appropriated funds generously, amounting to almost \$13,000,000,000 by November 1941. Other countries besides Britain began receiving lend-lease aid by this time, including China and the Soviet Union. From the time of the German invasion of the U.S.S.R., Roosevelt had been clearly determined to aid the Soviet Union, but the American public's suspicions of Communism delayed his declaring that country eligible for lend-lease until November 1941. American deliveries of aircraft, tanks, and other supplies to the U.S.S.R. began shortly thereafter.

The Atlantic and the Mediterranean, 1940–41

At the outbreak of World War II, the primary concerns of the British Navy were to defend Great Britain from invasion and to retain command of the ocean trading routes, both in order to protect the passage of essential supplies of food and raw materials for Britain and to deny the trading routes to the Axis powers, thus drawing tight once again the blockade that had proved so successful during World War I. Britain had adequate forces of battleships, aircraft carriers, cruisers, and other ships to fulfill these tasks.

The German Navy's role was to protect Germany's coasts, to defend its sea communications and to attack those of the Allies', and to support land and air operations. These modest goals were in keeping with Germany's position as the dominant land-based power in continental Europe. Germany's main naval weapon during the war was to be the submarine, or U-boat, with which it attacked Allied shipping much as it had in World War I.

U-218

Launching of U-218 at Kiel, Germany, in 1941.

From J.P. Mallmann Showell, U-Boats under the Swastika (1987)

German control of the Biscay ports after the fall of France in June 1940 provided the U-boats with bases from which they could infest the Atlantic without having to pass either through the Channel or around the north of the British Isles at the end of every sortie.

Thenceforward, so long as naval escorts for outgoing convoys from the British Isles could go only 200 or 300 miles out to sea before

having to turn back to escort incoming convoys, the U-boats had a very wide field for free-ranging activity: sinkings rose sharply from 55,580 tons in May 1940 to 352,407 tons in October, achieved mainly by solitary attacks by single U-boats at night. But the beginning of lend-lease and the freeing of British warships after the German invasion threat waned enabled the British to escort their convoys for 400 miles by October 1940 and halfway across the Atlantic by April 1941. Since air cover for shipping could also be provided from the British Isles, from Canada, and from Iceland, the Atlantic space left open to the U-boats was reduced by May 1941 to a width of only 300 miles. Moreover, British surface vessels had the ASDIC (Anti-Submarine Detection Investigation Committee) device to detect submerged U-boats. By the spring of 1941, under the guidance of Admiral Karl Dönitz, the U-boat commanders were changing their tactic of individual operation to one of wolf-pack attacks: groups of U-boats, disposed in long lines, would rally when one of them by radio signaled a sighting and overwhelm the convoy by weight of numbers. Between July and December 1941 the German U-boat strength was raised from 65 to more than 230.

Furthermore, the German surface fleet became more active against Allied seaborne trade. Six armed German raiders disguised as merchantmen, with orders to leave convoys alone and to confine their attacks to unescorted ships, roamed the oceans with practical impunity from the spring of 1940 and had sunk 366,644 tons of shipping by the end of the year. German battleships—the *Admiral Scheer*, the *Admiral Hipper*, the *Scharnhorst*, and the *Gneisenau*—one after another began similar raiding operations, with considerable success, from October 1940; and in May 1941 a really modern battleship, the *Bismarck*, and a new cruiser, the *Prinz Eugen*, put out to sea from Germany. The *Bismarck* and the *Prinz Eugen*, however, were located by British reconnaissance in the North Sea near Bergen, and an intensive hunt for them was immediately set in motion. Tracked from a point northwest of Iceland by

two British cruisers, the two German ships were engaged on May 24 by the battle cruiser *Hood* and by the new battleship *Prince of Wales*; and, though the *Hood* was sunk, the *Bismarck*'s fuel supply was put out of action, so that its commander, Admiral Günther Lütjens, decided to make for the French coast. Separating from the *Prinz Eugen* (which escaped), the *Bismarck* threw off her pursuers early on May 25 but was sighted again the next day some 660 miles west of Brest. Paralyzed by torpedo aircraft from the *Ark Royal*, it was bombarded by the *King George V*, the *Rodney*, and the *Dorsetshire* on May 27 and sank.

In the Mediterranean the year 1941 ended with some naval triumphs for the Axis: U-boats torpedoed the *Ark Royal* on November 13 and the *Barham* 12 days later; Italian frogmen, entering the harbour of Alexandria, on December 19 crippled the battleships *Queen Elizabeth* and *Valiant*; and two British cruisers and a destroyer were also sunk in Mediterranean waters in December.

German strategy, 1939–42

German strategy in World War II is wholly intelligible only if Hitler's far-reaching system of power politics and his racist ideology are borne in mind. Since the 1920s his program had been first to win power in Germany proper, next to consolidate Germany's domination over Central Europe, and then to raise Germany to the status of a world power by two stages: (1) the building up of a continental empire embracing all Europe, including the European portion of the Soviet Union, and (2) the attainment for Germany of equal rank with the British Empire, Japan, and the United States—the only world powers to be left after the elimination of France and the U.S.S.R.—through the acquisition of colonies in Africa and the construction of a strong fleet with bases on the Atlantic. In the succeeding generation Hitler foresaw a decisive conflict between Germany and the United States, during which he hoped that Great Britain would be Germany's ally.

The conquest of the European part of the Soviet Union, which in Hitler's calendar was dated approximately for 1943–45, was to be preceded, he thought, by short localized campaigns elsewhere in Europe to provide a strategic shield and to secure Germany's rear for the great expedition of conquest in the East, which was also bound up with the extermination of the Jews. The most important of the localized campaigns would be that against France. While this European program remained unfulfilled, it was imperative to avoid any world war, since only after the German Reich had come to dominate the whole European continent would it have the economic base and the territorial extent that were prerequisite for success in a great war, especially against maritime world powers.

Hitler had always contemplated the overthrow of the Soviet regime, and though he had congratulated himself on the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact of 1939 as a matter of expediency, anti-Bolshevism had remained his most profound emotional conviction. His feelings had been stirred up afresh by the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states and of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina in June 1940 and by the consequent proximity of Soviet forces to the Romanian oil fields on which Germany depended. Hitler became acutely suspicious of the intentions of the Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, and he began to feel

that he could not afford to wait to complete the subjugation of western Europe before dealing with the Soviet Union. Hitler and his generals had originally scheduled the invasion of the U.S.S.R. for mid-May 1941, but the unforeseen necessity of invading Yugoslavia and Greece in April of that year had forced them to postpone the Soviet campaign to late June. The swiftness of Hitler's Balkan victories enabled him to keep to this revised timetable, but the five weeks' delay shortened the time for carrying out the invasion of the U.S.S.R. and was to prove the more serious because in 1941 the Russian winter would arrive earlier than usual. Nevertheless, Hitler and the heads of the Oberkommando des Heeres (OKH, or German Army High Command), namely the army commander in chief Walther von Brauchitsch and the army general staff chief Franz Halder, were convinced that the Red Army could be defeated in two or three months, and that, by the end of October, the Germans would have conquered the whole European part of Russia and the Ukraine west of a line stretching from Archangel to Astrakhan. The invasion of the Soviet Union was given the code name "Operation Barbarossa."

Invasion of the Soviet Union, 1941

For the campaign against the Soviet Union, the Germans allotted almost 150 divisions containing a total of about 3,000,000 men. Among these were 19 panzer divisions, and in total the "Barbarossa" force had about 3,000 tanks, 7,000 artillery pieces, and 2,500 aircraft. It was in effect the largest and most powerful invasion force in human history. The Germans' strength was further increased by more than 30 divisions of Finnish and Romanian troops.

The Soviet Union had twice or perhaps three times the number of both tanks and aircraft as the Germans had, but their aircraft were mostly obsolete. The Soviet tanks were about equal to those of the Germans, however. A greater hindrance to Hitler's chances of victory was that the German intelligence service underestimated the troop reserves that Stalin could bring up from the depths of the U.S.S.R. The Germans correctly estimated that there were about 150 divisions in the western parts of the U.S.S.R. and reckoned that 50 more might be produced. But the Soviets actually brought up more than 200 fresh divisions by the middle of August, making a total of 360. The consequence was that, though the Germans succeeded in shattering the original Soviet armies by superior technique, they then found their path blocked by fresh ones. The effects of the miscalculations were increased because much of August was wasted while Hitler and his advisers were having long arguments as to what course they should follow after their initial victories. Another factor in the Germans' calculations was purely political, though no less mistaken; they believed that within three to six months of their invasion, the Soviet regime would collapse from lack of domestic support.

The German attack on the Soviet Union was to have an immediate and highly salutary effect on Great Britain's situation. Until then Britain's prospects had appeared hopeless in the eyes of most people except the British themselves; and the government's decision to continue the struggle after the fall of France and to reject Hitler's peace offers could spell only slow suicide unless relief came from either the United States or the U.S.S.R. Hitler brought Great Britain relief by turning eastward and invading the Soviet Union just as the strain on Britain was becoming severe.

On June 22, 1941, the German offensive was launched by three army groups under the same commanders as in the invasion of France in 1940: on the left (north), an army group under Leeb struck from East Prussia into the Baltic states toward Leningrad; on the right (south), another army group, under Rundstedt, with an armoured group under Kleist, advanced from southern Poland into the Ukraine against Kiev, whence it was to wheel southeastward to the coasts of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov; and in the centre, north of the Pripet Marshes, the main blow was delivered by Bock's army group, with one armoured group under Guderian and another under Hoth, thrusting northeastward at Smolensk and Moscow.

The invasion along a 1,800-mile front took the Soviet leadership completely by surprise and caught the Red Army in an unprepared and partially demobilized state. Piercing the northern border, Guderian's tanks raced 50 miles beyond the frontier on the first day of the invasion and were at Minsk, 200 miles beyond it, on June 27. At Minsk they converged with Hoth's tanks, which had pierced the opposite flank, but Bock's infantry could not follow up quickly enough to complete the encirclement of the Soviet troops in the area; though 300,000 prisoners were taken in the salient, a large part of the Soviet forces was able to escape to the east. The Soviet armies were clumsily handled and frittered their tank strength away in piecemeal action like that of the French in 1940. But the isolated Soviet troops fought with a stubbornness that the French had not shown, and their resistance imposed a brake by continuing to block road centres long after the German tide had swept past them. The result was similar when Guderian's tanks, having crossed the Dnieper River on July 10, entered Smolensk six days later and converged with Hoth's thrust through Vitebsk: 200,000 Soviet prisoners were taken; but some Soviet forces were withdrawn from the trap to the line of the Desna, and a large pocket of resistance lay behind the German armour. By mid-July, moreover, a series of rainstorms were turning the sandy Russian roads into clogging mud, over which the wheeled vehicles of the German transport behind the tanks could make only very slow progress. The Germans also began to be hampered by the scorched earth policy adopted by the retreating Soviets. The Soviet troops burned crops, destroyed bridges, and evacuated factories in the face of the German advance. Entire steel and munitions plants in the westernmost portions of the U.S.S.R. were dismantled and shipped by rail to the east, where they were put back into production. The Soviets also destroyed or evacuated most of their rolling stock (railroad cars), thus depriving the Germans of the use of the Soviet rail system, since Soviet railroad track was of a different gauge than German track and German rolling stock was consequently useless on it.

Nevertheless, by mid-July the Germans had advanced more than 400 miles and were only 200 miles from Moscow. They still had ample time to make decisive gains before the onset of winter, but they lost the opportunity, primarily because of arguments throughout August between Hitler and the OKH about the destination of the next thrusts thence: whereas the OKH proposed Moscow as the main objective, Hitler wanted the major effort to be directed southeastward, through the Ukraine and the Donets Basin into the Caucasus, with a minor swing northwestward against Leningrad (to converge with Leeb's army group).

In the Ukraine, meanwhile, Rundstedt and Kleist had made short work of the foremost Soviet defenses, stronger though the latter had been. A new Soviet front south of Kiev was broken by the end of July; and in the next fortnight the Germans swept down to the Black Sea mouths of the Bug and Dnieper rivers—to converge with Romania's simultaneous offensive. Kleist was then ordered to wheel northward from the Ukraine, Guderian southward from Smolensk, for a pincer movement around the Soviet forces behind Kiev; and by the end of September the claws of the encircling movement had caught 520,000 men. These gigantic encirclements were partly the fault of inept Soviet high commanders and partly the fault of Stalin, who as commander in chief stubbornly overrode the advice of his generals and ordered his armies to stand and fight instead of allowing them to retreat eastward and regroup in preparation for a counteroffensive.

Winter was approaching, and Hitler stopped Leeb's northward drive on the outskirts of Leningrad. He ordered Rundstedt and Kleist, however, to press on from the Dnieper toward the Don and the Caucasus; and Bock was to resume the advance on Moscow.

Bock's renewed advance on Moscow began on October 2, 1941. Its prospects looked bright when Bock's armies brought off a great encirclement around Vyazma, where 600,000 more Soviet troops were captured. That left the Germans momentarily with an almost clear path to Moscow. But the Vyazma battle had not been completed until late October; the German troops were tired, the country became a morass as the weather got worse, and fresh Soviet forces appeared in the path as they plodded slowly forward. Some of the German generals wanted to break off the offensive and to take up a suitable winter line. But Bock wanted to press on, believing that the Soviets were on the verge of collapse, while Brauchitsch and Halder tended to agree with his view. As that also accorded with Hitler's desire, he made no objection. The temptation of Moscow, now so close in front of their eyes, was too great for any of the topmost leaders to resist. On December 2 a further effort was launched, and some German detachments penetrated into the suburbs of Moscow; but the advance as a whole was held up in the forests covering the capital. The stemming of this last phase of the great German offensive was partly due to the effects of the Russian winter, whose subzero temperatures were the most severe in several decades. In October and November a wave of frostbite cases had decimated the ill-clad German troops, for whom provisions of winter clothing had not been made, while the icy cold paralyzed the Germans' mechanized transport, tanks, artillery, and aircraft. The Soviets, by contrast, were well clad and tended to fight more effectively in winter than did the Germans. By this time German casualties had mounted to levels that were unheard of in the campaigns against France and the Balkans; by November the Germans had suffered about 730,000 casualties.

In the south, Kleist had already reached Rostov-on-Don, gateway to the Caucasus, on November 22, but had exhausted his tanks' fuel in doing so. Rundstedt, seeing the place to be untenable, wanted to evacuate it but was overruled by Hitler. A Soviet counteroffensive recaptured Rostov on November 28, and Rundstedt was relieved of his command four days later. The Germans, however, managed to establish a front on the Mius River—as Rundstedt had recommended.

As the German drive against Moscow slackened, the Soviet commander on the Moscow front, General Georgy Konstantinovich Zhukov, on December 6 inaugurated the first great counteroffensive with strokes against Bock's right in the Elets (Yelets) and Tula sectors south of Moscow and against his centre in the Klin and Kalinin sectors to the northwest. Levies of Siberian troops, who were extremely effective fighters in cold weather, were used for these offensives. There followed a blow at the German left, in the Velikie Luki sector; and the counteroffensive, which was sustained throughout the winter of 1941–42, soon took the form of a triple convergence toward Smolensk.

These Soviet counteroffensives tumbled back the exhausted Germans, lapped around their flanks, and produced a critical situation. From generals downward, the invaders were filled with ghastly thoughts of Napoleon's retreat from Moscow. In that emergency Hitler forbade any retreat beyond the shortest possible local withdrawals. His decision exposed his troops to awful sufferings in their advanced positions facing Moscow, for they had neither the clothing nor the equipment for a Russian winter campaign; but if they had once started a general retreat it might easily have degenerated into a panic-stricken rout.

The Red Army's winter counteroffensive continued for more than three months after its December launching, though with diminishing progress. By March 1942 it had advanced more than 150 miles in some sectors. But the Germans maintained their hold on the main bastions of their winter front—such towns as Schlüsselburg, Novgorod, Rzhev, Vyazma, Bryansk, Orël (Oryol), Kursk, Kharkov, and Taganrog—despite the fact that the Soviets had often advanced many miles beyond these bastions, which were in effect cut off. In retrospect, it became clear that Hitler's veto on any extensive withdrawal worked out in such a way as to restore the confidence of the German troops and probably saved them from a widespread collapse. Nevertheless, they paid a heavy price indirectly for that rigid defense. One immediate handicap was that the strength of the Luftwaffe was drained in the prolonged effort to maintain supplies by air, under winter conditions, to the garrisons of these more or less isolated bastion towns. The tremendous strain of that winter campaign, on armies which had not been prepared for it, had other serious effects. Before the winter ended, many German divisions were reduced to barely a third of their original strength, and they were never fully built up again.

The German plan of campaign had begun to miscarry in August 1941, and its failure was patent when the Soviet counteroffensive started. Nevertheless, having dismissed Brauchitsch and appointed himself army commander in chief in December, Hitler persisted in overruling the tentative opposition of the general staff to his strategy.

The first three months of the German–Soviet conflict produced cautious rapprochements between the U.S.S.R. and Great Britain and between the U.S.S.R. and the United States. The Anglo-Soviet agreement of July 12, 1941, pledged the signatory powers to assist one another and to abstain from making any separate peace with Germany. On August 25, 1941, British and Soviet forces jointly invaded Iran, to forestall the establishment of a German base there and to divide the country into spheres of occupation for the duration of the war; and late in September—at a conference in Moscow—Soviet,

British, and U.S. representatives formulated the monthly quantities of supplies, including aircraft, tanks, and raw materials, that Great Britain and the United States should try to furnish to the Soviet Union.

The critical situation on the Eastern Front did not deter Hitler from declaring Germany to be at war with the United States on December 11, 1941, after the Japanese attack on the U.S., British, and Dutch positions in the Pacific and in the Far East (see *below* Japanese policy, 1939–41), since this extension of hostilities did not immediately commit the German land forces to any new theatre but at the same time had the merit of entitling the German Navy to intensify the war at sea.

The war in the Pacific, 1938–41

The war in China, 1937–41

In 1931–32 the Japanese had invaded Manchuria (Northeast China) and, after overcoming ineffective Chinese resistance there, had created the Japanese-controlled puppet state of Manchukuo. In the following years the Nationalist government of China, headed by Chiang Kai-shek, temporized in the face of Japanese military and diplomatic pressures and instead waged an internal war against the Chinese Communists, led by Mao Zedong, who were based in Shensi Province in north-central China. Meanwhile, the Japanese began a military buildup in North China proper, which in turn stimulated the formation of a unified resistance by the Nationalists and the Communists.

Japanese expansion in the late 19th and 20th centuries.
Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

Overt hostilities between Japan and China began after the Marco Polo Bridge incident of July 7, 1937, when shots were exchanged between Chinese and Japanese troops on the outskirts of Peking. Open fighting broke out in that area, and in late July the Japanese

captured the Peking-Tientsin area. Thereupon full-scale hostilities began between the two nations. The Japanese landed near Shanghai, at the mouth of the Yangtze River, and took Shanghai in November and the Chinese capital, Nanking, in December 1937. Chiang Kai-shek moved his government to Han-k'ou (one of the Wu-han cities), which lay 435 miles west of Shanghai along the Yangtze. The Japanese also pushed southward and westward from the Peking area into Hopeh and Shansi provinces. In 1938 the Japanese launched several ambitious military campaigns that brought them deep into the heart of central China. They advanced to the northeast and west from Nanking, taking Suchow and occupying the Wu-han cities. The Nationalists were forced to move their government to Chungking in Szechwan Province, about 500 miles west of the Wu-han cities. The Japanese also occupied Canton and several other coastal cities in South China in 1938.

Nationalist Chinese resistance to these Japanese advances was ineffective, primarily because the Nationalist leadership was still more interested in holding their forces in reserve for a future struggle with the Communists than in repelling the Japanese. By contrast, the Communists, from their base in north-central China, began an increasingly effective guerrilla war against the Japanese troops in Manchuria and North China. The Japanese needed large numbers of troops to maintain their hold on the immense Chinese territories and populations they controlled. Of the 51 infantry divisions making up

the Japanese Army in 1941, 38 of them, comprising about 750,000 men, were stationed in China (including Manchuria).

Japanese policy, 1939–41

When war broke out in Europe in September 1939, the Japanese, despite a series of victorious battles, had still not brought their war in China to an end: on the one hand, the Japanese strategists had made no plans to cope with the guerrilla warfare pursued by the Chinese; on the other, the Japanese commanders in the field often disregarded the orders of the supreme command at the Imperial headquarters and occupied more Chinese territory than they had been ordered to take. Half of the Japanese Army was thus still tied down in China when the commitment of Great Britain and France to war against Germany opened up the prospect of wider conquests for Japan in Southeast Asia and in the Pacific. Japan's military ventures in China proper were consequently restricted rather more severely henceforth.

The German victories over the Netherlands and France in the summer of 1940 further encouraged the Japanese premier, Prince Konoe, to look southward at those defeated powers' colonies and also, of course, at the British and U.S. positions in the Far East. The island archipelago of the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) along with French Indochina and British-held Malaya contained raw materials (tin, rubber, petroleum) that were essential to Japan's industrial economy, and if Japan could seize these regions and incorporate them into the empire, it could make itself virtually self-sufficient economically and thus become the dominant power in the Pacific Ocean. Since Great Britain, single-handedly, was confronting the might of the Axis in Europe, the Japanese strategists had to reckon, primarily, with the opposition of the United States to their plans for territorial aggrandizement. When Japanese troops entered northern Indochina in September 1940 (in pursuance of an agreement extorted in August from the Vichy government of France), the United States uttered a protest. Germany and Italy, by contrast, recognized Japan as the leading power in the Far East by concluding with it the Tripartite, or Axis, Pact of September 27, 1940: negotiated by Japanese foreign minister Matsuoka Yosuke, the pact pledged its signatories to come to one another's help in the event of an attack "by a power not already engaged in war." Japan also concluded a neutrality pact with the U.S.S.R. on April 13, 1941.

On July 2, 1941, the Imperial Conference decided to press the Japanese advance southward even at the risk of war with Great Britain and the United States; and this policy was pursued even when Matsuoka was relieved of office a fortnight later. On July 26, in pursuance of a new agreement with Vichy France, Japanese forces began to occupy bases in southern Indochina.

This time the United States reacted vigorously, not only freezing Japanese assets under U.S. control but also imposing an embargo on supplies of oil to Japan. Dismay at the embargo drove the Japanese naval command, which had hitherto been more moderate than the army, into collusion with the army's extremism. When negotiations with the Dutch of Indonesia for an alternative supply of oil produced no satisfaction, the Imperial Conference on September 6, at the high command's insistence, decided that

war must be undertaken against the United States and Great Britain unless an understanding with the United States could be reached in a few weeks' time.

General Tōjō Hideki, who succeeded Konoe as premier in mid-October 1941, continued the already desperate talks. The United States, however, persisted in making demands that Japan could not concede: renunciation of the Tripartite Pact (which would have left Japan diplomatically isolated); the withdrawal of Japanese troops from China and from Southeast Asia (a humiliating retreat from an overt commitment of four years' standing); and an open-door regime for trade in China. When Cordell Hull, the U.S. secretary of state, on November 26, 1941, sent an abrupt note to the Japanese bluntly requiring them to evacuate China and Indochina and to recognize no Chinese regime other than that of Chiang Kai-shek, the Japanese could see no point in continuing the talks. (See Sidebar: Pearl Harbor and the "Back Door to War" Theory.)

Since peace with the United States seemed impossible, Japan set in motion its plans for war, which would now necessarily be waged not only against the United States but also against Great Britain (the existing war effort of which depended on U.S. support and the Far Eastern colonies of which lay within the orbit of the projected Japanese expansion) and against the Dutch East Indies (the oil of which was essential to Japanese enterprises, even apart from geopolitical considerations).

The evolving Japanese military strategy was based on the peculiar geography of the Pacific Ocean and on the relative weakness and unpreparedness of the Allied military presence in that ocean. The western half of the Pacific is dotted with many islands, large and small, while the eastern half of the ocean is, with the exception of the Hawaiian Islands, almost devoid of landmasses (and hence of usable bases). The British, French, American, and Dutch military forces in the entire Pacific region west of Hawaii amounted to only about 350,000 troops, most of them lacking combat experience and being of disparate nationalities. Allied air power in the Pacific was weak and consisted mostly of obsolete planes. If the Japanese, with their large, well-equipped armies that had been battle-hardened in China, could quickly launch coordinated attacks from their existing bases on certain Japanese-mandated Pacific islands, on Formosa (Taiwan), and from Japan itself, they could overwhelm the Allied forces, overrun the entire western Pacific Ocean as well as Southeast Asia, and then develop those areas' resources to their own military-industrial advantage. If successful in their campaigns, the Japanese planned to establish a strongly fortified defensive perimeter extending from Burma in the west to the southern rim of the Dutch East Indies and northern New Guinea in the south and sweeping around to the Gilbert and Marshall islands in the southeast and east. The Japanese believed that any American and British counteroffensives against this perimeter could be repelled, after which those nations would eventually seek a negotiated peace that would allow Japan to keep her newly won empire.

Until the end of 1940 the Japanese strategists had assumed that any new war to be waged would be against a single enemy. When it became clear, in 1941, that the British and the Dutch as well as the Americans must be attacked, a new and daring war plan was successfully sponsored by the commander in chief of the Combined Fleet, Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku.

Yamamoto's plan prescribed two operations, together involving the whole strength of his navy, which was composed of the following ships: 10 battleships, six regular aircraft carriers, four auxiliary carriers, 18 heavy cruisers, 20 light cruisers, 112 destroyers, 65 submarines, and 2,274 combat planes. The first operation, to which all six regular aircraft carriers, two battleships, three cruisers, and 11 destroyers were allocated, was to be a surprise attack, scheduled for December 7 (December 8 by Japanese time), on the main U.S. Pacific Fleet in its base at Pearl Harbor in the Hawaiian Islands. The rest of the Japanese Navy was to support the army in the "Southern Operation": 11 infantry divisions and seven tank regiments, assisted by 795 combat planes, were to undertake two drives, one from Formosa through the Philippines, the other from French Indochina and Hainan Island through Malaya, so as to converge on the Dutch East Indies, with a view to the capture of Java as the culmination of a campaign of 150 days—during which, moreover, Wake Island, Guam, the Gilbert Islands, and Burma should also have been secured as outer bastions, besides Hong Kong.

Pearl Harbor and the Japanese expansion, to July 1942

In accordance with Yamamoto's plan, the aircraft carrier strike force commanded by Admiral Nagumo Chuichi sailed eastward undetected by any U.S. reconnaissance until it had reached a point 275 miles north of Hawaii. From there, on Sunday, December 7, 1941, a total of about 360 aircraft, composed of dive-bombers, torpedo bombers, and a few fighters, was launched in two waves in the early morning at the giant U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor. The base at that time was accommodating 70 U.S. fighting ships, 24 auxiliaries, and some 300 planes. The Americans were taken completely by surprise, and all eight battleships in the harbour were hit (though six were eventually repaired and returned to service); three cruisers, three destroyers, a minelayer, and other vessels were damaged; more than 180 aircraft were destroyed and others damaged (most while parked at airfields); and more than 2,330 troops were killed and over 1,140 wounded. Japanese losses were comparatively small. The Japanese attack failed in one crucial respect, however; the Pacific Fleet's three aircraft carriers were at sea at the time of the attack and escaped harm, and these were to become the nucleus of the United States' incipient naval defense in the Pacific. Pearl Harbor's shore installations and oil-storage facilities also escaped damage. The Pearl Harbor attack, unannounced beforehand by the Japanese as it was, unified the American public and swept away any remaining support for American neutrality in the war. On December 8 the U.S. Congress declared war on Japan with only one dissenting vote.

Pearl Harbor, Hawaii

Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, as seen from a Japanese aircraft during the attack on the U.S. Pacific Fleet, December 7, 1941.

National Archives, Washington, D.C.

On the day of the attack, December 8 by local time, Formosa-based Japanese bombers struck Clark and Iba airfields in the Philippines, destroying more than 50 percent of the U.S. Army's Far East aircraft; and, two days later, further raids destroyed not only more U.S. fighters but also Cavite Naval Yard, likewise in the Philippines. Part of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet, however, had already gone south in November; and the surviving major ships and bomber aircraft, which were vulnerable for lack of fighter protection, were withdrawn in the next fortnight to safety in bases in Java and Australia.

Japanese forces began to land on the island of Luzon in the Philippines on December 10. The main assault, consisting of the bulk of one division, was made at Lingayen Gulf, 100 miles north-northwest of Manila, on December 22, and a second large landing took place south of Manila two days later. Manila itself fell unopposed to the Japanese on January 2, 1942, but by that time the U.S. and Filipino forces under General Douglas MacArthur were ready to hold Bataan Peninsula (across the bay from Manila) and Corregidor Island (in the bay). The Japanese attack on Bataan was halted initially, but it was reinforced in the following eight weeks. MacArthur was ordered to Australia on March 11, leaving Bataan's defense to Lieutenant General Jonathan M. Wainwright. The latter and his men surrendered on April 9; Corregidor fell in the night of May 5–6; and the southern Philippines capitulated three days later.

Japanese bombers had already destroyed British air power at Hong Kong on December 8, 1941, and the British and Canadian defenders surrendered to the ground attack from the Kowloon Peninsula (the nearest mainland) on December 25. To secure their flank while pushing southward into Malaya, the Japanese also occupied Bangkok on December 9 and Victoria Point in southernmost Burma on December 16. The Japanese landings in Malaya, from December 8 onward, accompanied as they were by air strikes, overwhelmed the small Australian and Indian forces; and the British battleship *Prince of Wales* and the battle cruiser *Repulse*, sailing from Singapore to cut Japanese communications, were sunk by Japanese aircraft on December 10. By the end of January 1942, two Japanese divisions, with air and armoured support, had occupied all Malaya except Singapore Island. In Burma, meanwhile, other Japanese troops had taken Moulmein and were approaching Rangoon and Mandalay.

On the eastern perimeter of the war zone, the Japanese had bombed Wake Island on December 8, attempted to capture it on December 11, and achieved a landing on December 23, quickly subduing the garrison. Guam had already fallen on December 10. Having also occupied Makin and Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands in the first days of the war, the Japanese successfully attacked Rabaul, the strategic base on New Britain (now part of Papua New Guinea), on January 23, 1942.

A unified American–British–Dutch–Australian Command, ABDACOM, under Wavell, responsible for holding Malaya, Sumatra, Java, and the approaches to Australia, became operative on January 15, 1942; but the Japanese had already begun their advance on the oil-rich Dutch East Indies. They occupied Kuching (December 17), Brunei Bay (January 6), and Jesselton (January 11), on the northern coast of Borneo, as well as Tarakan Island (off northeastern Borneo) and points on Celebes. Balikpapan (on Borneo's east coast) and Kendari (in southeastern Celebes) fell to the Japanese on January 24, 1942, Amboina on February 4, Makasar City (in southwestern Celebes) on February 8, and Bandjarmasin (in southern Borneo) on February 16. Bali was invaded on February 18, and by February 24 the Japanese were also in possession of Timor.

The fall of Singapore

Meanwhile, on February 8 and 9, three Japanese divisions had landed on Singapore Island; and on February 15 they forced the 90,000-strong British, Australian, and Indian garrison there, under Lieutenant General A.E. Percival, to surrender. Singapore was the major British base in the Pacific and had been regarded as unassailable due to its strong seaward defenses. The Japanese took it with comparative ease by advancing down the Malay Peninsula and then assaulting the base's landward side, which the British had left inadequately defended. On February 13, moreover, Japanese paratroopers had landed at Palembang in Sumatra, which fell to an amphibious assault three days later.

When ABDACOM was dissolved on February 25, 1942, only Java remained to complete the Japanese program of conquest. The Allies' desperate attempt to intercept the Japanese invasion fleet was defeated in the seven-hour Battle of the Java Sea on February 27, in which five Allied warships were lost and only one Japanese destroyer damaged. The Japanese landed at three points on Java on February 28 and rapidly expanded their beachheads. On March 9 the 20,000 Allied troops in Java surrendered. In the Indian Ocean, the Japanese captured the Andaman Islands on March 23, and began a series of attacks on British shipping. After the failure of ABDACOM, the U.S.–British Combined Chiefs of Staff placed the Pacific under the U.S. Joint Chiefs' strategic direction. MacArthur became supreme commander of the Southwest Pacific Area, which comprised the Dutch East Indies (less Sumatra), the Philippines, Australia, the Bismarck Archipelago, and the Solomons; and Admiral Chester W. Nimitz became commander in chief of the Pacific Ocean Areas, which comprised virtually every area not under MacArthur. Their missions were to hold the U.S.–Australia line of communications, to contain the Japanese within the Pacific, to support the defense of North America, and to prepare for major amphibious counteroffensives.

Japan's initial war plans were realized with the capture of Java. But despite their military triumphs, the Japanese saw no indication that the Allies were ready for a negotiated peace. On the contrary, it seemed evident that an Allied counterstroke was in the making. The U.S. Pacific Fleet bombed the Marshall Islands on February 1, 1942, Wake Island on February 23, and Marcus Island (between Wake and Japan) on March 1. These moves, together with the bombing of Rabaul on February 23 and the establishment of bases in Australia and a line of communications across the South Pacific, made the Japanese decide to expand so as to cut the Allied line of communications to Australia. They planned to occupy New Caledonia, the Fiji Islands, and Samoa and also to seize eastern New Guinea, whence they would threaten Australia from an air base to be established at Port Moresby. They planned also to capture Midway Island in the North Pacific and to establish air bases in the Aleutians. In pursuance of this new program, Japanese troops occupied Lae and Salamaua in New Guinea and Buka in the Solomon Islands in March 1942 and Bougainville in the Solomons and the Admiralty Islands (north of New Guinea) early in April.

Something to raise the Allies' morale was achieved on April 18, 1942, when 16 U.S. bombers raided Tokyo—though they did little real damage except to the Japanese government's prestige. Far more important were the consequences of the U.S. intelligence services' detection of Japanese plans to seize

Port Moresby and Tulagi (in the southern Solomons). Had these two places fallen, Japanese aircraft could have dominated the Coral Sea. In the event, after U.S. aircraft on May 3, 1942, had interfered with the Japanese landing on Tulagi, U.S. naval units, with aircraft, challenged the Japanese ships on their circuitous detour from Rabaul to Port Moresby. On May 5 and 6 the opposing carrier groups sought each other out, and the four-day Battle of the Coral Sea ensued. On May 7 planes from the Japanese carriers sank a U.S. destroyer and an oil tanker, but U.S. planes sank the Japanese light carrier *Shoho* and a cruiser; and the next day, though Japanese aircraft sank the U.S. carrier *Lexington* and damaged the carrier *Yorktown*, the large Japanese carrier *Shokaku* had to retire crippled. Finally, the Japanese lost so many planes in the battle that their enterprise against Port Moresby had to be abandoned.

Despite the mixed results of the Battle of the Coral Sea, the Japanese continued with their plan to seize Midway Island. Seeking a naval showdown with the remaining ships of the U.S. Pacific Fleet and counting on their own numerical superiority to secure a victory, the Japanese mustered four heavy and three light aircraft carriers, two seaplane carriers, 11 battleships, 15 cruisers, 44 destroyers, 15 submarines, and miscellaneous small vessels. The U.S. Pacific Fleet had only three heavy carriers, eight cruisers, 18 destroyers, and 19 submarines, though there were some 115 aircraft in support of it. The Americans, however, had the incomparable advantage of knowing the intentions of the Japanese in advance, thanks to the U.S. intelligence services' having broken the Japanese Navy's code and deciphered key radio transmissions. In the ensuing Battle of Midway, the Japanese ships destined to take Midway Island were attacked while still 500 miles from their target by U.S. bombers on June 3. The Japanese carriers were still able to launch their aircraft against Midway early on June 4, but in the ensuing battle, waves of carrier- and Midway-based U.S. bombers sank all four of the Japanese heavy carriers and one heavy cruiser. Appalled by this disaster, the Japanese began to retreat in the night of June 4–5. Though the U.S. carrier *Yorktown* was sunk by torpedo on June 6, Midway was saved from invasion. In the Aleutians, the Japanese bombed Dutch Harbor effectively and on June 7 occupied Attu and Kiska.

The Battle of Midway was probably the turning point of the war in the Pacific, for Japan lost its first-line carrier strength and most of its navy's best trained pilots. Henceforth, the naval strengths of the Japanese and of the Allies were virtually equal. Having lost the strategic initiative, Japan canceled its plans to invade New Caledonia, Fiji, and Samoa.

The Chinese front and Burma, 1941–42

Japan's entry into war against the western Allies had its repercussions in China. Chiang Kai-shek's government on December 9, 1941, formally declared war not only against Japan (a formality long overdue) but also, with political rather than military intent, against Germany and Italy. Three Chinese armies were rushed to the Burmese frontier, since the Burma Road was the only land route whereby the western Allies could send supplies to the Nationalist Chinese government. On January 3, 1942, Chiang was recognized as supreme Allied commander for the China theatre of war; and a U.S. general, Joseph W. Stilwell, was sent to him to be his chief of staff. In the first eight weeks after Pearl Harbor,

however, the major achievement of the Chinese was the definitive repulse, on January 15, 1942, of a long-sustained Japanese drive against Ch'ang-sha, on the Canton–Han-k'ou railway.

Chinese line the streets of K'un-ming as the first supply convoy reaches the city over the Allied-controlled Burma-Ledo road during World War II.

U.S. Army photograph

Thereafter, Chiang and Stilwell were largely preoccupied by efforts to check the Japanese advance into Burma. By mid-March 1942 two Chinese armies, under Stilwell's command, had crossed the Burmese frontier; but before the end of the month the Chinese force defending Toungoo, in central Burma between Rangoon and Mandalay, was nearly annihilated by the more soldierly Japanese.

British and Indian units in Burma fared scarcely better, being driven into retreat by the enemy's numerical superiority both in the air and on the ground. On April 29 the Japanese took Lashio, the Burma Road's southern terminus, thus cutting the supply line to China and turning the Allies' northern flank. Under continued pressure, the British and Indian forces in the following month fell back through Kalewa to Imphāl (across the Indian border), while most of the Chinese retreated across the Salween River into China. By the end of 1942 all of Burma was in Japanese hands, China was effectively isolated (except by air), and India was exposed to the danger of a Japanese invasion through Burma.

Since the U.S. bombers that raided Tokyo on April 18 flew on to Chinese airfields, particularly to those in Chekiang (the coastal province south of Shanghai), the Japanese reacted by launching a powerful offensive to seize those airfields. By the end of July they had generally achieved their objectives.

Developments from autumn 1941 to spring 1942

Allied strategy and controversies, 1940–42

In the year following the collapse of France in June 1940, British strategists, relying as they could on supplies from the nonbelligerent United States, were concerned first with home defense, second with the security of the British positions in the Middle East, and third with the development of a war of attrition against the Axis powers, pending the buildup of adequate forces for an invasion of the European continent. For the United States, President Roosevelt's advisers, from November 1940, based their strategic plans on the "Europe first" principle; that is to say, if the United States became engaged in war simultaneously against Germany, Italy, and Japan, merely defensive operations should be conducted in the Pacific (to protect at least the Alaska–Hawaii–Panama triangle) while an offensive was being mounted in Europe.

Japan's entry into the war terminated the nonbelligerency of the United States. The three weeks' conference, named Arcadia, that Roosevelt, Churchill, and their advisers opened in Washington, D.C., on December 22, 1941, reassured the British about U.S. maintenance of the "Europe first" principle and also produced two plans: a tentative one, code-named "Sledgehammer," for the buildup of an offensive force in Great Britain, in case it should be decided to invade France; and another, code-named "Super-Gymnast," for combining a British landing behind the German forces in Libya (already planned under the code name "Gymnast") with a U.S. landing near Casablanca on the Atlantic coast of Morocco. The

same conference furthermore created the machinery of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, where the British Chiefs of Staff Committee was to be linked continuously, through delegates in Washington, D.C., with the newly established U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Organization, so that all aspects of the war could be studied in concert. It was on January 1, 1942, during the Arcadia Conference, that the Declaration of the United Nations was signed in Washington, D.C., as a collective statement of the Allies' war aims in sequel to the Atlantic Charter.

Atlantic Charter

Atlantic Charter Conference, August
1941.

U.S. Naval Historical Center

Meanwhile, Churchill became anxious to do something to help the embattled Soviets—who were clamouring for the United States and Britain to invade continental Europe so as to take some of the German pressure off the Eastern Front. Roosevelt was no less conscious than Churchill of the fact that the Soviet Union was

bearing by far the greatest burden of the war against Germany; and this consideration inclined him to listen to the arguments of his Joint Chiefs of Staff Organization for a change of plan. After some hesitation, he sent his confidant Harry Hopkins and his army chief of staff General George C. Marshall to London in April 1942 to suggest the scrapping of “Super-Gymnast” in favour of “Bolero,” namely the concentration of forces in Great Britain for a landing in Europe (perhaps at Brest or at Cherbourg) in the autumn; then “Roundup,” an invasion of France by 30 U.S. and 18 British divisions, could follow in April 1943. The British agreed but soon began to doubt the practicability of mounting an amphibious invasion of France at such an early date.

Attempts to conclude an Anglo-Soviet political agreement were renewed without result, but a 20-year Anglo-Soviet alliance was signed on May 26, 1942; and, though Churchill warned the Soviet foreign minister, Vyacheslav Mikhaylovich Molotov, not to expect an early second front in Europe, Molotov seemed gratified by what he was told about Anglo-U.S. plans.

Visiting Roosevelt again in the latter part of June 1942, Churchill at Hyde Park, New York, and in Washington, D.C., pressed for a revised and enlarged joint operation in North Africa before the end of the year, instead of a buildup for the invasion of France; but the U.S. Joint Chiefs resolutely upheld the latter plan. After further debate and disagreement, in July the U.S. Joint Chiefs yielded at last to British obstinacy in favour of a North African enterprise: it was decided that “Torch,” as this combined Anglo-U.S. operation came to be called, should begin the following autumn.

Already, on July 17, 1942, Churchill had had to notify Stalin that convoys of Allied supplies to northern Russia must be suspended because of German submarine activity on the Arctic sea route (on June 2 a convoy from Iceland had lost 23 out of 34 vessels). Consequently, it was the more awkward to inform Stalin that there would be no second front in Europe before 1943. In mid-August 1942, when Churchill went to Moscow to break the news, Stalin raged against the retreat from the plan for a second front in Europe but had to admit the military logic of “Torch.”

Libya and Egypt, autumn 1941–summer 1942

In the Western Desert, a major offensive against Rommel's front was undertaken on November 18, 1941, by the British 8th Army, commanded by Cunningham under the command in chief of Wavell's successor in the Middle East, General Sir Claude Auchinleck. The offensive was routed. General Neil Methuen Ritchie took Cunningham's place on November 25, still more tanks were brought up, and a fortnight's resumed pressure constrained Rommel to evacuate Cyrenaica and to retreat to Agedabia. There, however, Rommel was at last, albeit meagrely, reinforced; and, after repulsing a British attack on December 26, he prepared a counteroffensive. When the British still imagined his forces to be hopelessly crippled, he attacked on January 21, 1942, and, by a series of strokes, drove the 8th Army back to the Gazala–Bir Hakeim line, just west of Tobruk.

Both sides were subsequently further reinforced. Then, on the night of May 26–27, Rommel passed around Ritchie's southern flank with his three German divisions and two Italian ones, leaving only four Italian divisions to face the Gazala line. Though at first Rommel did some damage to the British tanks as they came into action piecemeal from a weak position, he failed to break through to the coast behind Gazala. In a single day one-third of Rommel's tank force was lost; and, after another unsuccessful effort to reach the coast, he decided, on May 29, to take up a defensive position.

The new German position, aptly known as the Cauldron, seemed indeed to be perilously exposed; and throughout the first days of June the British attacked it continually from the air and from the ground, imagining that Rommel's armour was caught at last. The British tanks, however, persisted in making direct assaults in small groups against the Cauldron and were beaten off with very heavy losses; and Rommel, meanwhile, secured his rear and his line of supply by overwhelming several isolated British positions to the south.

Whereas in May 1942 the British had had 700 tanks, with 200 more in reserve, against Rommel's 525, by June 10 their present armoured strength was reduced, through their wasteful tactics against the Cauldron, to 170, and most of the reserve was exhausted. Suddenly then, on June 11, Rommel struck eastward, to catch most of the remaining British armour in the converging fire of two panzer divisions. By nightfall on June 13 the British had barely 70 tanks left, and Rommel, with some 150 still fit for action, was master of the battlefield.

The British on June 14 began a precipitate retreat from the Gazala line toward the Egyptian frontier. A garrison of 33,000 men, however, with an immense quantity of material, was left behind in Tobruk—on the retention of which Churchill characteristically and most unfortunately insisted in successive telegrams from London. Rommel's prompt reduction of Tobruk, achieved on June 21, 1942, was felt by Great Britain as a national disaster second only to the loss of Singapore; and 80 percent of the transport with which Rommel chased the remnant of the 8th Army eastward consisted of captured British vehicles.

At this point Auchinleck relieved Ritchie of his command and in a realistic and soldierly way ordered a general British retreat back to the Alamein area. By June 30 the German tanks were pressing against

the British positions between el-Alamein (al-‘Alamayn) and the Qattara Depression, some 60 miles west of Alexandria, after an advance of more than 350 miles from Gazala. Hitler and Mussolini could expect that within a matter of days Rommel would be the master of Egypt.

The ensuing First Battle of el-Alamein, which lasted throughout July 1942, marked the end of the German hopes of a rapid victory. Rommel’s troops, having come so far and so fast, were exhausted; their first assaults failed to break the defense rallied by Auchinleck; and they were also subjected to disconcerting counterstrokes. At this point, the respite that Rommel had to grant to his men gave Auchinleck time to bring up reinforcements. By the end of July Rommel knew that it was he rather than Auchinleck who was now on the defensive.

Auchinleck had saved Egypt by halting Rommel’s invasion, but his counterattacks had not driven it back. Early in August, when Churchill arrived in Cairo to review the situation, Auchinleck insisted on postponing the resumption of the offensive until September, so that his new forces could be properly acclimatized and trained for desert warfare. Impatient of this delay, Churchill removed Auchinleck from the command in chief in the Middle East and gave the post to General Sir Harold Alexander, while the command of the 8th Army was transferred eventually (after the sudden death of Churchill’s first nominee) to General Bernard Law Montgomery. Paradoxically, Montgomery postponed the resumption of the offensive even longer than Auchinleck had desired.

While the British in the course of August raised their strength in armour at the front to some 700 tanks, Rommel received only meagre reinforcement in the shape of infantry. He had, however, about 200 gun-armed German tanks and also 240 Italian tanks (of an obsolete model). With this armament, in the night of August 30–31, 1942, he launched a fresh attack, intending to capture by surprise the minefields on the southern sector of the British front and then to drive eastward with his armour for some 30 miles before wheeling north into the 8th Army’s supply area on the coast. In the event, the minefields proved unexpectedly deep, and by daybreak Rommel’s spearhead was only eight miles beyond them. Delayed on their eastward drive and already under attack from the air, the two German panzer divisions of the Afrika Korps had to make their wheel to the north at a much shorter distance from the breach than Rommel had planned. Their assault thus ran mainly into the position held by the British 22nd Armoured Brigade, to the southwest of the ridge ‘Alam al-Halfa’. Shortage of fuel on the German side and reinforced defense on the British, together with intensification of the British bombing, spelled the defeat of the offensive, and Rommel on September 2 decided to make a gradual withdrawal.

The Germans’ summer offensive in southern Russia, 1942

The German plan to launch another great summer offensive crystallized in the early months of 1942. Hitler’s decision was influenced by his economists, who mistakenly told him that Germany could not continue the war unless it obtained petroleum supplies from the Caucasus. Hitler was the more responsive to such arguments because they coincided with his belief that another German offensive would so drain the Soviet Union’s manpower that the U.S.S.R. would be unable to continue the war. His

thinking was shared by his generals, who had been awed by the prodigality with which the Soviets squandered their troops in the fighting of 1941 and the spring of 1942. By this time at least 4,000,000 Soviet troops had been killed, wounded, or captured, while German casualties totaled only 1,150,000.

In the early summer of 1942 the German southern line ran from Orël southward east of Kursk, through Belgorod, and east of Kharkov down to the loop of the Soviet salient opposite Izyum, beyond which it veered southeastward to Taganrog, on the northern coast of the Sea of Azov. Before the Germans were ready for their principal offensive, the Red Army in May started a drive against Kharkov; but this premature effort actually served the Germans' purposes, since it not only preempted the Soviet reserves but also provoked an immediate counterstroke against its southern flank, where the Germans broke into the salient and reached the Donets River near Izyum. The Germans captured 240,000 Soviet prisoners in the encirclement that followed. In May also the Germans drove the Soviet defenders of the Kerch Peninsula out of Crimea; and on June 3 the Germans began an assault against Sevastopol, which, however, held out for a month.

The Germans' crossing of the Donets near Izyum on June 10, 1942, was the prelude to their summer offensive, which was launched at last on June 28: Field Marshal Maximilian von Weichs's Army Group B, from the Kursk–Belgorod sector of the front, struck toward the middle Don River opposite Voronezh, whence General Friedrich Paulus' 6th Army was to wheel southeastward against Stalingrad (Volgograd); and List's Army Group A, from the front south of Kharkov, with Kleist's 1st Panzer Army, struck toward the lower Don to take Rostov and to thrust thence northeastward against Stalingrad as well as southward into the vast oil fields of Caucasia. Army Group B swept rapidly across a 100-mile stretch of plain to the Don and captured Voronezh on July 6. The 1st Panzer Army drove 250 miles from its starting line and captured Rostov on July 23. Once his forces had reached Rostov, Hitler decided to split his troops so that they could both invade the rest of the Caucasus and take the important industrial city of Stalingrad on the Volga River, 220 miles northeast of Rostov. This decision was to have fatal consequences for the Germans, since they lacked the resources to successfully take and hold both of these objectives.

Maikop (Maykup), the great oil centre 200 miles south of Rostov, fell to Kleist's right-hand column on August 9, and Pyatigorsk, 150 miles east of Maikop, fell to his centre on the same day, while the projected thrust against Stalingrad, in the opposite direction from Rostov, was being developed. Shortage of fuel, however, slowed the pace of Kleist's subsequent southeastward progress through the Caucasian mountains; and, after forcing a passage over the Terek River near Mozdok early in September, he was halted definitively just south of that river. From the end of October 1942 the Caucasian front was stabilized; but the titanic struggle for Stalingrad, draining manpower that might have won victory for the Germans in Caucasia, was to rage on, fatefully, for three more months (see *below* Stalingrad and the German retreat, summer 1942–February 1943). Already, however, it was evident that Hitler's new offensive had fallen short of its objectives, and the scapegoat this time was Halder, who was superseded by Kurt Zeitzler as chief of the army general staff.

The Allies' first decisive successes

The Solomons, Papua, Madagascar, the Aleutians, and Burma, July 1942–May 1943

On July 2, 1942, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered limited offensives in three stages to recapture the New Britain–New Ireland–Solomons–eastern New Guinea area: first, the seizure of Tulagi and of the Santa Cruz Islands, with adjacent positions; second, the occupation of the central and northern Solomons and of the northeast coast of New Guinea; third, the seizure of Rabaul and of other points in the Bismarck Archipelago.

On July 6 the Japanese landed troops on Guadalcanal, one of the southern Solomons, and began to construct an air base. The Allied high command, fearing further Japanese advances southeastward, sped into the area to dislodge the enemy and to obtain a base for later advances toward Japan's main base in the theatre, Rabaul. The U.S. 1st Marine Division poured ashore on August 7 and secured Guadalcanal's airfield, Tulagi's harbour, and neighbouring islands by dusk on August 8—the Pacific war's first major Allied offensive. During the night of August 8–9, Japanese cruisers and destroyers, attempting to hold Guadalcanal, sank four U.S. cruisers, themselves sustaining one cruiser sunk and one damaged and later sunk. On August 23–25, in the Battle of the Eastern Solomons, the Japanese lost a light carrier, a destroyer, and a submarine and sustained damage to a cruiser and to a seaplane carrier but sank an Allied destroyer and crippled a cruiser. On August 31 another U.S. carrier was disabled, and on September 15 Japanese submarines sank the carrier *Wasp* and damaged a battleship. Meanwhile, more than 6,000 Japanese reinforced their Guadalcanal garrison, attacking the Marines' beachhead on August 20–21 and on September 12–14. On September 18 some U.S. reinforcements arrived, and mid-October saw about 22,000 Japanese ranged against 23,000 U.S. troops. The sea battles of Cape Esperance and of the Santa Cruz Islands—in which two Japanese cruisers and two destroyers were sunk and three carriers and two destroyers damaged in return for the loss of one U.S. carrier and two destroyers, besides damage to six other Allied ships—thwarted an attempt to reinforce further the Japanese ground troops, whose attack proved a failure (October 20–29).

U.S. Marines landing on Guadalcanal,
August 1942.

UPI/Bettmann Archive

After October, Allied strength was built up. Another Japanese attempt at counter-reinforcement led to the naval Battle of Guadalcanal, fought on November 13–15: it cost Japan two battleships, three destroyers, one cruiser, two submarines, and 11 transports and the Allies (now under Admiral William F. Halsey) two cruisers and seven destroyers sunk and one battleship and one cruiser damaged. Only 4,000 Japanese troops out of 12,500 managed to reach land, without equipment; and on November 30 eight Japanese destroyers, attempting to land more troops, were beaten off in the Battle of Tassafaronga, losing one destroyer sunk and one crippled, at an Allied cost of one cruiser sunk and three damaged.

By Jan. 5, 1943, Guadalcanal's Allied garrison totaled 44,000, against 22,500 Japanese. The Japanese decided to evacuate the position, carrying away 12,000 men in early February in daring destroyer runs. In ground warfare Japanese losses were more than 24,000 for the Guadalcanal campaign, Allied losses about 1,600 killed and 4,250 wounded (figures that ignore the higher number of casualties from disease). On February 21, U.S. infantry began occupying the Russell Islands, to support advances on Rabaul.

Earlier, before Allied plans to secure eastern New Guinea had been implemented, the Japanese had landed near Gona on the north coast of Papua (the southeastern extremity of the great island) on July 24, 1942, in an attempt to reach Port Moresby overland, via the Kokoda Trail. Advanced Japanese units from the north, despite Australian opposition, had reached a ridge 32 miles from Port Moresby by mid-September. Then, however, they had to withdraw exhausted to Gona and to nearby Buna, where there were some 7,500 Japanese assembled by November 18. The next day U.S. infantry attacked them there. Each side was subsequently reinforced; but the Australians took Gona on December 9 and the Americans Buna village on December 14. Buna government station fell to the Allies on Jan. 2, 1943, Sanananda on January 18, and all Japanese resistance in Papua ceased on January 22.

The retaking of Guadalcanal and Papua ended the Japanese drive south, and communications with Australia and New Zealand were now secure. Altogether, Papua cost Japan nearly 12,000 killed and 350 captured. Allied losses were 3,300 killed and 5,500 wounded. Allied air forces had played a particularly important role, interdicting Japanese supply lines and transporting Allied supplies and reinforcements.

Japan, having lost Guadalcanal, fought henceforth defensively, with worsening prospects. Its final effort to reinforce the Lae–Salamaua position in New Guinea from the stronghold of Rabaul was a disaster: in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea, on March 2–4, 1943, the Japanese lost four destroyers and eight transports, and only 1,000 of the 7,000 troops reached their destination. On March 25 the Japanese Army and Navy high commands agreed on a policy of strengthening the defense of strategic points and of counterattacking wherever possible, priority being given to the defense of the remaining Japanese positions in New Guinea, with secondary emphasis on the Solomon Islands. In the following three weeks, however, the Allies improved their own position in New Guinea, and Japanese intervention was confined to air attacks. Before the end of April, moreover, the Japanese Navy sustained a disaster: the guiding genius of the Japanese war effort, Yamamoto, was sent late in March to command the forces based on Rabaul but was killed in an American air ambush on a flight to Bougainville.

Developments of the Allies' war against Japan also took place outside the southwest Pacific area. British forces in the summer of 1942 invaded Vichy French-held Madagascar. A renewed British offensive in September 1942 overran the island; hostilities ceased on November 5, and a Free French administration of Madagascar took office on Jan. 8, 1943. In the North Pacific, meanwhile, the United States had decided to expel the Japanese from the Aleutians. Having landed forces on Adak in August 1942, they began air attacks against Kiska and Attu from Adak the next month and from Amchitka also in the following January, while a naval blockade prevented the Japanese from reinforcing their

garrisons. Finally, U.S. troops, bypassing Kiska, invaded Attu on May 11, 1943—to kill most of the island's 2,300 defenders in three weeks of fighting. The Japanese then evacuated Kiska. Bases in the Aleutians thenceforth facilitated the Allies' bombing of the Kuril Islands.

Burma, autumn 1942–summer 1943

On the Burmese front the Allies found they could do little to dislodge the Japanese from their occupation of that country, and what little the Allies did attempt proved abortive. Brigadier General Orde Wingate's "Chindits," which were long-range penetration groups depending on supplies from the air, crossed the Chindwin River in February 1943 and were initially successful in severing Japanese communications on the railroad between Mandalay and Myitkyina. But the Chindits soon found themselves in unfavourable terrain and in grave danger of encirclement, and so they made their way back to India.

In May 1943, however, the Allies reorganized their system of command for Southeast Asia. Vice Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten was appointed supreme commander of the South East Asia Command (SEAC), and Stilwell was appointed deputy to Mountbatten. Stilwell at the same time was chief of staff to Chiang Kai-shek. The British–Indian forces destined for Burma meanwhile constituted the 14th Army, under Lieutenant General William Slim, whose operational control Stilwell agreed to accept. Shortly afterward, Auchinleck succeeded Wavell as commander in chief in India.

Montgomery's Battle of el-Alamein and Rommel's retreat, 1942–43

While Churchill was still chafing in London about his generals' delay in resuming the offensive in Egypt, Montgomery waited for seven weeks after 'Alam al-Halfa' in order to be sure of success. He finally chose to begin his attack in the night of Oct. 23–24, 1942, when there would be moonlight for the clearing of gaps in the German minefields.

By mid-October the British 8th Army had 230,000 men and 1,230 gun-armed tanks ready for action, while the German–Italian forces numbered only 80,000 men, with only 210 tanks of comparable quality ready; and in air support the British enjoyed a superiority of 1,500 to 350. Allied air and submarine attacks on the Axis supply lines across the Mediterranean, moreover, had prevented Rommel's army from receiving adequate replenishments of fuel, ammunition, and food; and Rommel himself, who had been ill before 'Alam al-Halfa', was convalescing in Austria.

The British launched their infantry attack at el-Alamein at 10:00 PM on Oct. 23, 1942, but found the German minefields harder to clear than they had foreseen. Two days later, however, some of those tanks were deploying six miles beyond the original front. When Rommel, ordered back to Africa by Hitler, reached the front in the evening of October 25, half of the Germans' available armour was already destroyed. Nevertheless, the impetus of the British onslaught was stopped the next day, when German antitank guns took a heavy toll of armour trying to deepen the westward penetration. In the night of October 28 Montgomery turned the offensive northward from the wedge, but this drive

likewise miscarried. In the first week of their offensive the British lost four times as many tanks as the Germans but still had 800 available against the latter's remaining 90.

When Montgomery switched the British line of attack back to its original direction, early on Nov. 2, 1942, Rommel was no longer strong enough to withstand him. After expensive resistance throughout the daytime, he ordered a retreat to Fūka (Fūkah); but in the afternoon of November 3 the retreat was fatally countermanded by Hitler, who insisted that the Alamein position be held. The 36 hours wasted in obeying this long-distance instruction cost Rommel his chance of making a stand at Fūka: when he resumed his retreat, he had to race much farther back to escape successive British attempts to intercept him on the coast road by scythelike sweeps from the south. A fortnight after resuming his withdrawal from el-Alamein, Rommel was 700 miles to the west, at the traditional backstop of Agheila. As the British took their time to mount their attacks, he fell back farther by stages: after three weeks, 200 miles to Buerat (al-Bu'ayrāt); after three more weeks, in mid-January 1943, the whole distance of 350 miles past Tripoli to the Mareth Line within the frontiers of Tunisia. By that time the Axis position in Tunisia was being battered from the west, through the execution of "Torch."

Stalingrad and the German retreat, summer 1942–February 1943

The German 4th Panzer Army, after being diverted to the south to help Kleist's attack on Rostov late in July 1942 (see *above* The Germans' summer offensive in southern Russia, 1942), was redirected toward Stalingrad a fortnight later. Stalingrad was a large industrial city producing armaments and tractors; it stretched for 30 miles along the banks of the Volga River. By the end of August the 4th Army's northeastward advance against the city was converging with the eastward advance of the 6th Army, under General Friedrich Paulus, with 330,000 of the German Army's finest troops. The Red Army, however, put up the most determined resistance, yielding ground only very slowly and at a high cost as the 6th Army approached Stalingrad. On August 23 a German spearhead penetrated the city's northern suburbs, and the Luftwaffe rained incendiary bombs that destroyed most of the city's wooden housing. The Soviet 62nd Army was pushed back into Stalingrad proper, where, under the command of General Vasily I. Chuikov, it made a determined stand. Meanwhile, the Germans' concentration on Stalingrad was increasingly draining reserves from their flank cover, which was already strained by having to stretch so far—400 miles on the left (north), as far as Voronezh, 400 again on the right (south), as far as the Terek River. By mid-September the Germans had pushed the Soviet forces in Stalingrad back until the latter occupied only a nine-mile-long strip of the city along the Volga, and this strip was only two or three miles wide. The Soviets had to supply their troops by barge and boat across the Volga from the other bank. At this point Stalingrad became the scene of some of the fiercest and most concentrated fighting of the war; streets, blocks, and individual buildings were fought over by many small units of troops and often changed hands again and again. The city's remaining buildings were pounded into rubble by the unrelenting close combat. The most critical moment came on October 14, when the Soviet defenders had their backs so close to the Volga that the few remaining supply crossings of the river came under German machine-gun fire. The Germans, however, were growing dispirited by heavy losses, by fatigue, and by the approach of winter.

A huge Soviet counteroffensive, planned by generals G.K. Zhukov, A.M. Vasilevsky, and Nikolay Nikolayevich Voronov, was launched on Nov. 19–20, 1942, in two spearheads, north and south of the German salient whose tip was at Stalingrad. The twin pincers of this counteroffensive struck the flanks of the German salient at points about 50 miles north and 50 miles south of Stalingrad and were designed to isolate the 250,000 remaining men of the German 6th and 4th armies in the city. The attacks quickly penetrated deep into the flanks, and by November 23 the two prongs of the attack had linked up about 60 miles west of Stalingrad; the encirclement of the two German armies in Stalingrad was complete. The German high command urged Hitler to allow Paulus and his forces to break out of the encirclement and rejoin the main German forces west of the city, but Hitler would not contemplate a retreat from the Volga River and ordered Paulus to “stand and fight.” With winter setting in and food and medical supplies dwindling, Paulus’ forces grew weaker. In mid-December Hitler allowed one of the most talented German commanders, Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, to form a special army corps to rescue Paulus’ forces by fighting its way eastward, but Hitler refused to let Paulus fight his way westward at the same time in order to link up with Manstein. This fatal decision doomed Paulus’ forces, since the main German forces now simply lacked the reserves needed to break through the Soviet encirclement singlehandedly. Hitler exhorted the trapped German forces to fight to the death, but on Jan. 31, 1943, Paulus surrendered; 91,000 frozen, starving men (all that was left of the 6th and 4th armies) and 24 generals surrendered with him.

Besides being the greatest battle of the war, Stalingrad proved to be the turning point of the military struggle between Germany and the Soviet Union. The battle used up precious German reserves, destroyed two entire armies, and humiliated the prestigious German war machine. It also marked the increasing skill and professionalism of a group of younger Soviet generals who had emerged as capable commanders, chief among whom was Zhukov.

Meanwhile, early in January 1943, only just in time, Hitler acknowledged that the encirclement of the Germans in Stalingrad would lead to an even worse disaster unless he extricated his forces from the Caucasus. Kleist was therefore ordered to retreat, while his northern flank of 600 miles was still protected by the desperate resistance of the encircled Paulus. Kleist’s forces were making their way back across the Don at Rostov when Paulus at last surrendered. Had Paulus surrendered three weeks earlier (after seven weeks of isolation), Kleist’s escape would have been impossible.

Even west of Rostov there were threats to Kleist’s line of retreat. In January, two Soviet armies, the one under General Nikolay Fyodorovich Vatutin, the other under General Filipp Ivanovich Golikov, had crossed the Don upstream from Serafimovich and were thrusting southwestward to the Donets between Kamensk and Kharkov: Vatutin’s forces, having crossed the Donets at Izyum, took Lozovaya Junction on February 11, Golikov’s took Kharkov five days later. Farther to the north, a third Soviet army, under General Ivan Danilovich Chernyakhovsky, had initiated a drive westward from Voronezh on February 2 and had retaken Kursk on February 8. Thus, the Germans had to retreat from all the territory they had taken in their great summer offensive in 1942. The Caucasus returned to Soviet hands.

A sudden thaw supervened to hamper the Red Army's transport of supplies and reinforcements across the swollen courses of the great rivers. With the momentum of the Soviet counteroffensive thus slowed, the Germans made good their retreat to the Dnepr along the easier routes of the Black Sea littoral and were able, before the end of February 1943, to mount a counteroffensive of their own.

The invasion of northwest Africa, November–December 1942

When the U.S. and British strategists had decided on “Torch” (Allied landings on the western coast of North Africa) late in July 1942, it remained to settle the practical details of the operation. The purpose of “Torch” was to hem Rommel's forces in between U.S. troops on the west and British troops to the east. After considerable discussion, it was finally agreed that landings, under the supreme command of Major General Dwight D. Eisenhower, should be made on November 8 at three places in the vicinity of Casablanca on the Atlantic coast of Morocco and on beaches near Oran and near Algiers itself on the Mediterranean coast of Algeria. The amphibious landings would involve a total of about 110,000 troops, most of them Americans.

The conciliation of the French on whose colonial territory the landings would be made was a more delicate matter. All of French North Africa was still loyal to the Vichy government of Marshal Pétain, with which the United States, unlike Great Britain, was still formally maintaining diplomatic relations. Thus, the French commander in chief in Algeria, General Alphonse Juin, and his counterpart in Morocco, General Charles-Auguste Noguès, were subordinate to the supreme commander of all Vichy's forces, namely Admiral Jean-François Darlan. American diplomats and generals tried to gain these officers' collaboration with the Allies in the landings, for it was vital to try to avoid a situation in which Vichy French troops put up armed resistance to the landings at the beaches.

The U.S.-British landings at Algiers began on November 8 and were met by little French resistance. The simultaneous landings near Oran met stiffer resistance, and on November 9 the whole U.S. plan of operations was dislocated by a French counterattack on the Arzew beachhead. Around Casablanca the U.S. landings were accomplished without difficulty, but resistance developed when the invaders tried to expand their beachheads. On November 10, however, the fighting was called off; and next day the French authorities in Morocco concluded an armistice with the Americans.

The landing in Algiers, meanwhile, was complicated by the fact that Darlan himself was in the city at the time. The situation was muddled, with some French troops loyal to Pétain while others backed de Gaulle and the anti-Vichy French general whom the Allies were sponsoring in North Africa, Henri Giraud.

On Nov. 11, 1942, in reaction to the Allied landings, German and Italian forces overran southern France, the metropolitan territory hitherto under Pétain's immediate authority. This event helped induce Noguès and the other French commanders in Algeria to assent to Darlan's proposals for a working agreement with the Allies, including recognition of Giraud as military commander in chief of the French forces. Concluded on November 13, the agreement was promptly endorsed by Eisenhower.

French West Africa, including Senegal, with the port of Dakar, likewise followed Darlan's lead. The Germans, however, by mining the exit from the harbour of Toulon, forestalled plans for the escape of the main French fleet from metropolitan France to North Africa: on November 27, the French crews scuttled their ships to avoid capture. On Dec. 24, 1942, Darlan was assassinated; both Royalist and Gaullist circles in North Africa had steadfastly objected to him on political grounds. Giraud thereupon took his place, for a time, as French high commissioner in North Africa.

Tunisia, November 1942–May 1943

Axis troops had begun to arrive in Tunisia as early as Nov. 9, 1942, and were reinforced in the following fortnight until they numbered about 20,000 combat troops (which were subsequently heavily reinforced by air). Thus, when the British general Kenneth Anderson, designated to command the invasion of Tunisia from the west with the Allied 1st Army, started his offensive on November 25, the defense was unexpectedly strong. By December 5 the 1st Army's advance was checked a dozen miles from Tunis and from Bizerte. Further reinforcements enabled Colonel General Jürgen von Arnim, who assumed the command in chief of the Axis defense in Tunisia on December 9, to expand his two bridgeheads in Tunisia until they were merged into one. Germany and Italy had won the race for Tunis but were henceforth to succumb to the lure of retaining their prize regardless of the greater need of conserving their strength for the defense of Europe.

After Rommel had fallen back from Libya to the Mareth Line in mid-January 1943 (*see above* Montgomery's Battle of el-Alamein and Rommel's retreat, 1942–43), two German armies, Arnim's and Rommel's, were holding the north and the south of the eastern littoral both against Anderson's 1st Army attacking from the west and against Montgomery's 8th from the southeast. Rommel judged that a counterstroke should be delivered first against the Allies in the west. Accordingly, on February 14 the Axis forces delivered a major attack against U.S. forces between the Fā'iq Pass in the north and Gafsa in the south. West of Fā'iq, the 21st Panzer Division, under General Heinz Ziegler, destroyed 100 U.S. tanks and drove the Americans back 50 miles. In the Kasserine Pass, however, the Allies put up some stiffer opposition.

When on February 19 Rommel received authority to continue his attack, he was ordered to advance not against Tébessa but northward from Kasserine against Thala—where, in fact, Alexander was expecting him. Having overcome the stubborn U.S. resistance in the Kasserine Pass on February 20, the Germans entered Thala the next day, only to be expelled a few hours later by Alexander's reserve troops. His chance having been forfeited, Rommel began a gradual withdrawal on February 22.

The delays ensuing from the frustration of Rommel's stroke against the 1st Army reduced the effectiveness of his stroke against the 8th. Whereas on Feb. 26, 1943, Montgomery had had only one division facing the Mareth Line, he quadrupled his strength in the following week, massing 400 tanks and 500 antitank guns. Rommel's attack, on March 6, was brought to an early halt, and 50 German tanks were lost. A sick man and a disappointed soldier, Rommel relinquished his command.

The Allied 1st Army resumed the offensive on March 17, with attacks by the U.S. II Corps, under General George Patton, on the roads through the mountains, with the aim of cutting the Afrika Korps' line of retreat up the coast to Tunis; but these attacks were checked by the Germans in the passes. In the night of March 20–21, however, the British 8th Army launched a frontal assault on the Mareth Line, combined with an outflanking movement by the New Zealand Corps toward el-Hamma (al-Ḥāmmah) in the Germans' rear; and a few days later, seeing the frontal assault to have failed, Montgomery switched the main weight of his attack to the flank. Threatened with encirclement, the Germans decided to abandon the Mareth Line, which the 8th Army occupied on March 28; but the German defenses at el-Hamma held out long enough to enable the rest of the Afrika Korps to retreat without much loss to a new line on the Wādī al-ʿAkārīt, north of Gabès. The new line, however, was breached by the 8th Army on April 6; and, meanwhile, the Americans were also advancing on the Axis troops' rear from Gafsa. By the following morning the Afrika Korps was retreating rapidly northward along the littoral toward Tunis, and by April 11 it had joined hands with Arnim's forces for the defense of a 100-mile perimeter stretching around Tunis and Bizerte (Banzart).

Thanks to the rapidity of the Afrika Korps' retreat from Wādī al-ʿAkārīt, the German high command had an opportunity to withdraw its forces from the rump of Tunisia to Sicily, but it chose instead to defend the indefensible rump. The defenders indeed withstood the converging assaults that the 8th and 1st armies delivered against the perimeter from April 20 to April 23; but on May 6 a concentrated attack by Allied artillery, aircraft, infantry, and tanks was launched on the two-mile front of the Medjerda (Majardah) Valley leading to Tunis; and on May 7 the city fell to the leading British armoured forces, while the Americans and the French almost simultaneously captured Bizerte. At the same time, the Germans' line of retreat into the Cap Bon Peninsula was severed by an armoured division's swift turn southeastward from Tunis. A general collapse of the German resistance followed, the Allies taking more than 250,000 prisoners, including 125,000 German troops and Arnim himself. North Africa had been cleared of Axis forces and was now completely in Allied hands. Its capture insured the safety of Allied shipping and naval movements throughout the Mediterranean, and North Africa would serve as a base for future Allied operations against Italy itself.

The Atlantic, the Mediterranean, and the North Sea, 1942–45

The year 1942 was, on the whole, a favourable one for the German U-boats. First, the U.S. entry into the war entitled them to infest the U.S. coast of the North Atlantic; and it was not until the middle of the year that the Allies' introduction of the convoy system from the Caribbean northward constrained the raiders to go so far afield as the waters between Brazil and West Africa. Second, U-tankers were developed; i.e., large converted U-boats equipped to provide fuel, torpedoes, and other supplies to U-boats operating in remote waters. In the course of 1942, the U-boats sank more than 6,266,000 tons of shipping; and, since in the same period their operational strength rose from 91 to 212, it seemed conceivable that they might soon score their desired target of 800,000 tons of sinkings per month.

March 1943 saw the climax of the U-boats' good fortune: their strength rose to 240; they sank in that single month 627,377 tons of shipping; and, in the greatest convoy battle of the war, when 20 of them attacked two convoys merged into one, they sank 21 ships (141,000 tons) out of 77 with the loss of only one of their own number. The anticlimax followed, thanks to five developments of the Allies' counteraction: "support groups" were reintroduced; aircraft carriers became progressively available for escorts; more and more long-range Liberator aircraft began to cover the convoys offshore; ships were equipped with a radar set of very short wavelength, the probing of which was undetectable to the U-boats; and a regular offensive against U-boats on their transit routes was launched from the air (56 were destroyed in April–May 1943). The U-boats sank 327,943 tons in April, 264,852 in May, only 95,753 in June 1943; and for the rest of the war monthly totals were less than 100,000 tons except in July and September 1943 and in March 1944.

Late in 1944 the U-boats were equipped with the snorkel breathing tube, which provided them with the necessary oxygen to recharge their batteries under water and so converted them from submersible torpedo boats into almost complete submarines virtually undetectable to radar. About the same time a new model of U-boat, with greater underwater speed and endurance, came into operation. These improvements came too late, however, because the Allies' surface and air resources for the protection of the convoys were already overwhelming.

Air warfare, 1942–43

Early in 1942 the RAF bomber command, headed by Sir Arthur Harris, began an intensification of the Allies' growing strategic air offensive against Germany. These attacks, which were aimed against factories, rail depots, dockyards, bridges, and dams and against cities and towns themselves, were intended to both destroy Germany's war industries and to deprive its civilian population of their housing, thus sapping their will to continue the war. The characteristic feature of the new program was its emphasis on area bombing, in which the centres of towns would be the points of aim for nocturnal raids.

Danzig harbour in flames after an attack
by Allied bombers in World War II.
Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Already in March 1942 an exceptionally destructive bombing raid, using the Germans' own incendiary method, had been made on Lübeck; and intensive attacks were also made on Essen (site of the Krupp munitions works) and other Ruhr towns. In the night of May

30–31 more than 1,000 bombers were dispatched against Cologne, where they did heavy damage to one-third of that city's built-up area. Such operations, however, became highly expensive to the bomber command, particularly because of the defense put up by the German night fighter force. Interrupted for two months during which the bombers concentrated their attention on U-boat bases on the Bay of Biscay, the air offensive against Germany was resumed in March 1943. In the following 12 months, moreover, its resources were to be increased formidably, so that by March 1944 the bomber command's average daily operational strength had risen to 974 from about 500 in 1942. These numbers helped the RAF to concentrate effectively against major industrial targets, such as those in the Ruhr.

The phases of the resumed offensive were: (1) the Battle of the Ruhr, from March to July 1943, comprising 18,506 sorties and costing 872 aircraft shot down and 2,126 damaged, its most memorable operation being that of the night of May 16–17, when the Möhne Dam in the Ruhr Basin and the Eder Dam in the Weser Basin were breached, (2) the Battle of Hamburg, from July to November 1943, comprising 17,021 sorties and costing 695 bombers lost and 1,123 damaged but, nevertheless, thanks in part to the new Window antiradar and “H₂S” radar devices, achieving an unprecedented measure of devastation, since four out of its 33 major actions, with a little help from minor attacks, killed about 40,000 people and drove nearly 1,000,000 from their homes, and (3) the Battle of Berlin, from November 1943 to March 1944, comprising 20,224 sorties but costing 1,047 bombers lost and 1,682 returned damaged and achieving, on the whole, less devastation than the Battle of Hamburg.

The U.S. 8th Air Force, based in Great Britain, also took part in the strategic offensive against Germany from January 1943. Its bombers, Flying Fortresses (B-17s) and Liberators (B-24s), attacked industrial targets in daylight. They proved, however, to be very vulnerable to German fighter attack whenever they went beyond the range of their own escort of fighters—that is to say, farther than the distance from Norfolk to Aachen: the raid against the important ball-bearing factory at Schweinfurt, for instance, on Oct. 14, 1943, lost 60 out of the 291 bombers participating, and 138 of those that returned were damaged. Not until December 1943 was the P-51B (Mustang III) brought into operation with the 8th Air Force—a long-range fighter that portended a change in the balance of air power. The Germans, meanwhile, continued to increase their production of aircraft and, in particular, of their highly successful fighters.

German-occupied Europe

Hitler’s racist ideology and his brutal conception of power politics caused him to pursue certain aims in those European countries conquered by the Germans in the period 1939–42. Hitler intended that those western and northern European areas in which civil administrations were installed—the Netherlands and Norway—would at some later date become part of the German Reich, or nation. Those countries left by Germany under military administration (which originally had been imposed everywhere), such as France and Serbia, would eventually be included more loosely in a German-dominated European bloc. Poland and the Soviet Union, on the other hand, were to be a colonial area for German settlement and economic exploitation.

Without regard to these distinctions, the SS, the elite corps of the Nazi Party, possessed exceptional powers throughout German-dominated Europe and in the course of time came to perform more and more executive functions, even in those countries under military administration. Similarly, the powers that Hitler gave to his chief labour commissioner, Fritz Sauckel, for the compulsory enrollment of foreign workers into the German armaments industry were soon applied to the whole of German-dominated Europe and ultimately turned 7,500,000 people into forced or slave labourers. Above all, however, there was the Final Solution of the “Jewish question” as ordered by Hitler, which meant the

physical extermination of the Jewish people throughout Europe wherever German rule was in force or where German influence was decisive.

The Final Solution—that is to say the step beyond half-measures such as the concentration of Poland’s Jews into overcrowded ghettos—was introduced concurrently with Germany’s preparations for the military campaign against the Soviet Union, since Hitler believed that the annihilation of the Communists entailed not only the extermination of the Soviet ruling class but also what he believed to be its “biological basis”—the millions of Jews in western Russia and the Ukraine. Accordingly, with the start of the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, special mobile killing squads began systematically shooting the Jewish population on conquered Soviet territory in the rear of the advancing German armies; in a few months, up to the end of 1941, they had killed about 1,400,000 people. Meanwhile, plans were made in 1941 to similarly exterminate the Jews of central and western Europe. At the Wannsee Conference of Nazi and SS chiefs in January 1942, it was agreed that those Jews would be deported and sent to camps in eastern Poland where they would be killed en masse or made to work as slave labourers until they perished. In the period from May 1942 to September 1944 more than 4,200,000 Jews were killed in such death camps as Auschwitz (Oświęcim), Treblinka, Belzec, Chełmno, Majdanek, and Sobibor. About 5,700,000 Jews died in the course of the Final Solution.

While Hitler destined the Jews in his empire to physical extermination, he regarded the Slavs, principally the Poles and the Russians, as “subhumans” who were to be subjected to continual decimation and used as a pool of cheap labour, that is to say, reduced to slavery. Poland became the training ground for this purpose. Upon the German conquest of Poland in 1939, Hitler ordered the SS to kill a large proportion of the Polish intelligentsia. A reign of terror against the nationalistic-minded Polish ruling classes began, and by the war’s end a total of 3,000,000 Poles (in addition to 3,000,000 Polish Jews) had been killed. Hitler further willed that the whole mass of Slavs and Balts in the occupied portions of the Soviet Union should be indiscriminately subjected to German domination and should be economically exploited without hindrance or compassion. In the event, the Ukraine was the major area subject to economic exploitation and also became the main source of slave labour. When the German armies first entered the Ukraine in July 1941, many Ukrainians had welcomed the Germans as their liberators from Stalinist terror and collectivization. But this goodwill soon turned to resentment as the Germans requisitioned large quantities of grain from the farms, forcibly deported several million Ukrainians for work in Germany, and engaged in brutal reprisals against civilians for acts of resistance or sabotage.



These inhumane occupation policies were practiced to a greater or lesser extent in all the countries occupied by the Germans, and the result was the beginning in 1940–41 of armed, underground resistance movements in those countries. Underground resistance was especially effective in the Soviet Union because it functioned behind fronts on which the German armies were still engaged in battle with the Red Army. The Soviet Partisans, as they were called,

could thus covertly receive arms, equipment, and direction from the Soviet forces at the front itself. Soviet Partisans, like the members of other nations' Resistance movements, harassed and disrupted German military and economic activities by blowing up ammunition dumps and communications and transport facilities, sabotaging factories, ambushing small German units, and gathering military intelligence for use by the Allied armies. By 1944 the Resistance organizations in the Soviet Union, Poland, Yugoslavia, France, and Greece had grown quite large and were holding down many German divisions that were badly needed at the battlefield. In eastern Europe and Yugoslavia, the Resistance came to control large tracts of land in more inaccessible areas such as forests, mountain ranges, and swamplands. Some Resistance organizations, such as the Partisans in Yugoslavia and the National Liberation Movement in Greece, were Communist ones, while others, such as the Maquis in France and the Home Army in Poland, comprised people of many different political persuasions, though they were invariably anti-Fascists.

The German occupation authorities' attempts to eradicate the Resistance in most cases merely fanned the flames, due to the Germans' use of indiscriminate reprisals against civilians. It is generally agreed that by 1944 the Germans had earned the overwhelming antipathy of most of the people in the occupied nations of Europe. It should be noted, however, that the German occupation was in general far harsher in eastern Europe and the Balkans than in western Europe. In the Soviet Union, Poland, Yugoslavia, and Greece, a process of Resistance guerrilla warfare and Nazi reprisals began in 1941 and rose to a crescendo in 1943–44 as the fury of Nazi racism resulted in a war of annihilation upon the Slavic peoples.

Casablanca and Trident, January–May 1943

To decide what should be done after victory in North Africa, Roosevelt and Churchill, with their advisers, met at Casablanca in mid-January 1943. After long argument, it was eventually agreed that Sicily should be the next Axis area to be taken, in July. For the war against Japan, it was decided that two offensive operations should be undertaken: MacArthur should move toward the Japanese base at Rabaul, on the island of New Britain; and convergent movements on Burma should be made by the British from the mainland of India and by the Americans from the sea. Politically, the Casablanca Conference owes its importance to the fact that, at its end, Roosevelt publicly announced a demand for the unconditional surrender of Germany, Italy, and Japan.

Casablanca Conference; Giraud, Henri; Roosevelt, Franklin D.; Gaulle, Charles de; Churchill, Winston

Allied leaders (from left) French General Henri Giraud, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, French General Charles de Gaulle, and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill at the Casablanca Conference, January 1943.

U.S. Army Photo

Only four months after Casablanca it became necessary to hold another Anglo-U.S. conference. In mid-May 1943, Roosevelt, Churchill, and their advisers met, in Washington, D.C., for the conference code-named Trident. There the Sicilian project was effectively confirmed, and the date May 1, 1944, was prescribed—definitively in the U.S. view, provisionally in the British—for the landing of 29 divisions in France; but the question whether the

conquest of Sicily should be followed, as the British proposed, by an invasion of Italy was left unsettled.

The Eastern Front, February–September 1943

The German counteroffensive of February 1943 threw back the Soviet forces that had been advancing toward the Dnepr River on the Izyum sector of the front, and by mid-March the Germans had retaken Kharkov and Belgorod and reestablished a front on the Donets River. Hitler also authorized the German forces to fall back, in March, from their advanced positions facing Moscow to a straighter line in front of Smolensk and Orël. Finally, there was the existence of the large Soviet bulge, or salient, around Kursk, between Orël and Belgorod, which extended for about 150 miles from north to south and protruded 100 miles into the German lines. This salient irresistibly tempted Hitler and Zeitzler into undertaking a new and extremely ambitious offensive instead of remaining content to hold their newly shortened front.

Soviet forces use signal flares to illuminate a night attack during the battle of Kursk in July–August 1943.

Mary Evans Picture Library/Alamy

Hitler concentrated all efforts on this offensive without regard to the risk that an unsuccessful attack would leave him without reserves to maintain any subsequent defense of his long front. The Germans' increasing difficulty in building up their forces with fresh drafts of men and equipment was reflected in the increased delay

that year in opening the summer offensive. Three months' pause followed the close of the winter campaign.

By contrast, the Red Army had improved much since 1942, both in quality and in quantity. The flow of new equipment had greatly increased, as had the number of new divisions, and its numerical superiority over the Germans was now about 4 to 1. Better still, its leadership had improved with experience: generals and junior commanders alike had become more skilled tacticians. That could already be discerned in the summer of 1943, when the Soviets waited to let the Germans lead off and commit themselves deeply to an offensive, and so stood well-poised to exploit the Germans' loss of balance in lunging.

The German offensive against the Kursk salient was launched on July 5, 1943, and into it Hitler threw 20 infantry divisions and 17 armoured divisions having a total of about 3,000 tanks. But the German tank columns got entangled in the deep minefields that the Soviets had laid, forewarned by the long preparation of the offensive. The Germans advanced only 10–30 miles, and no large bag of Soviet prisoners was taken, since the Red Army had withdrawn their main forces from the salient before the German attack began. After a week of effort the German armoured divisions were seriously reduced by the well-prepared Soviet antitank defenses in the salient. On July 12, as the Germans began to pull out, the Soviets launched a counteroffensive upon the German positions in the salient and met with great success, taking Orël on August 5. By this time the Germans had lost 2,900 tanks and 70,000 men in the Battle of Kursk, which was the largest tank battle in history. The Soviets continued to advance steadily,

taking Belgorod and then Kharkov. In September the Soviet advance was accelerated, and by the end of the month the Germans in the Ukraine had been driven back to the Dnepr.

The Southwest and South Pacific, June–October 1943

A Pacific military conference held in Washington, D.C., in March 1943 produced a new schedule of operations calling for the development of some counterattacks against the Japanese. The reduction of the threat from the large Japanese naval base at Rabaul, by encirclement if not by the capture of that stronghold, was a primary objective for MacArthur.

Between June 22 and June 30, 1943, two U.S. regiments invaded Woodlark and Kiriwina islands (northeast of the tip of Papua), whence aircraft could range over not only the Coral Sea but also the approaches to Rabaul and to the Solomons. At the same time, U.S. and Australian units advanced from Buna along the coast of New Guinea toward Lae and Salamaua, while other Australian forces simultaneously advanced from Wau in the hinterland; and in the night of June 29–30, U.S. forces secured Nassau Bay as a base for further advances against the same positions.

U.S. landings on New Georgia and on Rendova in the Solomons, however, also made in the night of June 29–30, provoked the Japanese into strong counteraction: between July 5 and July 16, in the battles of Kula Gulf and of Kolombangara, the Allies lost one cruiser and two destroyers and had three more cruisers crippled; and the Japanese, though they lost a cruiser and two destroyers, were able to land considerable reinforcements (from New Britain). Only substantial counter-reinforcement secured the New Georgia group of islands for the Allies, who, moreover, began on August 15 to extend their operation to the island of Vella Lavella also. In the last two months of the struggle, which ended with the Japanese evacuation of Vella Lavella on October 7, the Japanese sank an Allied destroyer and crippled two more but lost a further six of their own; and their attempt to defend the Solomon Islands cost them 10,000 lives, as against the Americans' 1,150 killed and 4,100 wounded.

Meanwhile, U.S. planes on August 17–18 had attacked Japanese bases at Wewak (on the New Guinea coast far to the west of Lae) and destroyed more than 200 aircraft there. On September 4 an Australian division landed near Lae, and the next day U.S. paratroops dropped at Nadzab, above Lae on the Markham River, where they were soon joined by an Australian airborne division. Salamaua fell to the Allies on September 12, Lae on September 16, and Finschhafen, on the Huon Peninsula behind Lae, on October 2. On Sept. 30, 1943, the Japanese made a new policy decision: a last defense line was to be established from western New Guinea and the Carolines to the Marianas by spring 1944, to be held at all costs, and also to be used as a base for counterattacks.

The Allied landings in Europe and the defeat of the Axis powers

Developments from autumn 1943 to summer 1944

Sicily and the fall of Mussolini, July–August 1943

Hitler's greatest strategic disadvantage in opposing the Allies' imminent reentry into Europe lay in the immense stretch of Germany's conquests, from the west coast of France to the east coast of Greece. It was difficult for him to gauge where the Allies would strike next. The Allies' greatest strategic advantage lay in the wide choice of alternative objectives and in the powers of distraction they enjoyed through their superior sea power. Hitler, while always having to guard against a cross-Channel invasion from England's shores, had cause to fear that the Anglo-American armies in North Africa might land anywhere on his southern front between Spain and Greece.

Having failed to save its forces in Tunisia, the Axis had only 10 Italian divisions of various sorts and two German panzer units stationed on the island of Sicily at midsummer 1943. The Allies, meanwhile, were preparing to throw some 478,000 men into the island—150,000 of them in the first three days of the invasion. Under the supreme command of Alexander, Montgomery's British 8th Army and Patton's U.S. 7th Army were to be landed on two stretches of beach 40 miles long, 20 miles distant from one another, the British in the southeast of the island, the Americans in the south. The Allies' air superiority in the Mediterranean theatre was so great by this time—more than 4,000 aircraft against some 1,500 German and Italian ones—that the Axis bombers had been withdrawn from Sicily in June to bases in north-central Italy.

On July 10 Allied seaborne troops landed on Sicily. The coastal defenses, manned largely by Sicilians unwilling to turn their homeland into a battlefield for the Germans' sake, collapsed rapidly enough. The British forces had cleared the whole southeastern part of the island in the first three days of the invasion. The Allies' drive toward Messina then took the form of a circuitous movement by the British around Mount Etna in combination with an eastward drive by the Americans, who took Palermo, on the western half of the northern coast, on July 22. Meanwhile, the German armoured strength in Sicily had been reinforced.

After the successive disasters sustained by the Axis in Africa, many of the Italian leaders were desperately anxious to make peace with the Allies. The invasion of Sicily, representing an immediate threat to the Italian mainland, prompted them to action. On the night of July 24–25, 1943, when Mussolini revealed to the Fascist Grand Council that the Germans were thinking of evacuating the southern half of Italy, the majority of the council voted for a resolution against him, and he resigned his powers. On July 25 the king, Victor Emmanuel III, ordered the arrest of Mussolini and entrusted Marshal Pietro Badoglio with the formation of a new government. The new government entered into secret negotiations with the Allies, despite the presence of sizable German forces in Italy.

A few days after the fall of Mussolini, Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, the German commander in chief in Italy, decided that the Axis troops in Sicily must be evacuated; the local Italian commander thought so too. While rearguard actions held up the Allies at Adrano (on the western face of Mount Etna) and at Randazzo (to the north), 40,000 Germans and 60,000 Italian troops were safely withdrawn across the Strait of Messina to the mainland, mostly in the week ending on August 16, 1943—the day before the Allies' entry into Messina.

The Allies sustained about 22,800 casualties in their conquest of Sicily. The Axis powers suffered about 165,000 casualties, of whom 30,000 were Germans.

The Quadrant Conference (Quebec I)

The success of the Sicilian operation and the fall of Mussolini converted the American military and political leadership into supporters of a campaign in Italy. Furthermore, Lieutenant General Sir Frederick Morgan, who after Casablanca had been designated chief of staff to the Supreme Allied Commander (COSSAC), produced a detailed and realistic plan for the long-envisioned invasion of France from Great Britain, thus enabling the U.S. strategists to calculate more precisely how much of the Allies' resources were needed for that purpose and how much could be spared for operations in the Mediterranean and for the Pacific. With regard to the Pacific, plans sponsored by Admiral Nimitz for operations against the Gilbert and Marshall islands apart from the enterprise against Rabaul were approved early in August 1943.

King, W.L. Mackenzie; Roosevelt, Franklin D.; Churchill, Winston

(From left, seated) Canadian Prime Minister W.L. Mackenzie King, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill at an Allied conference in Quebec, 1943.

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The new turn of strategical thought necessitated a new Anglo-U.S. conference, which took place in Quebec in mid-August 1943 and was code-named "Quadrant." After vigorous debate, the question of the timing of "Overlord" was eventually left open, but it was agreed that the strength of the assault force should exceed the original estimate by 25 percent, that the cross-Channel landing should be supported by a landing in southern France, and that a U.S. officer should be in command of "Overlord." It was also

decided that a new Southeast Asia theatre of war should be organized, under British command.

The Allies' invasion of Italy and the Italian volte-face, 1943

From Sicily, the Allies had a wide choice of directions for their next offensive. Calabria, the "toe" of Italy, was the nearest and most obvious possible destination, and the "shin" was also vulnerable; and the "heel" was also very attractive. The two army corps of Montgomery's 8th Army crossed the Strait of Messina and landed on the "toe" of Italy on September 3, 1943; but, though the initial resistance was practically negligible, they made only very slow progress, as the terrain, with only two good roads running up the coasts of the great Calabrian "toe" prevented the deployment of large forces. On the day of the landing, however, the Italian government at last agreed to the Allies' secret terms for a capitulation. It was understood that Italy would be treated with leniency in direct proportion to the part that it would take, as soon as possible, in the war against Germany. The capitulation was announced on September 8.

The landing on the "shin" of Italy, at Salerno, just south of Naples, was begun on September 9, by the mixed U.S.-British 5th Army, under U.S. General Mark Clark. Transported by 700 ships, 55,000 men made the initial assault, and 115,000 more followed up. At first they were faced only by the German 16th Panzer Division; but Kesselring, though he had only eight weak divisions to defend all southern and

central Italy, had had time to plan since the fall of Mussolini and had been expecting a blow at the “shin.” His counterstroke made the success of the Salerno landing precarious for six days, and it was not until October 1 that the 5th Army entered Naples.

By contrast, the much smaller landing on the “heel” of Italy, which had been made on September 2 (the day preceding the invasion of the “toe”), took the Germans by surprise. Notwithstanding the paucity of its strength in men and in equipment, the expedition captured two good ports, Taranto and Brindisi, in a very short time; but it lacked the resources to advance promptly. Nearly a fortnight passed before another small force was landed at Bari, the next considerable port north of Brindisi, to push thence unopposed into Foggia.

It was the threat to their rear from the “heel” of Italy and from Foggia that had induced the Germans to fall back from their positions defending Naples against the 5th Army. When the Italian government, in pursuance of a Badoglio–Eisenhower agreement of September 29, declared war against Germany on October 13, 1943, Kesselring was already receiving reinforcements and consolidating the German hold on central and northern Italy. The 5th Army was checked temporarily on the Volturno River, only 20 miles north of Naples, then more lastingly on the Garigliano River, while the 8th Army, having made its way from Calabria up the Adriatic coast, was likewise held on the Sangro River. Autumn and midwinter passed without the Allies’ making any notable impression on the Germans’ Gustav Line, which ran for 100 miles from the mouth of the Garigliano through Cassino and over the Apennines to the mouth of the Sangro.

Ortona; World War II

The ruins of Ortona, Italy, after liberation from the German army by Canadian forces, December 1943.

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The western Allies and Stalin: Cairo and Tehrān, 1943

Relations between the western Allies and the U.S.S.R. were still delicate. Besides their inability to satisfy Soviet demands for convoys of supplies and for an early invasion of France, the

Americans and the British were embarrassed by the discrepancy between their political war aims and Stalin’s.

The longest-standing difference was about Poland. While Poles were still fighting on the Allies’ side and acknowledging the authority of General Władysław Sikorski’s London-based Polish government in exile, Stalin was trying to get the Allies to consent to the U.S.S.R.’s retention, after the war, of all the territory taken from Poland by virtue of the German–Soviet pacts of 1939. On January 16, 1943, the Soviet government announced that Poles from the border territories in dispute were being treated as Soviet citizens and drafted into the Red Army. On April 25, the Soviet government severed relations with the London Poles, and Moscow subsequently began to build up its own puppet government for postwar Poland.

Besides the quarrel over Poland, the western Allies and the U.S.S.R. were also at variance with regard to the postwar fate of other European states still under German domination; but the Americans and the

British were really more interested in maintaining the Soviet war effort against Germany than in insisting, at the risk of offense to Stalin, on the detailed application of their own loudly but vaguely enunciated war aims.

Sextant, the conference of November 22–27, 1943, for which Churchill, Roosevelt, and Chiang Kai-shek met in Cairo, was, on Roosevelt's insistence, devoted mainly to discussing plans for a British–U.S.–Chinese operation in northern Burma. Little was produced by Sextant except the Cairo Declaration, published on December 1, a further statement of war aims. It prescribed inter alia that Japan was to surrender all Pacific islands acquired since 1914, to retrocede Manchuria, Formosa, and the Pescadores to China, and to give up all other territory “taken by violence and greed”; and, in addition, it was stipulated that Korea was in due course to become independent.

From Cairo, Roosevelt and Churchill went to Tehrān, to meet Stalin at the Eureka conference of November 28–December 1. Stalin renewed the Soviet promise of military intervention against Japan, but he primarily wanted an assurance that “Overlord” (the invasion of France) would indeed take place in 1944. Reassured about this by Roosevelt, he declared that the Red Army would attack simultaneously on the Eastern Front. On the political plane, Stalin now demanded the Baltic coast of East Prussia for the U.S.S.R. as well as the territories annexed in 1939–40. The main communique of the conference was accompanied by a joint declaration guaranteeing the postwar restoration of Iran. Returning to Cairo, Roosevelt and Churchill spent six more days, December 2–7, in staff talks to compose their differences on strategy. They finally agreed that “Overlord” (with Eisenhower in command) should have first claim on resources.

**Joseph Stalin, Franklin D. Roosevelt,
and Winston Churchill**

(Left to right) Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill at the Tehrān Conference, December 1943.

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German strategy, from 1943

From late 1942 German strategy, every feature of which was determined by Hitler, was solely aimed at protecting the still very large area under German control—most of Europe and part of North Africa—against a future Soviet onslaught on the Eastern Front and against future Anglo-U.S. offensives on the southern and western fronts. The Germans' vague hopes that the Allies would shrink from such costly tasks or that the “unnatural” coalition of

Western capitalism and Soviet Communism would break up before achieving victory were disappointed, so Hitler, in accordance with his dictum that “Germany shall either be a world power or not be at all,” consciously resolved to preside over the downfall of the German nation. He gave inflexible orders whereby whole armies were made to stand their ground in tactically hopeless positions and were forbidden to surrender under any circumstances. The initial success of this strategy in preventing a German rout during the Soviet winter counteroffensive of 1941–42 had blinded Hitler to its impracticability in the very different military circumstances on the Eastern Front by 1943, by which time the Germans simply lacked sufficient numbers of troops to defend an extremely long front against

much more numerous Soviet forces. (By December 1943 the 3,000,000 German troops there were opposed by about 5,500,000 Soviet troops.)

The strategy of keeping his armies stationary was made easier for Hitler by the complete ascendancy he had achieved over his generals, who disputed with Hitler only at the risk of losing their commands or worse. Frequent changes were made in the command of the various army groups and armies, with the result that during 1943–44 most of the talented commanders who had been associated with Germany's past successes were removed, and everyone who was suspected of a critical attitude at headquarters was silenced.

From late 1943 on, Hitler's strategy, which from a political standpoint remains inexplicable to most Western historians, was to strengthen the German forces in western Europe at the expense of those on the Eastern Front. In view of the danger of the great Anglo-U.S. invasion of western Europe that seemed imminent by early 1944, the loss of some part of his eastern conquests evidently seemed to Hitler to be less serious. Hitler continued to insist on the primacy of the war in the west after the start of the Allied invasion of northern France in June 1944, and while his armies made strenuous efforts to contain the Allied bridgehead in Normandy for the next two months, Hitler accepted the annihilation of the German Army Group Centre on the Eastern Front by the Soviet summer offensive (from June 1944), which brought the Red Army in a few weeks' time to the Vistula River and the borders of East Prussia. But the Western Front likewise crumbled in a few weeks, whereupon the Allies advanced to Germany's western borders. Then, still adhering to his guiding principle, Hitler assembled on the Western Front all that was left of his forces there and tried to drive the British and Americans back in what became known as the Battle of the Bulge. This campaign had some successes but meant that Germany's last battleworthy units were used on the Western Front while the Red Army, heavily outnumbering the remaining German troops in the east, resumed its drive on the eastern frontiers of Germany and reached the Oder River by the end of January 1945.

The Eastern Front, October 1943–April 1944

By the end of the first week of October 1943, the Red Army had established several bridgeheads on the right bank of the Dnieper River. Then, while General N.F. Vatutin's drive against Kiev was engaging the Germans' attention, General Ivan Stepanovich Konev suddenly pushed so far forward from the Kremenchug bridgehead (more than halfway downstream between Kiev and Dnepropetrovsk) that the German forces within the great bend of the Dnieper to the south would have been isolated if Manstein had not stemmed the Soviet advance just in time to extricate them. By early November the Red Army had reached the mouth of the Dnieper also, and the Germans in Crimea were isolated. Kiev, too, fell to Vatutin on November 6, and Zhitomir, 80 miles to the west, and Korosten, north of Zhitomir, fell in the next 12 days. Farther north, however, the Germans, who had already fallen back from Smolensk to a line covering the upper Dnieper, repelled with little difficulty five rather predictable Soviet thrusts toward Minsk in the last quarter of 1943.

Vatutin's forces from the Zhitomir–Korosten sector advanced westward across the prewar Polish frontier on January 4, 1944, and, though another German flank attack, by troops drawn from adjacent fronts, slowed them down, they had reached Lutsk, 100 miles farther west, a month later. Vatutin's left wing, meanwhile, wheeled southward to converge with Konev's right, so that 10 German divisions were encircled near Korsun, on the Dnieper line south of Kiev. Vainly trying to save those 10 divisions, the Germans had to abandon Nikopol, in the Dnieper bend far to the south, with its valuable manganese mines.

March 1944 saw a triple thrust by the Red Army: Zhukov, succeeding to Vatutin's command, drove southwest toward Tarnopol, to outflank the Germans on the upper stretches of the southern Bug River. General Rodion Yakovlevich Malinovsky, in the south, advanced across the mouth of the latter river from that of the Dnieper; and between them Konev, striking over the central stretch of the Bug, reached the Dniester, 70 miles ahead, and succeeded in crossing it. When Zhukov had crossed the upper Prut River and Konev was threatening Iași on the Moldavian stretch of the river, the Carpathian Mountains were the only natural barrier remaining between the Red Army and the Hungarian Plain. German troops occupied Hungary on March 20, since Hitler suspected that the Hungarian regent, Admiral Miklós Horthy, might not resist the Red Army to the utmost.

A German counterstroke from the Lwów area of southern Poland against Zhukov's extended flank early in April not only put an end to the latter's overhasty pressure on the Tatar (Yablonitsky) Pass through the Carpathians but also made possible the withdrawal of some of the German forces endangered by the Red Army's March operation. Konev, too, was halted in front of Iași; but his left swung southward down the Dniester to converge with Malinovsky's drive on Odessa. That great port fell to the Red Army on April 10. On May 9 the Germans in Crimea abandoned Sevastopol, caught as they were between Soviet pincers from the mainland north of the isthmus and from the east across the Strait of Kerch.

At the northern end of the Eastern Front, a Soviet offensive in January 1944 had been followed by an orderly German retreat from the fringes of the long-besieged Leningrad area to a shorter line exploiting the great lakes farther to the south. The retreat was beneficial to the Germans but sacrificed their land link with the Finns, who now found themselves no better off than they had been in 1939–40. Finland in February 1944 sought an armistice from the U.S.S.R., but the latter's terms proved unacceptable.

The war in the Pacific, October 1943–August 1944

Considering that it might be necessary for them to invade Japan proper, the Allies drew up new plans in mid-1943. The main offensive, it was decided, should be from the south and from the southeast, through the Philippines and through Micronesia (rather than from the Aleutians in the North Pacific or from the Asian mainland). While occupation of the Philippines would disrupt Japanese communications with the East Indian isles west of New Guinea and with Malaya, the conquest of Micronesia, from the Gilberts by way of the Marshalls and Carolines to the Marianas, would not only

offer the possibility of drawing the Japanese into a naval showdown but also win bases for heavy air raids on the Japanese mainland prior to invasion.

For the approach to the Philippines, it was prerequisite, on the one hand, to complete the encirclement of Rabaul, thereby nullifying the threat from the Japanese positions in the Solomon Islands and in the Bismarck Archipelago (New Britain, New Ireland, etc.) and, on the other, to reduce the Japanese hold on western New Guinea. Great emphasis, however, was put on the advance across the central Pacific through Micronesia, to be begun via the Gilberts.

The encirclement of Rabaul

Allied moves to isolate the large Japanese garrison on Rabaul proceeded by land and air. The encirclement of Rabaul by land began during October and November 1943 with the capture by New Zealand troops of the Treasury Islands in the Solomons and was accompanied on November 1 by a U.S. landing at Empress Augusta Bay on the west of Bougainville. U.S. reinforcements subsequently repulsed Japanese counterattacks in December, when they sank two destroyers, and in March 1944, when they killed almost 6,000 men. What remained of the Japanese garrison on Bougainville was no longer capable of fighting, though it did not surrender until the end of the war.



Continuing the approach to Rabaul, U.S. troops landed on December 15 at Arawe on the southwestern coast of New Britain, thereby distracting Japanese attention from Cape Gloucester, on the northwestern coast, where a major landing was made on December 26. By January 16, 1944, the airstrip at Cape Gloucester had been captured and defense lines set up. Talasea, halfway to Rabaul, fell in March 1944. The conquest of western New Britain secured Allied control of the Vitiaz and Dampier straits between that island and New Guinea.

By constructing air bases on each island that they captured, the Allies systematically blocked any westward movement that the Japanese might have made: New Zealand troops took the Green Islands southeast of New Guinea on February 15; and U.S. forces invaded Los Negros in the Admiralty Islands on February 29 and captured Manus on March 9.

With the fall of the Emirau Islands on March 20, the Allies' stranglehold on Rabaul and Kavieng was practically complete, so that they could thenceforth disregard the 100,000 Japanese immobilized there.

Western New Guinea

Before they could push northward to the Philippines, the Allies had to subdue Japanese-held western New Guinea. U.S. troops took Saidor, on the Huon Peninsula, on January 2, 1944, and established an air base there; and the Australians took Sio, to the east of Saidor, on January 16. Then reinforcements were

landed at Mindiri, west of Saidor, on March 5, and Australian infantry began to move westward up the coast, to take Bogadjim, Madang, and Alexishafen.

Bypassing Hansa Bay (which was eventually captured on June 15) and Wewak, whither the Japanese had retreated, the Allies, on April 22, 1944, made two simultaneous landings at Hollandia: having in the past weeks already destroyed 300 Japanese planes, they captured the airfields there in four days' time. In the following months Hollandia was converted into a major base and command post for the Southwest Pacific area. The Allies also took Aitape, on the coast east of Hollandia, and held it against counterattacks by more than 200,000 Wewak-based Japanese during July and August. Biak, the isle guarding the entrance to Geelvink Bay, west of Hollandia, was invaded by U.S. troops on May 27, 1944; but the Japanese defense of it was maintained until early August. Though westernmost New Guinea fell likewise to the Allies in August 1944, the Japanese garrison at Wewak held out until May 10, 1945.

The central Pacific

U.S. troops advancing on Tarawa, Gilbert Islands, in 1943

U.S. troops advancing on Tarawa, Gilbert Islands, in 1943, during World War II.

U.S. Dept. of Defense

Aftermath of the bloody invasion of Tarawa by U.S. Marines, November 1943.

U.S. Department of Defense

Marshall Islands; World War II

U.S. Marines on the beach of Namur Islet, Kwajalein Atoll, the first of the Marshall Islands to be taken from Japan in January–February 1944.

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U.S. Marines taking a Japanese prisoner in the Marshall Islands.

U.S. Department of Defense

Though the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff envisaged no major offensive westward across the Pacific toward Formosa until mid-1944, they nevertheless decided to launch a limited offensive in the central Pacific in 1943, hoping thereby both to speed the pace of the war and to draw the Japanese away from other areas. Accordingly, Nimitz' central Pacific forces invaded the Gilberts on November 23, 1943. Makin fell easily, but well-fortified Japanese defenses on Tarawa cost the U.S. Marines 1,000 killed and 2,300 wounded. Japanese losses in the Gilberts totaled about 8,500 men.

Having been forced to cede the Gilberts, the Japanese elected next to defend the Marshalls, in order both to absorb Allied forces and to strain the latters' extended lines of supply. Nimitz subjected Kwajalein Atoll, which he chose first to attack, to so heavy a preliminary bombardment that the U.S. infantry could land on it on January 31, 1944; and U.S. forces moved on to Enewetak on February 17.

In support of the landings on the Marshalls, the U.S. fleet on February 17, 1944, started a series of day and night attacks against the Japanese base at Truk in the Caroline Islands, where they

destroyed some 300 aircraft and 200,000 tons of merchant shipping. Henceforth, the Allies could confidently ignore Truk and bypass it.

U.S. Marines coming ashore under Japanese fire on Saipan, Mariana Islands, 1944.

The Allies' next objective, for which they required more than 500 ships and 125,000 troops, was to reduce the Mariana Islands, lying

U.S. Department of Defense

U.S. Marines advancing against
Japanese positions on Saipan, Mariana
Islands, 1944.

U.S. Department of Defense

1,000 miles from Enewetak and 3,500 miles from Pearl Harbor. Against this threat, after the destruction at Truk, the Japanese hastily drew up a new defense plan, "Operation A," relying on their remaining 1,055 land-based aircraft in the Marianas, in the Carolines, and in western New Guinea and on timely and decisive intervention by a sea force, which should include nine aircraft carriers with 450 aircraft. But in the spring of 1944 the Japanese air

strength was still further depleted, and, moreover, on March 31 the sponsor of the plan, Admiral Koga Mineichi (Yamamoto's successor), and his staff were killed in an air disaster. When, on June 15, two U.S. Marine divisions went ashore on Saipan Island in the Marianas, the 30,000 Japanese defenders put up so fierce a resistance that an army division was needed to reinforce the Marines. Using the same defensive tactics as on other small islands, the Japanese had fortified themselves in underground caves and bunkers that afforded protection from American artillery and naval bombardment. Notwithstanding this, the Japanese defenders were gradually compressed into smaller and smaller pockets, and they themselves ended most organized resistance with a suicidal counterattack on July 7, the largest of its kind during the war.

The loss of Saipan was such a disaster for Japan that when the news was announced in Tokyo the prime minister, Tōjō Hideki, and his entire Cabinet resigned. To realists in the Japanese high command, the loss of the Marianas spelled the ultimate loss of the war, but no one dared say so. Tōjō's Cabinet was succeeded by that of General Koiso Kuniaki, which was pledged to carrying on the fight with renewed vigour.

Air power enthusiasts have called the conquest of Saipan "the turning point of the war in the Pacific," for it enabled the United States to establish air bases there for the big B-29 bombers, which had been developed for the specific purpose of bombing Japan. The first flight of 100 B-29s took off from Saipan on November 24, 1944, and bombed Tokyo, the first bombing raid on the Japanese capital since 1942.

While the Japanese were still resisting on Saipan, the Japanese Combined Fleet, under Admiral Ozawa Jisaburō, was approaching from Philippine and East Indian anchorages, in accordance with "Operation A," to challenge the U.S. 5th Fleet, under Admiral Raymond Spruance. Ozawa, with only nine aircraft carriers against 15 for the United States, was obviously inferior in naval power, but he counted heavily on help from land-based aircraft on Guam, Rota, and Yap. The encounter, which took place west of the Marianas and is known as the Battle of the Philippine Sea, has been called the greatest carrier battle of the war. It began on June 19 when Ozawa sent 430 planes in four waves against Spruance's ships. The result was a disaster for the Japanese. U.S. airmen shot down more than 300 planes and sank two carriers, and as the Japanese fleet retreated northward toward Okinawa it lost another carrier and almost 100 more planes. The United States lost about 130 planes. The hasty and incomplete training of the Japanese pilots and the inadequate armour plating of their planes were decisive factors in the numerous aerial combats of this battle, which was ultimately of more strategic importance than the fall of Saipan. Nimitz' forces could thereafter occupy other major islands in the Marianas: Guam on July 21

and Tinian on July 24. The Marianas cost the Japanese 46,000 killed or captured, the Americans only 4,750 killed.

The Burmese frontier and China, November 1943–summer 1944

For the dry season of 1943–44 both the Japanese and the Allies were resolved on offensives in Southeast Asia. On the Japanese side, Lieutenant General Kawabe Masakazu planned a major Japanese advance across the Chindwin River, on the central front, in order to occupy the plain of Imphāl and to establish a firm defensive line in eastern Assam. The Allies, for their part, planned a number of thrusts into Burma: Stilwell's NCAC forces, including his three Chinese divisions and "Merrill's Marauders" (U.S. troops trained by Wingate on Chindit lines), were to advance against Mogaung and Myitkyina; while Slim's 14th Army was to launch its XV Corps southeastward into Arakan and its IV Corps eastward to the Chindwin. Because the Japanese had habitually got the better of advanced British forces by outflanking them, Slim formulated a new tactic to ensure that his units would stand against attack in the forthcoming campaign, even if they should be isolated: they were to know that, when ordered to stand, they could certainly count both on supplies from the air and on his use of reserve troops to turn the situation against the Japanese attackers.

On the southern wing of the Burmese front, the XV Corps's Arakan operation, launched in November 1943, had achieved most of its objectives by the end of January 1944. When the Japanese counterattack surrounded one Indian division and part of another, Slim's new tactic was brought into play, and the Japanese found themselves crushed between the encircled Indians and the relieving forces.

The Japanese crossing of the Chindwin into Assam, on the central Burmese front, when the fighting in Arakan was dying down, played into Slim's hands, since he could now profit from the Allies' superiority in aircraft and in tanks. The Japanese were able to approach Imphāl and to surround Kohīma, but the British forces protecting these towns were reinforced with several Indian divisions that were taken from the now-secure Arakan front. With air support, Slim's reinforced forces now defended Imphāl against multiple Japanese thrusts and outflanking movements until, in mid-May 1944, he was able to launch two of his divisions into an offensive eastward, while still containing the last bold effort of the Japanese to capture Imphāl. By June 22 the 14th Army had averted the Japanese menace to Assam and won the initiative for its own advance into Burma. The Battle of Imphāl–Kohīma cost the British and Indian forces 17,587 casualties (12,600 of them sustained at Imphāl), the Japanese forces 30,500 dead (including 8,400 from disease) and 30,000 wounded.

On the northern Burmese front, Stilwell's forces were already approaching Mogaung and Myitkyina before the southern crisis of Imphāl–Kohīma; and the subsidiary Chindit operation against Indaw was going well ahead when, on March 24, 1944, Wingate himself was killed in an air crash. Meanwhile, Chiang Kai-shek was constrained by U.S. threats of a suspension of lend-lease to finally authorize some action by the 12 divisions of his Yunnan Army, which on May 12, 1944, with air support, began to cross the Salween River westward in the direction of Myitkyina, Bhamo, and Lashio. Myitkyina airfield was

taken by Stilwell's forces, with "Merrill's Marauders," on May 17, Mogaung was taken by the Chindits on June 26, and finally Myitkyina itself was taken by Stilwell's Chinese divisions on August 3. All of northwest and much of northern Burma was now in Allied hands.

In China proper, a Japanese attack toward Ch'ang-sha, begun on May 27, won control not only of a further stretch of the north-south axis of the Peking-Han-K'ou railroad but also of several of the airfields from which the Americans had been bombing the Japanese in China and were intending to bomb them in Japan.

The Italian front, 1944

The Allies' northward advance up the Italian peninsula to Rome was still blocked by Kesselring's Gustav Line, which was hinged on Monte Cassino. To bypass that line, the Allies landed some 50,000 seaborne troops, with 5,000 vehicles, at Anzio, only 33 miles south of Rome, on January 22, 1944. The landing surprised the Germans and met, at first, with very little opposition; but, instead of driving on over the Alban Hills to Rome at once, the force at Anzio spent so much time consolidating its position there that Kesselring was able, with his reserves, to develop a powerful counteroffensive against it on February 3. The beachhead was thereby reduced to a very shallow dimension, while the defenses at Monte Cassino held out unimpaired against a new assault by Clark's 5th Army.

For a final effort against the Gustav Line, Alexander decided to shift most of the 8th Army, now commanded by Major General Sir Oliver Leese, from the Adriatic flank of the peninsula to the west, where it was to strengthen the 5th Army's pressure around Monte Cassino and on the approaches to the valley of the Liri (headstream of the Garigliano). The combined attack, which was started in the night of May 11-12, 1944, succeeded in breaching the German defenses at a number of points between Cassino and the coast. Thanks to this victory, the Americans could push forward up the coast, while the British entered the valley and outflanked Monte Cassino, which fell to a Polish corps of the 8th Army on May 18. Five days later, the Allies' force at Anzio struck out against the investing Germans (whose strength had been diminished in order to reinforce the Gustav Line); and by May 26 it had achieved a breakthrough. When the 8th Army's Canadian Corps penetrated the last German defenses in the Liri Valley, the whole Gustav Line began to collapse.

Concentrating all available strength on his left wing, Alexander pressed up from the south to effect a junction with the troops thrusting northward from Anzio. The Germans in the Alban Hills could not withstand the massive attack. On June 5, 1944, the Allies entered Rome. The propaganda value of their occupying the Eternal City, Mussolini's former capital, was offset, however, by an unforeseen strategical reality: Kesselring's forces retreated not in the expected rout but gradually, to the line of the Arno River; Florence, 160 miles north of Rome, did not fall to the Allies until August 13; and by that time the Germans had made ready yet another chain of defenses, the Gothic Line, running from the Tyrrhenian coast midway between Pisa and La Spezia, over the Apennines in a reversed S curve, to the Adriatic coast between Pesaro and Rimini.

Livorno; World War II; Nisei

U.S. soldiers, members of a Nisei unit attached to the U.S. Fifth Army, passing through liberated Livorno (Leghorn), Italy, July 1944.

Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

Alexander might have made more headway against Kesselring's new front if some of his forces had not been subtracted, in August 1944, for the American-sponsored but eventually unnecessary invasion of southern France ("Operation Anvil," finally renamed "Dragoon" [see below]). As it was, the 8th Army, switched back from the west to the Adriatic coast, achieved only an indecisive breakthrough toward Rimini. After this September offensive, the

autumn rains set in, to make even more difficult Alexander's indirect movements, against Kesselring's resolute opposition, toward the mouth of the Po River.

Developments from summer 1944 to autumn 1945

The Allied invasions of western Europe, June–November 1944

Normandy Invasion

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Rommel, Erwin

Erwin Rommel inspecting western German defenses, early 1944.

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

The German Army high command had long been expecting an Allied invasion of northern France but had no means of knowing where precisely the stroke would come: while Rundstedt, commander in chief in the west, thought that the landings would be made between Calais and Dieppe (at the narrowest width of the Channel between England and France), Hitler prophetically indicated the central and more westerly stretches of the coast of Normandy as the site of the attack; and Rommel, who was in

charge of the forces on France's Channel coast, finally came around to Hitler's opinion. The fortifications of those stretches were consequently improved, but Rundstedt and Rommel still took different views about the way in which the invasion should be met: while Rundstedt recommended a massive counterattack on the invaders after their landing, Rommel, fearing that Allied air supremacy might interfere fatally with the adequate massing of the German forces for such a counterattack, advocated instead immediate action on the beaches against any attempted landing. The Germans had 59 divisions spread over western Europe from the Low Countries to the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts of France; but approximately half of this number was static, and the remainder included only 10 armoured or motorized divisions.

Postponed from May, the western Allies' "Operation Overlord," their long-debated invasion of northern France, took place on June 6, 1944—the war's most celebrated D-Day—when 156,000 men were landed on the beaches of Normandy between the Orne estuary and the southeastern end of the Cotentin Peninsula: 83,000 British and Canadian troops on the eastern beaches, 73,000 Americans on the western. Under Eisenhower's supreme direction and Montgomery's immediate command, the invading forces initially comprised the Canadian 1st Army (Lieutenant General Henry Duncan Graham Crerar); the British 2nd Army (Lieutenant General Sir Miles Dempsey); and the British 1st and 6th airborne divisions, the U.S. 1st Army, and the U.S. 82nd and 101st airborne divisions (all under Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley).

By 9:00 AM on D-Day the coastal defenses were generally breached, but Caen, which had been scheduled to fall on D-Day and was the hinge of an Allied advance, held out until July 9, the one panzer division already available there on June 6 having been joined the next day by a second. Though the heavy fighting at Caen attracted most of the German reserves, the U.S. forces in the westernmost sector of the front likewise met a very stubborn resistance. But when they had taken the port of Cherbourg on June 26 and proceeded to clear the rest of the Cotentin, they could turn southward to take Saint-Lô on July 18.

D-Day; Sherman tank

Sherman tanks coming ashore at Juno Beach in Normandy, France, on D-Day, June 6, 1944.

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The Allies could not have made such rapid progress in northern France if their air forces had not been able to interfere decisively with the movement of the German reserves. Allied aircraft destroyed most of the bridges over the Seine River to the east and over the Loire to the south. The German reserves thus had to make long detours in order to reach the Normandy battle zone and were

so constantly harassed on the march by Allied strafing that they suffered endless delays and only arrived in dribbles. And even where reserves could have been brought up, their movement was sometimes inhibited by hesitation and dissension on the Germans' own side. Hitler, though he had rightly predicted the zone of the Allies' landings, came to mistakenly believe, after D-Day, that a second and larger invasion was to be attempted east of the Seine and so was reluctant to allow reserves to be moved westward over that river. He also forbade the German forces already engaged in Normandy to retreat in time to make an orderly withdrawal to new defenses.

Rundstedt, meanwhile, was slow in obtaining Hitler's authority for the movement of the general reserve's SS panzer corps from its position north of Paris to the front; and Rommel, though he made prompt use of the forces at hand, had been absent from his headquarters on D-Day itself, when a forecast of rough weather had seemed to make a cross-Channel invasion unlikely. Subsequently, Rundstedt's urgent plea for permission to retreat provoked Hitler, on July 3, to appoint Günther von Kluge as commander in chief in the west in Rundstedt's place; and Rommel was badly hurt on July 17, when his car crashed under attack from Allied planes.

There was something else, besides the progress of the Allies, to demoralize the German commanders—the failure and the aftermath of a conspiracy against Hitler. Alarmed at the calamitous course of events and disgusted by the crimes of the Nazi regime, certain conservative but anti-Nazi civilian dignitaries and military officers had formed themselves into a secret opposition, with Karl Friedrich Goerdeler (a former chief mayor of Leipzig) and Colonel General Ludwig Beck (a former chief of the army general staff) among its leaders. From 1943 this opposition canvassed the indispensable support of the active military authorities with some notable success: General Friedrich Olbricht (chief of the General Army Office) and several of the serving commanders, including Rommel and Kluge, became implicated to various extents. Apart from General Henning von Tresckow, however, the group's most dynamic member was Colonel Graf Claus von Stauffenberg, who as chief of staff to the chief of the army reserve from July 1, 1944, had access to Hitler. Finally, it was decided to kill Hitler and to use the army reserve for

a coup d'état in Berlin, where a new regime under Beck and Goerdeler should be set up. On July 20, therefore, Stauffenberg left a bomb concealed in a briefcase in the room where Hitler was conferring at his headquarters in East Prussia. The bomb duly exploded; but Hitler survived, and the coup in Berlin miscarried. The Nazi reaction was savage: besides 200 immediately implicated conspirators, 5,000 people who were more remotely linked with the plot or were altogether unconnected with it were put to death. Kluge committed suicide on August 17, Rommel on October 14. Fear permeated and paralyzed the German high command in the weeks that followed.

Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini after the July Plot failed

Adolf Hitler (right) and Benito Mussolini (left) at the damaged Wolfsschanze (Wolf's Lair) field headquarters in Rastenburg, East Prussia, after an assassination attempt on Hitler, July 1944.

Pictorial Press Ltd./Alamy

On July 31, 1944, the Americans on the Allies' right, newly supported by the landing of the U.S. 3rd Army under Patton, broke through the German defenses at Avranches, the gateway from Normandy into Brittany. On August 7 a desperate counterattack by four panzer divisions from Mortain, east of Avranches, failed to seal the breach, and American tanks poured southward through the gap and flooded the open country beyond. Though some of the U.S. forces were then swung southwestward in the hope of seizing the Breton ports in pursuance of the original prescription of

"Overlord" and though some went on in more southerly directions toward the crossings of the Loire, others were wheeled eastward—to trap, in the Falaise "pocket," a large part of the German forces retreating southward from the pressure of the Allies' left at Caen. The Americans' wide eastward flanking maneuver after the breakout speedily produced a general collapse of the German position in northern France.

Caen during the Normandy Invasion

The town of Caen, France, after being taken by Allied forces, July 17, 1944.

AP Images

Meanwhile, more and more Allied troops were being landed in Normandy. On August 1, two army groups were constituted: the 21st (comprising the British and Canadian armies) under Montgomery; and the 12th (for the Americans) under Bradley. By the middle of August an eastward wheel wider than that which

had cut off the Falaise pocket had brought the Americans to Argentan, southeast of Falaise and level with the British and Canadian advance on the left (north) of the Allies' front, so that a concerted drive eastward could now be launched; and on August 19 a U.S. division successfully crossed the Seine at Mantes-Gassicourt. Already on August 17 the Americans on the Loire had taken Orléans. The clandestine French Resistance in Paris rose against the Germans on August 19; and a French division under General Jacques Leclerc, pressing forward from Normandy, received the surrender of the German forces there and liberated the city on August 25.

The German forces would have had ample time to pull back to the Seine River and to form a strong defensive barrier line there had it not been for Hitler's stubbornly stupid orders that there should be no withdrawal. It was his folly that enabled the Allies to liberate France so quickly. The bulk of the German armoured forces and many infantry divisions were thrown into the Normandy battle and kept there by Hitler's "no withdrawal" orders until they collapsed and a large part of them were trapped. The

fragments were incapable of further resistance, and their retreat (which was largely on foot) was soon outstripped by the British and American mechanized columns. More than 200,000 German troops were taken prisoner in France, and 1,200 German tanks had been destroyed in the fighting. When the Allies approached the German border at the beginning of September, after a sweeping drive from Normandy, there was no organized resistance to stop them from driving on into the heart of Germany.

World War II: paratroopers

U.S. paratroopers landing in southern France, 1944.

U.S. Air Force photograph

Strasbourg; World War II

A U.S. light tank passing through Strasbourg, France, after the city's liberation in November 1944.

Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

Meanwhile, “Operation Dragoon” (formerly “Anvil”) was launched on August 15, 1944, when the U.S. 7th Army and the French 1st Army landed on the French Riviera, where there were only four German divisions to oppose them. While the Americans drove first into the Alps to take Grenoble, the French took Marseille on August 23 and then advanced eastward through France up the Rhône Valley, to be rejoined by the Americans north of Lyon early in September. Both armies then moved swiftly northeastward into Alsace.

In the north, however, some discord had arisen among the Allied commanders after the crossing of the Seine. Whereas Montgomery wanted to concentrate on a single thrust northeastward through Belgium into the heavily industrialized Ruhr Valley (an area vital to Germany’s war effort), the U.S. generals argued for continuing to advance eastward through France on a broad front, in accordance with the pre-invasion plan. Eisenhower, by way of compromise, decided on August 23 that Montgomery’s drive into Belgium should have the prior claim on resources until Antwerp should have been captured but that thereafter the pre-invasion plan should be resumed.

Consequently, Montgomery’s 2nd Army began its advance on August 29, entered Brussels on September 3, took Antwerp, with its docks intact, on September 4, and went on, three days later, to force its way across the Albert Canal. The U.S. 1st Army, meanwhile, supporting Montgomery on the right, had taken Namur on the day of the capture of Antwerp and was nearing Aachen. Far to the south, however, Patton’s U.S. 3rd Army, having raced forward to take Verdun on August 31, was already beginning to cross the Moselle River near Metz on September 5, with the obvious possibility of achieving a breakthrough into Germany’s economically important Saarland. Eisenhower, therefore, could no longer devote a preponderance of supplies to Montgomery at Patton’s expense.

Montgomery nevertheless attempted a thrust to cross the Rhine River at Arnhem, the British 1st Airborne Division being dropped ahead there to clear the way for the 2nd Army; but the Germans were just able to check the thrust, thus isolating the parachutists, many of whom were taken prisoner. By this time, indeed, the German defense was rapidly stiffening as the Allies approached the German frontiers: the U.S. 1st Army spent a month grinding down the defenses of Aachen, which fell at last on October 20 (the first city of prewar Germany to be captured by the western Allies); and the 1st Canadian Army, on the left of the British 2nd, did not clear the Schelde estuary west of Antwerp, including Walcheren Island, until early November. Likewise, Patton’s 3rd Army was held up before Metz.

The Allies' amazing advance of 350 miles in a few weeks was thus brought to a halt. In early September the U.S. and British forces had had a combined superiority of 20 to 1 in tanks and 25 to 1 in aircraft over the Germans, but by November 1944 the Germans still held both the Ruhr Valley and the Saarland, after having been so near collapse in the west in early September that one or the other of those prizes could have easily been taken by the Allies. The root of the Allied armies' sluggishness in September was that none of their top planners had foreseen such a complete collapse of the Germans as occurred in August 1944. They were therefore not prepared, mentally or materially, to exploit it by a rapid offensive into Germany itself. The Germans thus obtained time to build up their defending forces in the west, with serious consequences both for occupied Europe and the postwar political situation of the Continent.

The Eastern Front, June–December 1944

After a successful offensive against the Finns on the Karelian Isthmus had culminated in the capture of Viipuri (Vyborg) on June 20, 1944, the Red Army on June 23 began a major onslaught on the Germans' front in Belorussia. The attackers' right wing took the bastion town of Vitebsk (Vitebskaya) and then wheeled southward across the highway from Orsha to Minsk; their left wing, under General Konstantin Konstantinovich Rokossovsky, broke through just north of the Pripet Marshes and then drove forward for 150 miles in a week, severing the highway farther to the west, between Minsk and Warsaw. Minsk itself fell to the Red Army on July 3; and, though the Germans extricated a large part of their forces from the Soviet enveloping movement, the Soviet tanks raced ahead, bypassing any attempts to block their path, and were deep into Lithuania and northeastern Poland by mid-July. Then the Soviet forces south of the Pripet Marshes struck too, capturing Lwów and pushing across the San River. This increase of pressure on the Germans enabled Rokossovsky's mobile columns to thrust still farther westward: they reached the Vistula River, and one of them, on July 31, even penetrated the suburbs of Warsaw. The Polish underground in Warsaw thereupon rose in revolt against the Germans and briefly gained control of the city. But three SS armoured divisions arrived to suppress the revolt in Warsaw, and the Soviet Red Army stood idly by across the Vistula while the Germans crushed the insurrection. Although the Soviet halt outside Warsaw was a purposeful move, it is true that the unprecedented length and speed of the Red Army's advance—450 miles in five weeks—had overstrained the Soviet communications. The halt on the Vistula was to last six months.

On August 20, however, two Soviet thrusts were launched in another direction—against the German salient in Bessarabia. A new government came to power in Romania on August 23 and not only suspended hostilities against the U.S.S.R. but also, on August 25, declared war against Germany. This long-premeditated volte-face opened the way for three great wheeling movements by the Red Army's left wing through the vast spaces of southeastern and central Europe: southwestward across Bulgaria, where they met no opposition; westward up the Danube Valley and over the Yugoslav frontier; and northwestward through the Carpathians into Transylvania. The Germans could only try to hold the threatened centres of communication long enough for the withdrawal of their forces from Greece and from southern Yugoslavia. Belgrade fell to a concerted action by the Red Army and Tito's Partisan

forces on October 20, 1944; and a rapid drive from the Transylvanian sector into the Hungarian Plain brought Soviet forces up to the suburbs of Budapest on November 4. Budapest, however, was stubbornly defended: by the end of the year, it was enveloped but still holding out.

At the northern end of the Eastern Front, Finland had capitulated early in September, and the following weeks saw a series of scythelike strokes by the Red Army against the German forces remaining in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. By mid-October the remnants of those forces were cornered in Courland, but the subsequent Soviet attempt to break through from Lithuania into East Prussia was repelled.

Air warfare, 1944

The Allies' strategic air offensive against Germany began to attain its maximum effectiveness in the opening months of 1944. Both the U.S. air forces concerned, namely, the 8th in England and the 15th in Italy, were increased in numbers and improved in technical proficiency. By the end of 1943 the 8th Bomber Command alone could mount attacks of 700 planes, and early in 1944 regular 1,000-bomber attacks became possible. Even more important was the arrival in Europe of effective long-range fighters, chief of which, the P-51 Mustang, was capable of operating at maximum bomber range. The U.S. fighters could now get the better of the Luftwaffe in the air over Germany, so that whereas 9.1 percent of bombers going out had been lost and 45.6 percent damaged in October 1943, the corresponding figures were only 3.5 percent and 29.9 percent in February 1944, though in that very month a massive and very difficult attack at extreme range had been made on the German aircraft industry. Carl Spaatz, commanding general of the U.S. Strategic Air Forces in Europe, in May 1944 initiated an offensive against Germany's synthetic-oil production—an offensive that was to become more and more harmful to the German war effort after the loss of Romania's oil fields to the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, the Luftwaffe's resistance dwindled almost to nothing as its fighter plane production dropped and most of its remaining trained pilots died in aerial combat.

The RAF Bomber Command launched nearly 10,000 sorties in March 1944 and dropped some 27,500 tons of bombs, about 70 percent of this effort being concentrated on Germany; but in the following months its offensive was largely diverted to the intensive preparation and, later, to the support of the Allied landings in France. Nevertheless, it joined usefully in the U.S. offensive against German oil production, continued to play its part in the Battle of the Atlantic, and also assumed the task of bombing the launching ramps of the Germans' "V" missiles. By early 1945, the unending Allied bombing and strafing raids on bridges, roads, rail facilities, locomotives, and supply columns had paralyzed the German transportation system.

The "V" missiles, flying bombs and long-range rockets, were the new weapons on which Hitler had vainly been counting to reduce Great Britain to readiness for peace. His faith in them had indeed been a major motive for his insistence on holding the sites, in northernmost France, from which they were initially to be aimed at London. The V-1 missiles were first launched on June 13, 1944, mostly from sites in the Pas-de-Calais; the V-2 missiles were launched a few months later, on September 8, from sites in

the Netherlands (after the Allies' occupation of the Pas-de-Calais on their way to Belgium). The V-2 offensive was maintained until March 1945.

Wernher von Braun: V-2 missile

Wernher von Braun holding a model of the German V-2 missile that he helped to develop beginning in 1936.

MSFC/NASA

Allied policy and strategy: Octagon (Quebec II) and Moscow, 1944

The progress of the Soviet armies toward central and southeastern Europe made it all the more urgent for the western Allies to come to terms with Stalin about the fate of the “liberated” countries of eastern Europe. London had already proposed to Moscow in May 1944 that Romania and Bulgaria should be zones for Soviet military operation, Yugoslavia and Greece—whose royalist governments in exile were under British protection—for British; and Roosevelt had approved this proposition in June.

The Soviet Union had in February 1944 sent a military mission to Josip Tito's Communist Partisans in Yugoslavia (the Partisans had become the sole Yugoslavian recipients, since the Tehrān Conference, of western aid, though their royalist rivals, the Chetniks, were not publicly disavowed by Churchill until May 25). Along with this, a would-be government of Greece had been set up in March by the EAM (National Liberation Front), which was a Communist movement controlling a military organization, the ELAS (National Popular Liberation Army), in opposition to the EDES (Greek Democratic National Army), which was loyal to the British-backed government in exile. The Polish question, moreover, was still unresolved, and in July the Soviets established, at Lublin, a Committee of National Liberation independent of the London Poles. In Romania, despite the government's change of side in August, the Soviets proceeded to disband the Romanian Army; and early in September they declared war on Bulgaria, invaded that country, and sponsored a Communist revolution there.

With this background, Churchill and Roosevelt met again for their second Quebec Conference, code-named “Octagon,” which lasted from September 11 to 16. The most important decision made at the conference was that Roosevelt and Churchill together approved the European Advisory Commission's scheme for the division of defeated Germany into U.S., British, and Soviet zones of occupation (the southwest, the northwest, and the east, respectively) and also the radical plan elaborated by the U.S. secretary of the treasury, Henry Morgenthau, Jr., for turning Germany “into a country primarily agricultural and pastoral” without “war-making industries.” The Morgenthau Plan, however, was subsequently revoked.

The next conference of the Allies was held in Moscow October 9–20, 1944, between Churchill and Stalin, with U.S. ambassador W. Averell Harriman also present at most of their talks. Disagreement persisted over Poland. Stalin, however, consented readily to Churchill's provisional suggestion for zones of influence in southeastern Europe: the U.S.S.R. should be preponderant in Romania and in Bulgaria, the western powers in Greece, and western and Soviet influences should counterbalance one another evenly in Yugoslavia and in Hungary. The timing of the next western and Soviet offensives against

Germany was also agreed, and some accord was reached about the scale of the eventual Soviet participation in the war against Japan.

The Philippines and Borneo, from September 1944

On July 27–28, 1944, Roosevelt had approved MacArthur's argument that the next objective in the Pacific theatre of the war should be the Philippine Archipelago (which was comparatively near to the already conquered New Guinea). The initial steps toward the Philippines were taken almost simultaneously, in mid-September 1944: MacArthur's forces from New Guinea seized Morotai, the northeasternmost isle of the Moluccas, which was on the direct route to Mindanao, southernmost landmass of the Philippines; and Nimitz' fleet from the east landed troops in the Palau Islands.

Already by mid-September the Americans had discovered that the Japanese forces were unexpectedly weak not only on Mindanao but also on Leyte, the smaller island north of the Surigao Strait. With this knowledge they decided to bypass Mindanao and to begin their invasion of the Philippines on Leyte. On October 17–18, 1944, American forces seized offshore islets in Leyte Gulf, and on October 20 they landed four divisions on the east coast of Leyte.

The threat to Leyte was the signal for the Japanese to put into effect their recently formulated plan "Sho-Go" ("Operation Victory"), whereby the Allies' next attempts at invasion were to be countered by concerted air attacks. Though in the case of Leyte the Japanese Army and Navy air forces in the immediate theatre numbered only 212 planes, it was hoped that the dispatch of four carriers under Vice Admiral Ozawa, with 106 planes, southward from Japanese waters would lure the U.S. aircraft carriers away from Leyte Gulf and that the suicidal "kamikaze" tactics of the Japanese airmen would save the situation. (Kamikaze pilots deliberately crashed their bomb-armed planes into enemy ships.) At the same time, however, a Japanese naval force from Singapore was to sail to Brunei Bay and there split itself into two groups that would converge on Leyte Gulf from the north and from the southwest: the stronger group, under Vice Admiral Kurita Takeo, would enter the Pacific through the San Bernardino Strait between the Philippine islands of Samar and Luzon; the other, under Vice Admiral Nishimura Teiji, would pass through the Surigao Strait.

Kurita's fleet (five battleships, 12 cruisers, 15 destroyers) lost two of its heavy cruisers to U.S. submarine attack on October 23, when it was off Palawan; and one of the mightiest of Japan's battleships, the *Musashi*, was sunk by aerial attack the next day. On October 25, however, Kurita made his way unopposed through the San Bernardino Strait, since the commander of the U.S. 3rd Fleet, Admiral Halsey, had diverted his main strength toward the bait dangled by Ozawa farther to the north. Three groups of U.S. escort carriers, met by Kurita on his way toward Leyte Gulf, suffered heavy damage; but, meanwhile, Nishimura's fleet (two battleships, one heavy cruiser, four destroyers) had been detected on its way to the Surigao Strait and, on its entry into Leyte Gulf in the early hours of October 25, had been practically annihilated by the U.S. 7th Fleet. Kurita consequently turned back from his rendezvous in Leyte Gulf; and the Japanese defeat in the war's greatest naval confrontation was sealed by Ozawa's

losses to Halsey: all of his four carriers, together with a light cruiser and two destroyers. The Japanese Navy's "Sho-Go" as it transpired in the Battle of Leyte Gulf had not only failed to inflict serious damage on the Americans but had resulted in serious losses for the Japanese. These losses amounted to three battleships, one large aircraft carrier, three light carriers, six heavy cruisers, four light cruisers, and 11 destroyers, while the United States lost only one light carrier, two escort carriers, and three destroyers. The battle reduced the Japanese Navy to vestigial strength and cleared the way for the U.S. occupation of the Philippines.

Defeat in the gulf, however, did not prevent the Japanese from landing reinforcements on the west coast of Leyte. They put up so stubborn a resistance that the Americans themselves had to be reinforced before Ormoc fell on December 10, 1944; it was not before December 25 that the Americans could claim control of all Leyte—though there was still some mopping up to be done. Altogether, the defense of Leyte cost the Japanese some 75,000 combatants killed or taken prisoner.

From Leyte the Americans proceeded first, on December 15, to the invasion of Mindoro, the largest of the islands immediately south of Luzon. Kamikaze counterattacks made this conquest more costly; and they were to be continued after the Americans had surprised the Japanese by landing, on January 9, 1945, at Lingayen Gulf on the west coast of Luzon itself, the most important island of the Philippines. The local Japanese commander, Lieutenant General Yamashita Tomoyuki, with no hope of reinforcement, opted for tying the enemy forces down as long as possible by a static defense in three mountainous sectors—west, northwest, and east of the Central Plains behind Manila.

World War II: invasion of Mindoro, Philippines

Barrage rockets during the invasion of Mindoro, Philippines, in December 1944. Launched in salvoes from landing craft, rockets smothered Japanese beach defenses as U.S. forces began the amphibious assault.

UPI/Bettmann Newsphotos

Manila itself was also strongly defended by the Japanese. One U.S. corps, however, was approaching it from Lingayen over the Central Plains; a second corps was landed at Subic Bay, at the northern end of the Bataan Peninsula, on January 29, 1945, to make contact with the former corps at Dinalupihan a week later; and troops made an amphibious landing at Nasugbu, south of Manila Bay, on January 31. Manila was then invested, and during the siege the bay was cleared by the occupation of the southern tip of Bataan Peninsula on February 15 and by the reduction of Corregidor Island

in the following fortnight. On March 3 Manila fell at last to the Americans.

World War II: Allied forces recaptured Manila, Philippines

Manila, Philippines, in the aftermath of its recapture by Allied forces in early 1945.

U.S. Navy

The Japanese resistance on Luzon continued in the mountains, and east of Manila it went on until mid-June 1945. Mindanao, meanwhile, was likewise being reduced. A U.S. division landed at Zamboanga, on the southwestern peninsula, on March 10, 1945, and a corps began the occupation of the core of the island on April 17.

The last phase of the U.S. campaign in the Philippines coincided with the opening of the reconquest of Borneo from the Japanese, chiefly by Australian forces. Tarakan Island, off the northeast coast, was invaded on May 1; Brunei on the northwest coast was invaded on June 10; and Balikpapan, on the east coast far to the south of Tarakan, was attacked on July 1. The subsequent collapse of the Japanese defenses around Balikpapan deprived Japan of the oil supplies of southern Borneo.

Burma and China, October 1944–May 1945

Chiang Kai-shek's demand for the recall of the talented but abrasive Stilwell was satisfied in October 1944, and some reorganization of the Allies' commands in Southeast Asia followed. While Lieutenant General Daniel Sultan took Stilwell's place, Major General A.C. Wedemeyer became commander of U.S. forces in the China theatre and Sir Oliver Leese commander of the land forces under Mountbatten.

On the northern wing of the Burma front, a three-pronged drive by NCAC forces southward from Myitkyina to the Irrawaddy River had been planned by Stilwell. Launched under Sultan, the triple drive was at first only partially successful: the right took Indaw and Katha early in December and effected a junction with Slim's British 14th Army, and the centre reached Shwegu, across the river; but the left, though it took Bhamo, was checked 60 miles west of Wan-t'ing. Sultan thereupon decided to push farther southward, both on the right against Kyaukme, on the Burma Road northeast of Mandalay, and on the left against Wan-t'ing. Threatened with envelopment, the Japanese fell back from Wan-t'ing, which Sultan's troops promptly occupied. Convoys up the Burma Road from Wan-t'ing to K'un-ming were resumed on January 18, 1945.

For central Burma, meanwhile, Slim had thought, after his victory at Imphāl, that he must immediately seize the crossings of the Chindwin River at Sittaung and at Kalewa and then advance southward against Mandalay itself. He did indeed effect the Chindwin crossings, but in mid-December 1944 he saw that the Japanese were in any case going to withdraw altogether to the left bank of the Irrawaddy. Thereupon, he changed his plan: his objective should rather be Meiktila, which lay east of the Irrawaddy and was a vital centre of Japanese communications between Mandalay and Rangoon to the south. To conceal his new intention, he allowed one of the corps already directed against Mandalay to continue its eastward advance, but the other corps was surreptitiously moved over a circuitous route of 300 miles southward to Pakokku, which lay south of the Chindwin-Irrawaddy confluence and northwest of Meiktila. While the crossing of the Irrawaddy by the former corps on both sides of Mandalay distracted the attention of the Japanese, the latter corps took Meiktila on March 3, 1945, and held it against fierce counterattacks. Mandalay fell 10 days later, and the whole area was under the 14th Army's control by the end of the month. When the action was over, two Japanese armies had lost one-third of their fighting strength.

It remained for Slim to capture the Burmese capital, Rangoon. Allied ground forces advanced on Rangoon along two routes from the north: one corps, having moved down the Sittang Valley east of the Irrawaddy, took Pegu; the other, moving down the river, took Prome (Pye). The monsoon, however,

was imminent, and to forestall it a small combined operation was undertaken: parachute troops were dropped at Elephant Point, on the coast south of Rangoon, on May 1, 1945; and an Indian division, landing at Rangoon itself the next day, took the city without opposition, just when the monsoon rains were beginning to fall. The recapture of Burma was essentially complete with the taking of Rangoon.

The German offensive in the west, winter 1944–45

Hitler still hoped to drive the Allies back and still adhered to his principle of concentrating on the war in the west. Late in 1944, therefore, he assembled on the Western Front all the manpower that had become available as a consequence of his second “total mobilization”: a decree of October 18 had raised a *Volkssturm*, or “home guard,” for the defense of the Third Reich, conscripting all able-bodied men between the ages of 16 and 60 years.

In mid-November all six Allied armies on the Western Front had launched a general offensive; but, though the French 1st Army and the U.S. 7th had reached the Rhine River in Alsace, there were only small gains on other sectors of the front. Meanwhile, the German defense was being continuously strengthened with hastily shifted reserves and with freshly raised forces, besides the troops that had managed to make their way back from France. The German buildup along the front was by now progressing faster than that of the Allies, despite Germany’s great inferiority of material resources. In mid-December 1944 the Germans gave the Allied armies a shock by launching a sizable counteroffensive. The Germans amassed 24 divisions for the attack. Under the overall command of the reinstated Rundstedt, this attack was to be delivered through the wooded hill country of the Ardennes against the weakest sector of the U.S.-manned front, between Monschau (southwest of Aachen) and Echternach (northwest of Trier). While the 5th Panzer Army on the left, under the talented commander General Hasso von Manteuffel, with its own left flank covered by the German 7th Army, was to wheel northwestward after the breakthrough and to cross the Meuse River of Namur in a drive on Brussels, the 6th Panzer Army on the right, under SS General Sepp Dietrich, was to wheel more sharply northward against the Allies’ important supply port of Antwerp. Thus, it was hoped, the British and Canadian forces at the northern end of the front could be cut off from their supplies and crushed, while the U.S. forces to the south were held off by the German left.

The offensive was prepared with skill and secrecy and was launched on December 16, 1944, at a time when mist and rain would minimize the effectiveness of counteraction from the air. The leading wedge of the attack by eight German armoured divisions along a 75-mile front took the Allies by surprise; and the 5th Panzer Army, which achieved the deeper penetration, reached points within 20 miles of the crossings of the Meuse River at Givet and at Dinant. U.S. detachments, however, stood firm, albeit outflanked, at Bastogne and at other bottlenecks in the Ardennes; and there followed what is popularly remembered as the Battle of the Bulge. By December 24 the German drive had narrowed but deepened, having penetrated about 65 miles into the Allied lines along a 20-mile front. But by this time the Allies had begun to respond. Montgomery, who had taken charge of the situation in the north, swung his reserves southward to forestall the Germans on the Meuse. Bradley, commanding the Allied

forces south of the German wedge, sent his 3rd Army under Patton to the relief of Bastogne, which was accomplished on December 26. The weather cleared, and as many as 5,000 Allied aircraft began to bomb and strafe the German forces and their supply system. During January 8–16, 1945, the German attackers were compelled to withdraw, lest the salient that they had driven into the Allied front be cut off in its turn. Though their abortive offensive inflicted much damage and upset the Allies' plans, the Germans spent too much of their strength on it and thereby forfeited whatever chance they had had of maintaining prolonged resistance later. The Germans sustained 120,000 casualties and the Americans sustained about 75,000 in the Battle of the Bulge.

The Soviet advance to the Oder, January–February 1945

At the end of 1944 the Germans still held the western half of Poland, and their front was still 200 miles east of where it had been at the start of the war in 1939. The Germans had checked the Soviets' summer offensive and had established a firm line along the Narew and Vistula rivers southward to the Carpathians, and in October they repelled the Red Army's attempted thrust into East Prussia. Meanwhile, however, the Soviet left, moving up from the eastern Balkans, had been gradually pushing around through Hungary and Yugoslavia in a vast flanking movement; and the absorption of German forces in opposing this side-door approach detracted considerably from the Germans' capacity to maintain their main Eastern and Western fronts.

The Soviet high command was now ready to exploit the fundamental weaknesses of the German situation. Abundant supplies for their armies had been accumulated at the railheads. The mounting stream of American-supplied trucks had by this time enabled the Soviets to motorize a much larger proportion of their infantry brigades and thus, with the increasing production of their own tanks, to multiply the number of armoured and mobile corps for a successful breakthrough.

Before the end of December ominous reports were received by Guderian—who, in this desperately late period of the war, had been made chief of the German general staff. German Army intelligence reported that 225 Soviet infantry divisions and 22 armoured corps had been identified on the front between the Baltic and the Carpathians, assembled to attack. But when Guderian presented the report of these massive Soviet offensive preparations, Hitler refused to believe it, exclaiming: "It's the biggest imposture since Genghis Khan! Who is responsible for producing all this rubbish?"

If Hitler had been willing to stop the Ardennes counteroffensive in the west, troops could have been transferred to the Eastern Front; but he refused to do so. At the same time he refused Guderian's renewed request that the 30 German divisions now isolated in Courland (on the Baltic seacoast in Lithuania) should be evacuated by sea and brought back to reinforce the gateways into Germany. As a consequence, Guderian was left with a mobile reserve of only 12 armoured divisions to back up the 50 weak infantry divisions stretched out over the 700 miles of the main front.

The Soviet offensive opened on January 12, 1945, when Konev's armies were launched against the German front in southern Poland, starting from their bridgehead over the Vistula River near

Sandomierz. After it had pierced the German defense and produced a flanking menace to the central sector, Zhukov's armies in the centre of the front bounded forward from their bridgeheads nearer Warsaw. That same day, January 14, Rokossovsky's armies also joined in the offensive, striking from the Narew River north of Warsaw and breaking through the defenses covering this flank approach to East Prussia. The breach in the German front was now 200 miles wide.

On January 17, 1945, Warsaw was captured by Zhukov, after it had been surrounded; and on January 19 his armoured spearheads drove into Łódź. That same day Konev's spearheads reached the Silesian frontier of prewar Germany. Thus, at the end of the first week the offensive had been carried 100 miles deep and was 400 miles wide—far too wide to be filled by such scanty reinforcements as were belatedly provided.

The crisis made Hitler renounce any idea of pursuing his offensive in the west; but, despite Guderian's advice, he switched the 6th Panzer Army not to Poland but to Hungary in an attempt to relieve Budapest. The Soviets could thus continue their advance through Poland for two more weeks. While Konev's spearheads crossed the Oder River in the vicinity of Breslau (Wrocław) and thus cut Silesia's important mineral resources off from Germany, Zhukov made a sweeping advance in the centre by driving forward from Warsaw, past Poznań, Bydgoszcz, and Toruń, to the frontiers of Brandenburg and of Pomerania. At the same time Rokossovsky pushed on, through Allenstein (Olsztyn), to the Gulf of Danzig, thus cutting off the 25 German divisions in East Prussia. To defend the yawning gap in the centre of the front, Hitler created a new army group and put Heinrich Himmler in command of it with a staff of favoured SS officers. Their fumbling helped to clear the path for Zhukov, whose mechanized forces by January 31, 1945, were at Küstrin, on the lower Oder, only 40 miles from Berlin.

Zhukov's advance now came to a halt. Konev, however, could still make a northwesterly sweep down the left bank of the middle Oder, reaching Sommerfeld, 80 miles from Berlin, on February 13, and the Neisse River two days later. The Germans' defense benefited from being driven back to the straight and shortened line formed by the Oder and Neisse rivers. This front, extending from the Baltic coast to the Bohemian frontier, was less than 200 miles long. The menace of the Soviets' imminent approach to Berlin led Hitler to decide that most of his fresh drafts of troops must be sent to reinforce the Oder; the way was thus eased for the crossing of the Rhine River by the American and British armies.

On February 13, 1945, the Soviets took Budapest, the defense of which had entailed the Germans' loss of Silesia.

Yalta

Roosevelt's last meeting with Stalin and Churchill took place at Yalta, in Crimea, February 4–11, 1945. The conference is chiefly remembered for its treatment of the Polish problem: the western Allied leaders, abandoning their support of the Polish government in London, agreed that the Lublin committee—already recognized as the provisional government of Poland by the Soviet masters of the country—should be the nucleus of a provisional government of national unity, pending free elections. But while

they also agreed that Poland should be compensated in the west for the eastern territories that the U.S.S.R. had seized in 1939, they declined to approve the Oder–Neisse line as a frontier between Poland and Germany, considering that it would put too many Germans under Polish rule. For the rest of “liberated Europe” the western Allied leaders obtained nothing more substantial from Stalin than a declaration prescribing support for “democratic elements” and “free elections” to produce “governments responsive to the will of the people.”

Yalta Conference

(From left) Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Joseph Stalin at the Yalta Conference, 1945.

AP Images

For Germany the conference affirmed the project for dividing the country into occupation zones, with the difference that the U.S. zone was to be reduced in order to provide a fourth zone, for the French to occupy. Roosevelt and Churchill, however, had already discarded the Morgenthau Plan for the postwar treatment of Germany; and Yalta found no comprehensive formula to replace it.

The three leaders simply pledged themselves to furnish the defeated Germans with the necessities for survival; to “eliminate or control” all German industry that could be used for armaments; to bring major war criminals to trial; and to set up a commission in Moscow for the purpose of determining what reparation Germany should pay.

The German collapse, spring 1945

Before their ground forces were ready for the final assault on Germany, the western Allies intensified their aerial bombardment. This offensive culminated in a series of five attacks on Dresden, launched by the RAF with 800 aircraft in the night of February 13–14, 1945, and continued by the U.S. 8th Air Force with 400 aircraft in daylight on February 14, with 200 on February 15, with 400 again on March 2, and, finally, with 572 on April 17. The motive of these raids was allegedly to promote the Soviet advance by destroying a centre of communications important to the German defense of the Eastern Front; but, in fact, the raids achieved nothing to help the Red Army militarily and succeeded in obliterating the greater part of one of the most beautiful cities of Europe and in killing up to 25,000 people.

The main strength of the ground forces being built up meanwhile for the crossing of the Rhine was allotted to Montgomery’s armies on the northern sector of the front. Meanwhile, some of the U.S. generals sought to demonstrate the abilities of their own less generously supplied forces. Thus, Patton’s 3rd Army reached the Rhine at Coblenz (Koblenz) early in March, and, farther downstream, General Courtney H. Hodges’ 1st Army seized the bridge over the Rhine at Remagen south of Bonn and actually crossed the river, while, still farther downstream, Lieutenant General William H. Simpson’s 9th Army reached the Rhine near Düsseldorf. All three armies were ordered to mark time until Montgomery’s grand assault was ready; but, meanwhile, they cleared the west bank of the river, and eventually, in the night of March 22–23, the 3rd Army crossed the Rhine at Oppenheim, between Mainz and Mannheim, almost unopposed.

Mark V Panther tank

A U.S. soldier inspecting a damaged German Mark V Panther tank, Kelberg, Germany, 1945.

U.S. Army Photograph

At last, in the night of March 23–24, Montgomery's attack by 25 divisions was launched across a stretch—30 miles long—of the Rhine near Wesel after a stupendous bombardment by more than 3,000 guns and waves of attacks by bombers. Resistance was

generally slight; but Montgomery would not sanction a further advance until his bridgeheads were consolidated into a salient 20 miles deep. Then the Canadian 1st Army, on the left, drove ahead through the Netherlands, the British 2nd went northeastward to Lübeck and to Wismar on the Baltic, and the U.S. armies swept forward across Germany, fanning out to reach an arc that stretched from Magdeburg (9th Army) through Leipzig (1st) to the borders of Czechoslovakia (3rd) and of Austria (7th and French 1st).

World War II: Allies entering bomb-damaged Nürnberg

U.S. tanks entering bomb-damaged Nürnberg, Germany, April 1945.

U.S. Army Photo

Guderian had tried to shift Germany's forces eastward to hold the Red Army off; but Hitler, despite his anxiety for Berlin, still wished to commit the 11th and 12th armies—formed from his last reserves—to driving the western Allies back over the Rhine and, on March 28, replaced Guderian with General Hans Krebs as chief of the general staff.

The dominant desire of the Germans now, both troops and civilians, was to see the British and American armies sweep eastward as rapidly as possible to reach Berlin and occupy as much of the country as possible before the Soviets overcame the Oder line. Few of them were inclined to assist Hitler's purpose of obstruction by self-destruction. On March 19 (the eve of the Rhine crossing), Hitler had issued an order declaring that "the battle should be conducted without consideration for our own population." His regional commissioners were instructed to destroy "all industrial plants, all the main electricity works, waterworks, gas works" together with "all food and clothing stores" in order to create "a desert" in the Allies' path. When his minister of war production, Albert Speer, protested against this drastic order, Hitler retorted: "If the war is lost, the German nation will also perish. So there is no need to consider what the people require for continued existence." Appalled at such callousness, Speer was shaken out of his loyalty to Hitler: he went behind Hitler's back to the army and industrial chiefs and persuaded them, without much difficulty, to evade executing Hitler's decree. The Americans and the British, driving eastward from the Rhine, met little opposition and reached the Elbe River 60 miles from Berlin, on April 11. There they halted.

On the Eastern Front, Zhukov enlarged his bridgehead across the Oder early in March. On their far left the Soviets reached Vienna on April 6; and on the right they took Königsberg on April 9. Then, on April 16, Zhukov resumed the offensive in conjunction with Konev, who forced the crossings of the Neisse; this time the Soviets burst out of their bridgeheads, and within a week they were driving into the suburbs of Berlin. Hitler chose to stay in his threatened capital, counting on some miracle to bring salvation and clutching at such straws as the news of the death of Roosevelt on April 12. By April 25 the armies of Zhukov and Konev had completely encircled Berlin, and on the same day they linked up with the Americans on the Elbe River.

Isolated and reduced to despair, Hitler married his mistress, Eva Braun, during the night of April 28–29, and on April 30 he committed suicide with her in the ruins of the Chancellery, as the advancing Soviet troops were less than a half mile from his bunker complex; their bodies were hurriedly cremated in the garden. The “strategy” of Hitler’s successor, Dönitz, was one of capitulation and of saving as many as possible of the westward-fleeing civilians and of his German troops from Soviet hands. During the interval of surrender, 1,800,000 German troops (55 percent of the Army of the East) were transferred into the British–U.S. area of control.

On the Italian front, the Allied armies had long been frustrated by the depletion of their forces for the sake of other enterprises; but early in 1945 four German divisions were transferred from Kesselring’s command to the Western Front, and in April the thin German defenses in Italy were broken by an Allied attack. A surrender document that had been signed on April 29 (while Hitler was still alive) finally brought the fighting to a conclusion on May 2.

The surrender of the German forces in northwestern Europe was signed at Montgomery’s headquarters on Lüneburg Heath on May 4; and a further document, covering all the German forces, was signed with more ceremony at Eisenhower’s headquarters at Reims, in the presence of Soviet as well as U.S., British, and French delegations. At midnight on May 8, 1945, the war in Europe was officially over.

World War II: V-E Day

People in New York City celebrating the end of the European phase of World War II, May 8, 1945.

Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

Potsdam

The last inter-Allied conference of World War II, code-named “Terminal,” was held at the suburb of Potsdam, outside ruined Berlin, from July 17 to August 2, 1945. It was attended by the Soviet, U.S., and British heads of government and foreign ministers:

respectively, Stalin and Molotov; President Harry S. Truman (Roosevelt’s successor) and James F. Byrnes; and Churchill and Anthony Eden, the last-named pair being replaced by Clement Attlee and Ernest Bevin after Great Britain’s change of government following a general election.

Operations against Japan were discussed, and the successful testing of an atomic bomb in the United States was divulged to Stalin. Pending the Soviet entry into the war against Japan, a declaration was issued on July 26 calling on Japan to surrender unconditionally and forecasting the territorial spoliation of the empire and the military occupation of Japan proper as well as the prosecution of war criminals, yet still promising that the Japanese people would not be enslaved or the nation destroyed.

Time was spent discussing the peace settlement and its procedure. Stalin induced Truman and Attlee to consent provisionally to the Soviet Union’s demands that it should take one-third of Germany’s naval and merchant fleet; have the right to exact reparations from its occupied zones of Germany and of Austria and also from Finland, Hungary, Romania, and even Bulgaria; and should furthermore receive a percentage of reparation from the western-occupied zones. The total amounts of all these exactions were, however, to be determined at a later date.

There was a profound disagreement at the conference about the Balkan areas occupied by the Red Army in which representatives of the western powers were allowed little say, and about the area east of the Oder–Neisse line, all of which the Soviets had arbitrarily put under Polish administration. The western statesmen protested at these lone-handed arrangements but perforce accepted them.

The end of the Japanese war, February–September 1945

While the campaign for the Philippines was still in progress, U.S. forces were making great steps in the direct advance toward their final objective, the Japanese homeland. Aerial bombardment was, of course, the prerequisite of the projected invasion of Japan—which was to begin, it was imagined, with landings on Kyushu, the southernmost of the major Japanese islands.

Iwo Jima and the bombing of Tokyo

With U.S. forces firmly established in the Mariana Islands, the steady long-range bombing of Japan by B-29s under the command of General Curtis E. LeMay continued throughout the closing months of 1944 and into 1945. But it was still 1,500 miles from Saipan to Tokyo, a long flight even for the B-29s. Strategic planners therefore fixed their attention on the little volcanic island of Iwo Jima in the Bonin Islands, which lay about halfway between the Marianas and Japan. If Iwo Jima could be eliminated as a Japanese base, the island could then be immensely valuable as a base for U.S. fighter planes defending the big bombers.

World War II: Iwo Jima

U.S. Coast Guard and Navy vessels
landing supplies on the Marine
beachhead at Iwo Jima, February 1945.
Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

The Japanese were determined to hold Iwo Jima. As they had done on other Pacific islands, they had created underground defenses there, making the best possible use of natural caves and the rough, rocky terrain. The number of Japanese defenders on the island, under command of Lieutenant General Kuribayashi Tadamichi, was more than 20,000.

injured U.S. marines at the Battle of Iwo Jima

Injured U.S. Marines being treated at an
aid station on Iwo Jima, 1945.
U.S. Department of Defense

Day after day before the actual landing the island was subjected to intense bombardment by naval guns, by rockets, and by air strikes using napalm bombs. But the results fell far short of expectations. The Japanese were so well protected that no amount of conventional bombing or shelling could knock them out. U.S. Marines landed on Iwo Jima on February 19, 1945, and encountered

an obstinate resistance. Meanwhile, kamikaze counterattacks from the air sank the light carrier *Bismarck Sea* and damaged other ships; and, though the U.S. flag was planted on Mount Suribachi on February 23, the isle was not finally secured until March 16. Iwo Jima had cost the lives of 6,000 Marines, as well as the lives of nearly all the Japanese defenders; but in the next five months more than 2,000 B-29 bombers were able to land on it.

Battle of Iwo Jima

U.S. Marines raising the American flag
over Mount Suribachi, Iwo Jima, in
February 1945.

Joe Rosenthal/AP

Meanwhile, a new tactic had been found for the bombing of Japan from bases in the Marianas. Instead of high-altitude strikes in daylight, which had failed to do much damage to the industrial centres attacked, low-level strikes at night, using napalm

firebombs, were tried, with startling success. The first, in the night of March 9–10, 1945, against Tokyo, destroyed about 25 percent of the city's buildings (most of them flimsily built of wood and plaster), killed more than 80,000 people, and made 1,000,000 homeless. This result indicated that Japan might be defeated without a massive invasion by ground troops, and so similar bombing raids on such major cities as Nagoya, Ōsaka, Kōbe, Yokohama, and Toyama followed. Japan literally was being bombed out of the war.

Okinawa

Plans for invasion, however, were not immediately discarded. Okinawa, largest of the Ryukyu Islands strung out northeastward from Taiwan, had been regarded as the last stepping-stone to be taken toward Kyushu, which was only 350 miles away from it. It had therefore been subjected to a series of air raids from October 1944, culminating in March 1945 in an attack that destroyed hundreds of Japanese planes; but there were still at least 75,000 Japanese troops on the island, commanded by Lieutenant General Ushijima Mitsuru. The invasion of Okinawa was, in fact, to be the largest amphibious operation mounted by the Americans in the Pacific war.

Under the overall command of Nimitz, with Admiral Raymond Spruance in charge of the actual landings and with Lieutenant General Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr., commanding the ground forces, the operation began with the occupation of the Kerama Islets, 15 miles west of Okinawa, on March 26, 1945. Five days later a landing was made on Keise-Jima, whence artillery fire could be brought to bear on Okinawa itself. Then, on April 1, some 60,000 U.S. troops landed on the central stretch of Okinawa's west coast, seizing two nearby airfields and advancing to cut the island's narrow waist. Koiso's government in Tokyo resigned on April 5, and the U.S.S.R. on the same day refused to renew its treaty of nonaggression with Japan.

U.S. Marines battling for control of a
ridge near Naha, Okinawa, May 1945.

U.S. Department of Defense

The first major counterattack on Okinawa by the Japanese, begun on April 6, involved not only 355 kamikaze air raids but also the *Yamato*, the greatest battleship in the world (72,000 tons, with nine 18.1-inch [460-millimetre] guns), which was sent out on a suicidal

mission with only enough fuel for the single outward voyage and without sufficient air cover. The Japanese hoped the *Yamato* might finish off the Allied fleet after the latter had been weakened by kamikaze attacks. In the event, the *Yamato* was hit repeatedly by bombs and torpedoes and was sunk on April 7. Equally suicidal was a new Japanese weapon, *baka*, which claimed its first victim, the U.S. destroyer *Abele*, off Okinawa on April 12. *Baka* was a rocket-powered glider crammed with explosives which was towed into range by a bomber and was then released to be guided by its solitary pilot into the chosen target for their mutual destruction.

The U.S. ground forces invading Okinawa met little opposition on the beaches because Ushijima had decided to offer his main resistance inland, out of range of the enemy's naval guns. In the southern half of the island this resistance was bitterest: it lasted until June 21, and Ushijima killed himself the next day. The campaign for Okinawa was ended officially on July 2. For U.S. troops it had been the longest and bloodiest Pacific campaign since Guadalcanal in 1942. Taking the island had cost the Americans 12,000 dead and 36,000 wounded, with 34 ships sunk and 368 damaged, and the Japanese losses exceeded 100,000 dead.

Japanese soldier flushed from a cave by a smoke grenade surrendering to U.S. Marines on Okinawa, 1945.

U.S. Department of Defense

On April 3, 1945, two days after the first landing on Okinawa, the U.S. command in the Pacific was reorganized: MacArthur was henceforth to be in command of all army units and also in operational control of the U.S. Marines for the invasion of Japan; Nimitz was placed in command of all navy units.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki

Throughout July 1945 the Japanese mainlands, from the latitude of Tokyo on Honshu northward to the coast of Hokkaido, were bombed just as if an invasion was about to be launched. In fact, something far more sinister was in hand, as the Americans were telling Stalin at Potsdam.

In 1939 physicists in the United States had learned of experiments in Germany demonstrating the possibility of nuclear fission and had understood that the potential energy might be released in an explosive weapon of unprecedented power. On August 2, 1939, Albert Einstein had warned Roosevelt of the danger of Nazi Germany's forestalling other states in the development of an atomic bomb. Eventually, the U.S. Office of Scientific Research and Development was created in June 1941 and given joint responsibility with the war department in the Manhattan Project to develop an atomic bomb. After four years of intensive and ever-mounting research and development efforts, an atomic device was set off on July 16, 1945, in a desert area near Alamogordo, New Mexico, generating an explosive power equivalent to that of more than 15,000 tons of TNT. Thus the atomic bomb was born. Truman, the new U.S. president, calculated that this monstrous weapon might be used to defeat Japan in a way less costly of U.S. lives than a conventional invasion of the Japanese homeland. Japan's unsatisfactory response to the Allies' Potsdam Declaration decided the matter. (See Sidebar: The decision to use the atomic bomb.) On August 6, 1945, an atomic bomb carried from Tinian Island in the Marianas in a specially equipped B-29 was dropped on Hiroshima, at the southern end of Honshu: the combined heat and blast pulverized everything in the explosion's immediate vicinity, generated fires that burned almost 4.4 square miles completely out, and immediately killed some 70,000 people (the death toll passed 100,000 by the end of the year). A second bomb, dropped on Nagasaki on August 9, killed between 35,000 and 40,000 people, injured a like number, and devastated 1.8 square miles.

World War II: total destruction of Hiroshima, Japan

The Japanese surrender

Total destruction of Hiroshima, Japan, following the dropping of the first atomic bomb, on August 6, 1945.

U.S. Air Force photo

News of Hiroshima's destruction was only slowly understood in Tokyo. Many members of the Japanese government did not appreciate the power of the new Allied weapon until after the Nagasaki attack. Meanwhile, on August 8, the U.S.S.R. had declared

war against Japan. The combination of these developments tipped the scales within the government in favour of a group that had, since the spring, been advocating a negotiated peace. On August 10 the Japanese government issued a statement agreeing to accept the surrender terms of the Potsdam Declaration on the understanding that the emperor's position as a sovereign ruler would not be prejudiced. In their reply the Allies granted Japan's request that the emperor's sovereign status be maintained, subject only to their supreme commander's directives. Japan accepted this proviso on August 14, and the emperor Hirohito urged his people to accept the decision to surrender. It was a bitter pill to swallow, though, and every effort was made to persuade the Japanese to accept the defeat that they had come to regard as unthinkable. Even princes of the Japanese Imperial house were dispatched to deliver the Emperor's message in person to distant Japanese Army forces in China and in Korea, hoping thus to mitigate the shock. A clique of diehards nevertheless attempted to assassinate the new prime minister, Admiral Suzuki Kantarō; but by September 2, when the formal surrender ceremonies took place, the way had been smoothed.

Truman designated MacArthur as the Allied powers' supreme commander to accept Japan's formal surrender, which was solemnized aboard the U.S. flagship *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay: the Japanese foreign minister, Shigemitsu Mamoru, signed the document first, on behalf of the Emperor and his government. He was followed by General Umezu Yoshijiro on behalf of the Imperial General Headquarters. The document was then signed by MacArthur, Nimitz, and representatives of the other Allied powers. Japan concluded a separate surrender ceremony with China in Nanking on September 9, 1945. With this last formal surrender, World War II came to an end.

Costs of the war

Killed, wounded, prisoners, or missing

The statistics on World War II casualties are inexact. Only for the United States and the British Commonwealth can official figures showing killed, wounded, prisoners or missing for the armed forces be cited with any degree of assurance. For most other nations, only estimates of varying reliability exist. Statistical accounting broke down in both Allied and Axis nations when whole armies were surrendered or dispersed. Guerrilla warfare, changes in international boundaries, and mass shifts in population vastly complicated postwar efforts to arrive at accurate figures even for the total dead from all causes.

Civilian deaths from land battles, aerial bombardment, political and racial executions, war-induced disease and famine, and the sinking of ships probably exceeded battle casualties. These civilian deaths are even more difficult to determine, yet they must be counted in any comparative evaluation of national losses. There are no reliable figures for the casualties of the Soviet Union and China, the two

countries in which casualties were undoubtedly greatest. Mainly for this reason, estimates of total dead in World War II vary anywhere from 35,000,000 to 60,000,000—a statistical difference of no small import. Few have ventured even to try to calculate the total number of persons who were wounded or permanently disabled.

However inexact many of the figures, their main import is clear. The heaviest proportionate human losses occurred in eastern Europe where Poland lost perhaps 20 percent of its prewar population, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union around 10 percent. German losses, of which the greater proportion occurred on the Eastern Front, were only slightly less severe. The nations of western Europe, however great their suffering from occupation, escaped with manpower losses that were hardly comparable with those of World War I. In East Asia, the victims of famine and pestilence in China are to be numbered in the millions, in addition to other millions of both soldiers and civilians who perished in battle and bombardment.

The table contains what appear to be the best available statistics on armed forces casualties of all types resulting from battle, of civilian deaths from war-related causes, and estimated total deaths in each of the major nations involved in World War II. Figures rounded to thousands (and this device has been employed in all cases for total deaths) are estimates of varying reliability while omissions in any category indicate that any estimate would be the wildest of conjectures. Estimated casualties of resistance movements have been included in military figures, other victims of Nazi persecution in the civilian ones. In the latter category fall about 5,700,000 Jews, more than half of them from Poland, who died in Nazi concentration and death camps.

World War II casualties
military

country	killed, died of wounds, or in prison ¹	wounded	prisoners or missing ²	civilian deaths due to war	estimated total deaths
Allied Powers					
Belgium	12,000	—	—	76,000	88,000
Brazil	943	4,222	—	—	1,000
British Commonwealth	373,372	475,047	251,724 ³	92,673	466,000
Australia	23,365	39,803	32,393	—	24,000
Canada	37,476	53,174	10,888	—	38,000
India	24,338	64,354	91,243	—	—
New Zealand	10,033	19,314	10,582	—	10,000
South Africa	6,840	14,363	16,430	—	7,000

World War II casualties

United Kingdom	264,443	277,077	213,919	92,673 ⁴	357,000
Colonies	6,877	6,972	22,323	—	7,000
China ⁵	1,310,224	1,752,951	115,248	—	—
Czechoslovakia ⁶	10,000	—	—	215,000	225,000
Denmark	1,800	—	—	2,000 ⁷	4,000
France ⁸	213,324	400,000	—	350,000	563,000
Greece ⁹	88,300	—	—	325,000	413,000
Netherlands	7,900	2,860	—	200,000	208,000
Norway	3,000	—	—	7,000	10,000
Poland ¹⁰	123,178	236,606	420,760	5,675,000	5,800,000
Philippines	27,000	—	—	91,000	118,000
United States ¹¹	292,131	671,801	139,709	6,000	298,000
U.S.S.R. ¹²	11,000,000	—	—	7,000,000	18,000,000
Yugoslavia	305,000	425,000	—	1,200,000	1,505,000
Axis Powers					
Bulgaria ¹³	10,000	—	—	10,000	20,000
Finland	82,000	50,000	—	2,000	84,000
Germany ¹⁴	3,500,000	5,000,000	3,400,000	780,000	4,200,000
Hungary ¹³	200,000	—	170,000	290,000	490,000
Italy ¹⁵	242,232	66,000	350,000	152,941	395,000
Japan	1,300,000 ¹⁶	4,000,000	810,000	672,000	1,972,000
Romania ¹³	300,000	—	100,000	200,000	500,000

¹ Figures for deaths, insofar as possible, exclude those who died of natural causes or were suicides. ² As far as possible the figures in this column exclude those who died in captivity. ³ Figures for all Commonwealth nations include those still missing in 1946, some of whom may be presumed dead.

⁴ This figure comprises 60,595 killed in aerial bombardment, 30,248 in the merchant marine service, 624 in women's auxiliary services, and 1,206 in the Home Guard. ⁵ The figures for China comprise casualties of the Chinese Nationalist forces during 1937–45, as reported in 1946, and do not include figures for local armies and communists. Estimates of 2,200,000 military dead and 22,000,000 civilian deaths appear in some compilations but are of doubtful accuracy. ⁶ Czech military figures include only those who fought on the Allied side, not Sudeten Germans and others who served in the German

⁷ army. ⁸ Includes merchant marine personnel who served with Allies. ⁹ French military casualties include those dead from all causes in the campaign of 1939–40, those of Free French, of rearmed French units that fought with Allies during 1942–45, and of French units that fought with Axis forces in Syria and North Africa during 1941–42 (1,200 dead). ¹⁰ These figures released in 1946 are possibly too high. Merchant seamen are included with military dead. ¹¹ Military figures drawn from statement released by Polish government in 1946 and include casualties in the campaign of 1939, those of the underground, of Polish forces serving with British and Soviet armies, and those incurred in the Warsaw Uprising. Civilian casualty figures, which include 3,200,000 Jews, are based on this statement as modified by the calculations of population experts. ¹² Military figures include those of Army Ground and Air Forces and those of the Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard. There were an additional 115,187 deaths of U.S. servicemen from non-battle causes. Civilians listed in 1946 as dead or missing include 5,638 of the merchant marine service. ¹³ Available estimates of Soviet casualties vary widely. A Soviet officer who served with the high command in Berlin and left the Soviet service in 1949 placed total military losses at 13,600,000—8,500,000 dead or missing in battle; 2,600,000 dead in prison camps; 2,500,000 died of wounds—and estimated civilian casualties at 7,000,000. These figures have been widely accepted in Germany, but most U.S. compilations, based on Soviet announcements, list 6,000,000 to 7,500,000 battle deaths. Calculations made on the basis of population distribution by age and sex in the 1959 U.S.S.R. census give some credence to the higher figures, for they seem to indicate losses of from 15,000,000 to 20,000,000 males of military age in World War II. The figures used here are a compromise estimate, not intended to obscure the fact that Soviet casualties are, in reality, unknown in the West. ¹⁴ Estimates based on fragmentary data. ¹⁵ Military estimates include men from outside Germany who served with the German armed forces and are based on the assumption that about 1,000,000 of the 1,250,000 men still listed as missing in Soviet territory in 1955 were dead. In addition, perhaps 250,000 military personnel died of natural causes, committed suicide, or were executed. Civilian figures are for Germany and Austria only, and they do not include an estimated 2,384,000 German deaths during 1944–46 resulting from Soviet invasion and forced transfers of population in the eastern provinces given to Poland after the war. ¹⁶ Figures for dead include those listed as still missing in compilation made by the Italian government in 1952 (131,419 military personnel and 3,651 civilians), but not 49,144 military deaths from natural causes or suicide. Known dead from enemy action amounted to 110,823, making a total of 159,957 military deaths from all causes if the missing are not included. Of this number, 92,767 occurred before the 1943 Armistice, 67,190 afterward. ¹⁷ Based on an estimate of 1,600,000 total military deaths on the assumption that about half of those listed as missing in Soviet territory in 1949 were dead. About 300,000 of these probably resulted from causes not related to battle.

Human and material cost

There can be no real statistical measurement of the human and material cost of World War II. The money cost to governments involved has been estimated at more than \$1,000,000,000,000 but this

figure cannot represent the human misery, deprivation, and suffering, the dislocation of peoples and of economic life, or the sheer physical destruction of property that the war involved.

Europe

The Nazi overlords of occupied Europe drained their conquered territories of resources to feed the German war machine. Industry and agriculture in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Norway were forced to produce to meet German needs with a resulting deprivation of their own peoples. Italy, though at first a German ally, fared no better. The resources of the occupied territories in eastern Europe were even more ruthlessly exploited. Millions of able-bodied men and women were drained away to perform forced labour in German factories and on German farms. The whole system of German economic exploitation was enforced by cruel and brutal methods, and the guerrilla resistance it aroused was destructive in itself and provoked German reprisals that were even more destructive, particularly in Poland, Yugoslavia, and the occupied portions of the Soviet Union.

Great Britain, which escaped the ravages of occupation, suffered heavily from the German aerial blitz of 1940–41 and later from V-bombs and rockets. On the other side, German cities were leveled by Allied bombers, and in the final invasion of Germany from both east and west there was much retaliatory devastation, destruction, and pillage.

The destruction of physical plant was immense and far exceeded that of World War I, when it was largely confined to battle areas. France estimated the total cost at an amount equivalent to three times the total French annual national income. Belgium and the Netherlands suffered damage roughly in similar proportions to their resources. In Great Britain about 30 percent of the homes were destroyed or damaged; in France, Belgium, and the Netherlands about 20 percent. Agriculture in all the occupied countries suffered heavily from the destruction of facilities and farm animals, the lack of machinery and fertilizers, and the drain on manpower. Internal transport systems were completely disrupted by the destruction or confiscation of railcars, locomotives, and barges, and the bombing of bridges and key rail centres. By 1945 the economies of the continental nations of western Europe were in a state of virtually complete paralysis.

In eastern Europe the devastation was even worse. Poland reported 30 percent of its buildings destroyed, as well as 60 percent of its schools, scientific institutions, and public administration facilities, 30–35 percent of its agricultural property, and 32 percent of its mines, electrical power, and industries. Yugoslavia reported 20.7 percent of its dwellings destroyed. In the battlegrounds of the western portion of the Soviet Union, the destruction was even more complete. In Germany itself, the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey found that in 49 of the largest cities, 39 percent of the dwelling units were destroyed or seriously damaged. Central business districts had generally been reduced to rubble, leaving only suburban rings standing around a destroyed core.

Millions throughout Europe were rendered homeless. There were an estimated 21,000,000 refugees, more than half of them “displaced persons” who had been deported from their homelands to perform

forced labour. Other millions who had remained at home were physically exhausted by five years of strain, suffering, and undernourishment. The roads of Europe were swamped by refugees all through 1945 and into 1946 as more than 5,000,000 Soviet prisoners of war and forced labourers returned eastward to their homeland and more than 8,000,000 Germans fled or were evacuated westward out of the Soviet-occupied portions of Germany. Millions of other persons of almost every European nationality also returned to their own countries or emigrated to new homes in other lands.

The Far East

The devastation of World War II in China was inflicted on a country that was already suffering from the economic ills of overpopulation, underdevelopment, and a half-century of war, political disunity, and unrest. The territory occupied by Japanese forces was roughly equivalent to that occupied by the Axis in Europe and the period of occupation was longer. That area of China unoccupied by the Japanese was virtually cut off from the outside world after the Japanese conquest of Burma in early 1942, and its economy continually tottered on the brink of collapse. In both areas, famines, epidemics, and civil unrest were recurrent, much farmland was flooded, and millions of refugees fled their homes, some several times. Cities, towns, and villages were laid waste by aerial bombardment and marching armies. The transportation system, poor to begin with, was thoroughly disrupted. Most of the limited number of hospitals and health institutions in China were destroyed or lost.

In India famine was recurrent, and the Indian economy was severely strained to support the burden the Allied military authorities placed upon it. The Philippines suffered from three years of Japanese occupation and exploitation and from the destruction wrought in the reconquest of the islands by the Americans in 1944–45. The harbour at Manila was wrecked by the retreating Japanese, and many portions of the city were demolished by bombardment.

In Japan the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey found the damage to urban centres comparable to that in Germany. In the aggregate, 40 percent of the built-up areas of 66 Japanese cities was destroyed, and approximately 30 percent of the entire urban population of Japan lost their homes and many of their possessions. Hiroshima and Nagasaki suffered the peculiar and lasting damage done by atomic explosion and radiation.

John Graham Royde-Smith The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica

CITATION INFORMATION

ARTICLE TITLE: World War II

WEBSITE NAME: Encyclopaedia Britannica

PUBLISHER: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.

DATE PUBLISHED: 07 November 2019

URL: <https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-II>

ACCESS DATE: March 24, 2020