

WAR WORLD II

MAJOR BATTLES



WAR WORLD II



With Adolf Hitler leading a German invasion of Poland in 1939, World War II was launched; a deadly global conflict waged across Europe and the Pacific until 1945.

Bloody battles raged between the Allied powers, which included Britain, France, the Soviet Union and the United States, along with other nations, and the Axis, notably Germany and Japan.

When the Axis ultimately surrendered, some 20 million soldiers were dead, along with an estimated 40 million civilians.

Follow the timeline of the war's most significant battles.

Battle of the Atlantic

September 3, 1939 to May 8, 1945



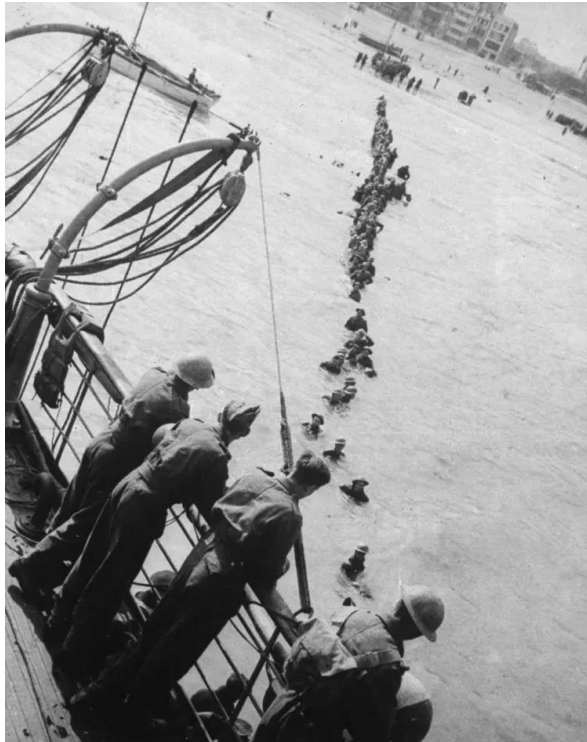
World War II's longest continuous campaign takes place, with the Allies striking a naval blockade against Germany and igniting a struggle for control of Atlantic Ocean sea routes.

The Axis, with its U-boats, responds with a counter-blockade that is at first successful, but the Allies' use of convoys, aircraft and technology eventually turns the tide.

Over five years, thousands of ships engage in 100-plus battles in the Atlantic Ocean with approximately 100,000 lives lost.

Battle of Dunkirk

May 26 to June 4, 1940



A German invasion around the French coastal town of Dunkirk separates the French and British armies, marooning Allied forces.

But with Adolf Hitler halting Germany's advance there, the Allies are able to perform a daring—and successful—evacuation, called Operation Dynamo. More than 338,000 soldiers were saved,

Germany claims victory with remaining Allied troops surrendering, but the evacuation serves to boost British morale, still referred to as the "Dunkirk spirit."

Battle of Britain

July 10 to October 31, 1940



The Battle of Britain was between Britain's Royal Air Force (RAF) and the Luftwaffe, Nazi Germany's air force, and was the first battle in history fought solely in the air.

From July 10 through October 31 pilots and support crews on both sides took to the skies and battled for control of airspace over Great Britain, Germany and the English Channel.

On September 7, 300 German bombers raid London, in the first of 57 consecutive nights of bombing called "[blitzkrieg](#)".

Defense systems, radar, and Hitler's decision to bomb London, rather than military bases, allows Britain to regroup and eventually win the battle.

Battle of Crete

May 20 to June 1, 1941



Nazi paratroopers invade the Greek island of Crete, marking history's first mostly airborne attack.

Day one of the campaign results in heavy losses for the Germans, as many paratroopers died or were injured on impact. The rest were undersupplied and inexperienced.

But fearing a sea assault, Allied forces soon withdraw and evacuate in defeat.

However, with nearly 4,000 Allies and more than 3,000 Germans killed, Hitler decries "the day of the parachutist is over" and it is the country's last airborne campaign.

The Siege of Leningrad

September 8, 1941 to January 27, 1944



German and Finnish soldiers begin a nearly 900-day siege and blockade of Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), the second-biggest Soviet city and a major center of industry.

Hitler decided to use starvation as a weapon, with supplies, water, electricity and transportation cut off. 1.3 million people are evacuated, but 2.5 million civilians remained.

Lake Ladoga, offered the only open route into the city to bring in food and fuel. This route became known as the "Road of Life".

Early 1944, the Red Army finally begins to break through the blockade, the siege ends, but approximately 800,000 civilians die, most from hunger.

Battle of Moscow

October 2, 1941 to January 7, 1942



Following Germany's Operation Barbarossa, an invasion of the Soviet Union, the Axis launches a campaign, Operation Typhoon, to capture the capital city of Moscow before winter sets in.

In preparation, the Soviets fortify the city and bring in reinforcements. After a series of gains and losses on both sides during harsh weather, the Germans are eventually beaten back and forced to retreat.

Though Hitler blamed the winter weather for the failure of the Moscow offensive, the entire operation had suffered from a lack of long-term strategic planning.

Counting on a quick victory, the Germans had failed to set up adequate supply lines to deal with the vast distances, icy weather and harsh terrain.

Battle of Pearl Harbor

December 7, 1941



In a surprise wave of attacks on the U.S. naval base at Oahu Island, Hawaii's Pearl Harbor, Japan takes out America's Pacific fleet (except for the three aircraft carriers which were not present during the attack).

Less than two hours later, the attack was over, and every battleship in Pearl Harbor—*USS Arizona*, *USS Oklahoma*, *USS California*, *USS West Virginia*, *USS Utah*, *USS Maryland*, *USS Pennsylvania*, *USS Tennessee* and *USS Nevada*—had sustained significant damage. *USS Arizona* is now a memorial.

With approximately 2,400 U.S. troops killed and another 1,000 wounded, President Franklin D. Roosevelt calls it "a date which will live in infamy" and, the next day, the U.S. officially enters World War II, declaring war on Japan.

Second Battle of Kharkov

May 12-28, 1942

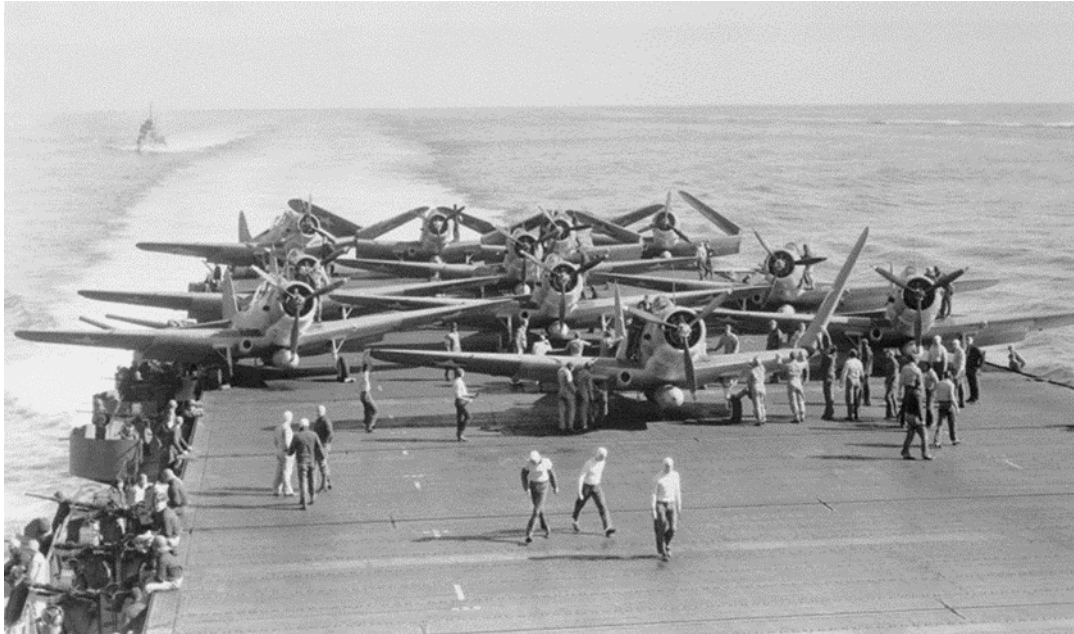


In a counter-offensive after Germany's attack on Moscow, the Soviet Red Army attacks Kharkov, Ukraine with the aid of 1,500 tanks and 1,000 aircraft but German intelligence alerts the Axis to the campaign.

Facing nearly 300,000 casualties and gaining little traction, the Soviets are forced to concede.

Battle of Midway

June 4-7, 1942



In one of America's most important World War II naval wins, American intelligence is able to break codes to thwart a Japanese attack on the US. at Midway Island in the Pacific Ocean.

With Japan focused on Midway, U.S. forces, including dive bombers, attack, sinking four of Japan's aircraft carriers and the victory serves as a turning point in the conflict.

As a result of the U.S. victory in the Battle of Midway, Japan abandoned its plan to expand its reach in the Pacific and would remain on the defensive for the remainder of World War II.

Battle of the Guadalcanal Campaign

August 7, 1942 to February 9, 1943



Weeks after Japan begins building a strategic airfield on Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands in the South Pacific Ocean, U.S. forces launch a surprise attack, taking control of the airfield and forcing the Japanese into initial retreat.

But with reinforcements arriving, hand-to-hand jungle combat follows with Japan finally retreating six months later, with 31,000 casualties and the loss of 38 ships. The Allies lose 29 ships and 7,100 soldiers.

Along with the battles at Milne Bay and Buna-Gona, the Guadalcanal campaign marked the Allies' transition from defensive operations to offensive ones and effectively allowed them to seize the strategic initiative in the Pacific theater from the Japanese.

Battle of Stalingrad

August 23, 1942 to February 2, 1943



In a conflict that marks the war's outcome tipping in the favor of the Allies, the Red Army defends the Russian city of Stalingrad from German attack, bringing an end to the Axis's eastern Europe advances and handing it its first decisive defeat.

One of the longest, biggest and deadliest battles of the war, it ends with close to 2 million casualties, including civilians, with brutal winter weather and a Russian blockade causing many Germans to starve to death.

Operation Torch

November 8-16, 1942



The Allies invade French North Africa in an attempt to draw the Axis away from Soviet attacks on the Eastern Front and gain control of the Mediterranean shipping lanes.

Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower leads attacks on Oran, Algiers and Casablanca before advancing on Tunis and causing the Vichy French to realign with the Allies. The victory is touted by Winston Churchill as the "end of the beginning."

It was the first mass involvement of US troops in the European–North African Theatre and saw the first large-scale airborne assault carried out by the United States.

Battle of Kursk

July 5 to August 23, 1943



Military history's largest tank battle takes place on the Eastern Front involving an estimated 6,000 tanks, 4,000 aircraft and 2 million soldiers.

In its last blitzkrieg offensive, Germany attacks the Red Army near Kursk, Russia, but due to delays and the cracking of the German Wehrmacht code, the Soviets are prepared and keep Hitler from conquering Russia.

Battle of Monte Cassino

January 17 to May 18, 1944



Advancing in Italy toward Rome, the Allies attack the Gustav Line, held by the Axis, at the mountain town of Monte Cassino, home to a Benedictine abbey dating to 524 A.D.

Evacuated by the Germans, both sides tell the Vatican it will not be attacked or used in military operations.

However, in a bomber attack by the Allies, the abbey is destroyed, leading to public outcry and, post-bombing, as shelter for the Nazis.

Polish troops capture the abbey on May 18, leading the way for the Allied capture of Rome soon after.

Battle of Anzio

January 22 to June 5, 1944



Attempting to liberate Italy, the Allies land at Anzio, catching the Germans by surprise and quickly securing a beachhead during Operation Shingle.

However, continued Axis resistance and counter-attacks ensue, resulting in a stalemate that doesn't end until the fall of Rome.

It's seen as a failure for the Allies, although it does keep German troops from moving to France in the days before the invasion at Normandy.

Battle of the Philippine Sea

June 19-20, 1944



Japan attacks Allied forces who have advanced in the Pacific Theater to the Marianas Islands in the war's largest aircraft carrier battle.

Prepared for the strike, the United States launches a stunning counter-attack, and the battle is later called the "Marianas Turkey Shoot" due to minimal U.S. casualties and the Japanese losing some 600 aircraft, two oilers and three carriers.

Battle of Normandy

June 6 to August 30, 1944



American, British and Canadian troops storm five beaches at Normandy France June 6, known as D-Day, waging one of military history's largest water invasions.

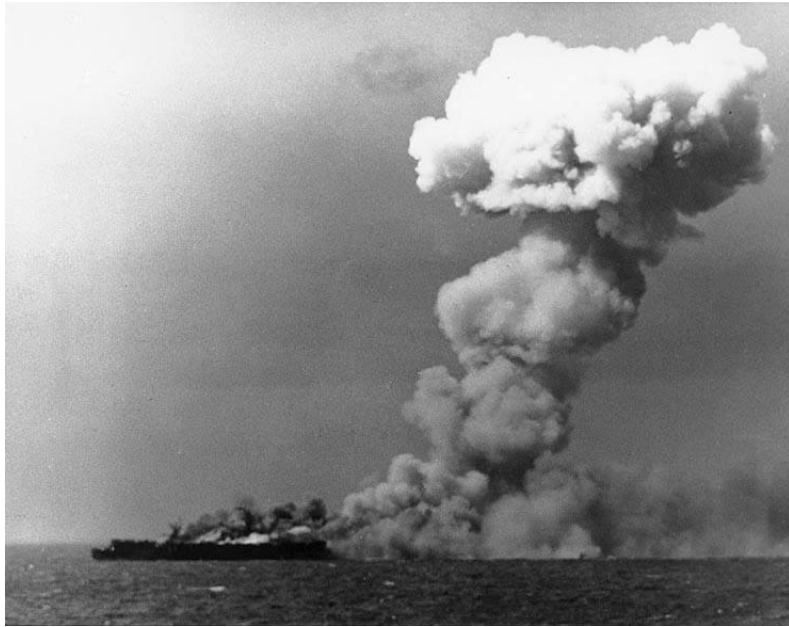
The amphibious assault—codenamed Operation Overlord—landed some 156,000 Allied soldiers on the beaches of Normandy by the end of the day.

At Omaha Beach, more than 2,000 American casualties are suffered with some 4,000 deaths that day.

But by June 11, the beaches are secured, and 325,000-plus forces have landed. The Allies begin their advance across Normandy, eventually liberating Paris.

Battle of Leyte Gulf

October 23-26, 1944



In World War II's largest naval battle, the Allies invade the Philippines to retake the commonwealth and create a Southeast Asian blockade.

In a counter-attack, Japan deploys its first kamikaze, or suicide, bombers.

Despite heavy U.S. casualties—more than 23,000 U.S. soldiers and sailors are killed—Japan suffers nearly 420,000 casualties and the conflict serves to cripple most of Japan's surface fleet, giving the Allies command of the Pacific.

Battle of the Bulge

December 16, 1944 to January 25, 1945



Fought in brutal, frigid winter conditions, Hitler's forces launch a surprise, last-ditch counter-attack, in an attempt to split the line of the Allies on the Western Front at the forested region of Ardennes in Belgium and Luxembourg.

The battle becomes known as Battle of the Bulge, because the Germans created a "bulge" around the area of the Ardennes in pushing through the American defensive line.

After early German success, the Allies regain their positions thanks, in part, to reinforcements and an eventual Christmas Day airstrike once the weather clears.

The Allies win (German casualties, number 100,000-plus and American casualties are estimated to be 81,000) and continue their advance toward Berlin.

Battle of Iwo Jima

February 19 to March 26, 1945



Fought 660 miles south of Tokyo, U.S. Marines invade the volcanic island of Iwo Jima seeking a strategic staging area for a possible attack on Japan's mainland.

Weeks of bloody battle follow and while the Americans eventually gain control, 7,000 Marines are killed, with 20,000 wounded. All but 216 of 18,000 Japanese soldiers are killed.

The island later serves as an emergency landing sight for B-29 bombers.

Battle of Berlin

April 16 to May 2, 1945



Soviet forces, with support from American and British aircraft, launch an offensive against the German capital of Berlin in one of World War II's final major battles.

As the Red Army encircles the city, capturing Gestapo headquarters, Hitler commits suicide April 30 in the Führerbunker and Germany surrenders a few days later, essentially ending the war.

Battle of Okinawa

April 1 to June 22, 1945



World War II's final major battle—and one of the war's bloodiest—begins Easter Sunday as U.S. Army and Marine forces invade Okinawa in the Ryukyus island chain southwest of Japan.

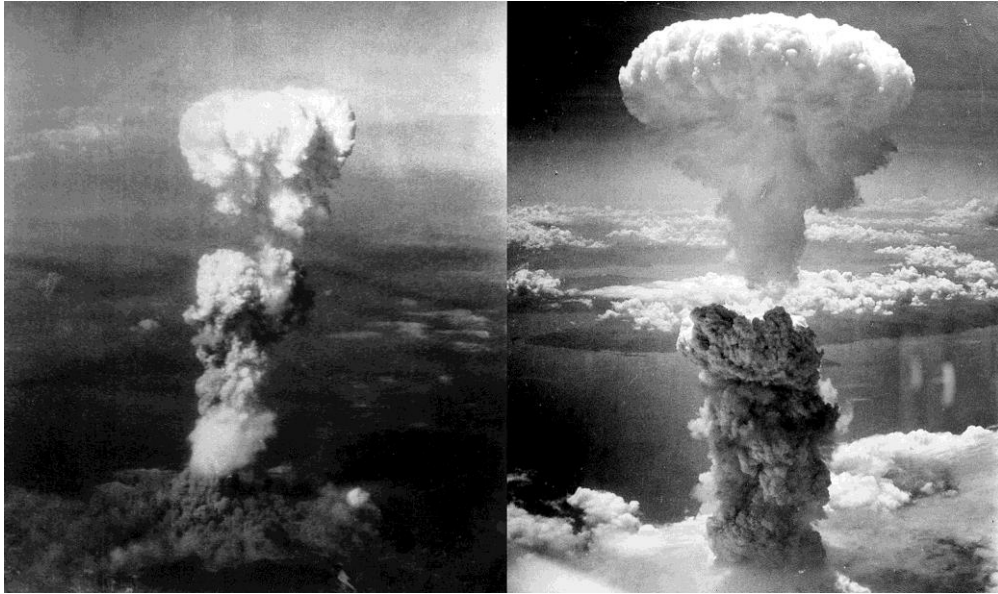
The orders were to take the island to execute air strikes against Japan and create a blockade.

Counter-striking with kamikaze attacks, the Japanese sink 26 Allied ships and damage nearly 170 more, causing more than 12,000 American deaths over the three-month battle.

Overpowered by the Americans, many surviving Japanese kill themselves rather than surrender. In the end, more than 100,000 Japanese are killed, along with 150,000 civilians.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki

August 6 & 9, 1945



On 6 and 9 August 1945, the United States detonated two atomic bombs over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The bombings killed between 129,000 and 226,000 people, most of whom were civilians, and remain the only use of nuclear weapons in an armed conflict.

Japan surrendered to the Allies on 15 August, six days after the bombing of Nagasaki and the Soviet Union's declaration of war against Japan and invasion of Japanese-occupied Manchuria.

The Japanese government signed the instrument of surrender on 2 September, effectively ending the war.