The War That Changed The World℠



THE NATIONAL
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Introduction

In the United States, World War II began on a sleepy December Sunday morning in 1941, in a tropical paradise called Pearl Harbor. For much of the world, the war had been raging since as early as 1931 when Imperial Japan invaded Manchuria in an attempt to gain territory. Japan continued its aggression when, in 1937, Japanese troops invaded China. The fighting in Asia began a bloody conflict that would rage until 1945.



Adolf Hitler in Paris, France on June 23, 1940.

In Europe, Germany swelled with a renewed sense of national pride as a new leader took power in 1933. Adolf Hitler helped to propel Germany from a post World War I shell of her former self to a powerful and well-armed nation in matter of a few years. In 1935, Hitler announced that the German Army would expand to a force of 500,000 men, an open violation of the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I. In 1936, Hitler ordered the German Wehrmacht to occupy the Rhineland, and in 1938, Germany annexed Austria. Political tensions further rose in Europe as Hitler demanded and secured the annexation of the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia. In September 1938, the Munich Agreement was signed by Germany, England and France, stating that Hitler and Germany would seek no further territorial annexations or occupations. In March of 1939, Hitler violated the Munich Agreement and moved troops into Czechoslovakia. By the late summer of 1939, Europe teetered on the brink of war.



A German Army grenadier prepares to throw a grenade at a Polish emplacement in 1939.

On September 1, 1939, World War II officially began with the German invasion of Poland. As a result of the German agression, Britain and France declared war on Germany. A series of stunning German victories left the free world amazed when in April and June of 1940, Germany conquered Denmark and Norway. The major German assault on Western Europe began on May 10, 1940, when the forces of the Third Reich invaded Luxembourg. On May 15, the Dutch Army surrendered, on May 28, Belgium surrendered and finally on June 22, 1940, France surrendered to Germany. The Third Reich would strike at Britain through the air during The Battle of Britain, but never invaded. Throughout all of the political negotiations of the late 30's and the European conflict, the United States remained neutral. The United States supported Britain and her Allies through the donation of food, equipment and war supplies, although as yet, no US combat troops had been committed to war.



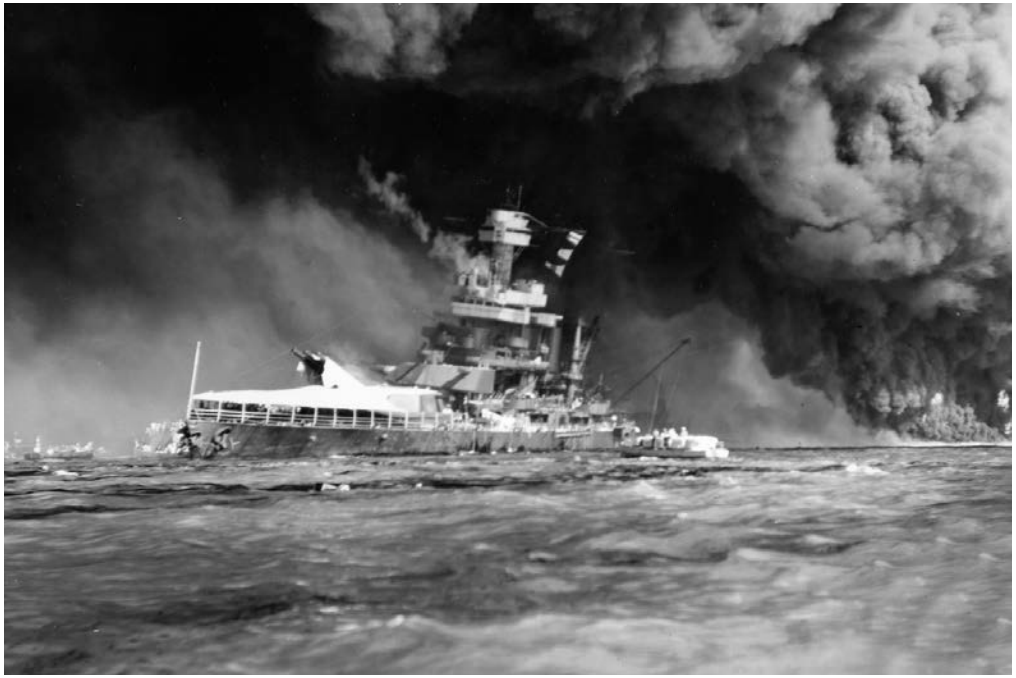
This terrified baby was almost the only human being alive in Shanghai's South Station after a brutal Japanese attack on August 28, 1937.

By the fall of 1941, Germany had attacked and captured the Balkans and invaded the Soviet Union. The free world gave the Russians but a few months to survive as a nation. In the Pacific, Japan continued her war against China. As a result of that war and actions against US vessels, including the sinking of the USS *Panay*, the United States enforced an oil embargo on Japan. Japan relied on the United States for over 80 percent of her oil and saw the embargo as an act of war. After negotiations to lift the embargo failed and talks of peace seemed hollow, Japan felt it had no choice but to go to war with America. On November 26, 1941, Japan's Imperial Navy weighed anchor and set sail for Pearl Harbor and the beginning of World War II for the United States.

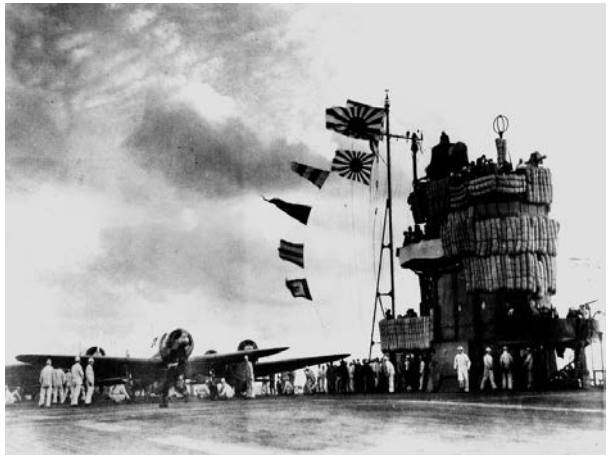
This book is a photographic timeline of World War II from the American perspective. Some of the images that are contained in this publication are iconic and well-known; the majority are seldom seen but also powerful. Collected from the US National Archives and Records Administration, unless otherwise noted, these images represent the World War II experience of the American service man and woman.



In an image taken from a Japanese level bomber, Battleship Row lies burning and leaking oil in the early stages of the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.



USS *California* (BB-44) sinks in the shallow waters of Pearl Harbor following a torpedo attack by Japanese carrier aircraft.



Japanese aircraft begin to launch from the deck of the Imperial Navy aircraft carrier *Akagi* for the attack on Pearl Harbor.

DECEMBER 1941

At 7:55 am on Sunday, December 7, 1941, Japanese naval air forces attacked the US Pacific Fleet anchored at Pearl Harbor, T.H. and six air fields on the island of Oahu. The Japanese achieved complete surprise and succeeded in sinking or damaging twenty-one ships and service craft, including all eight battleships present, as well as destroying or damaging 330 aircraft. The human toll was staggering – nearly 3,600 killed or wounded, almost one hundred of whom were civilians.

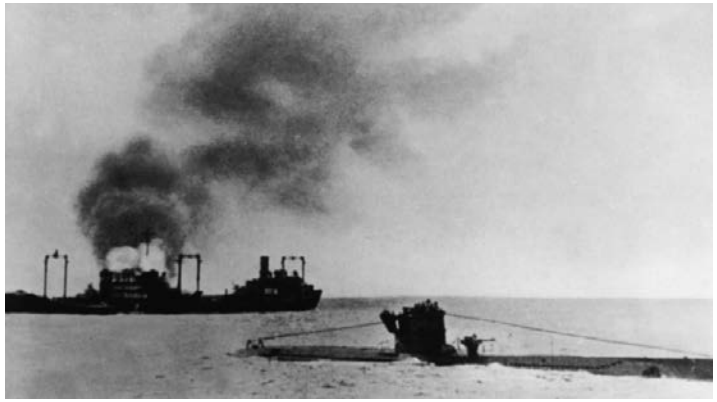


USS *Downes* (left) and USS *Cassin* (right) lie wrecked in the dry dock at Pearl Harbor following the Japanese attack on December 7, 1941. Astern is the USS *Pennsylvania*.

Even though the Pearl Harbor attack caused horrific damage and loss of life, the Japanese failed to destroy the US Pacific Fleet's aircraft carriers, which, at the time of the attack, were still at sea after delivering aircraft to Midway and Wake Island. The survival of those carriers allowed the US to remain in the fight. The attack on Pearl Harbor, which the Japanese hoped would bring the United States to the negotiating table, instead became the opening round of forty-four months of brutal fighting, the likes of which the world had never seen.



Wreckage and explosions at NAS Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.



German U-boat offensive on the US East Coast begins on January 26, 1941. A German U-boat, U-442, eases away from her victim in the North Atlantic.



At the Colorado River Relocation Center in Poston, Arizona, the Hirano family, George, Hisa and Yasebi, holds a picture of their son who is serving in the US Army.

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1942

After being attacked in the Pacific at Pearl Harbor the previous month, the US was attacked from the Atlantic in January of 1942. The German Kriegsmarine launched its own attack against the US as U-boats relentlessly hunted any US ship along the Eastern Seaboard, with devastating results. In February, as a result of rampant fears of a Japanese invasion on the West Coast and possible spies, Japanese-American families were rounded up and relocated to camps in desolate parts of the country in an action approved of by the US Government.

JANUARY 13, 1942 – *First US troops arrive in Britain.*

FEBRUARY 20, 1942 – *US Navy Lt. Edward "Butch" O'Hare becomes first US Ace.*

FEBRUARY 27, 1942 – *Battle of the Java Sea*



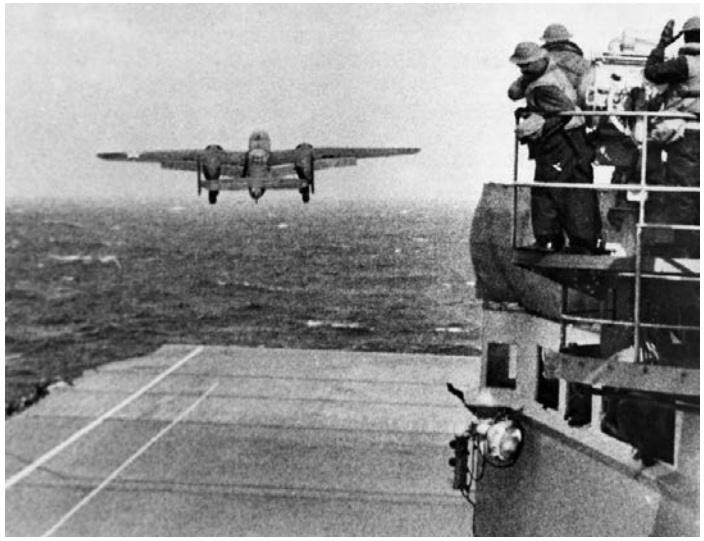
Internment of Japanese-Americans begins on February 25, 1942. These young people of Japanese ancestry are awaiting their turn for baggage inspection upon arrival at this assembly center in Turlock, California.



General Douglas MacArthur is ordered out of the Philippines on March 11, 1942.

March-April 1942

In March, General Douglas MacArthur was ordered out of the Philippines as Japanese forces closed in. Beginning on April 9, after the surrender of American forces on the Bataan Peninsula, the Japanese forced their newly captured prisoners to march some sixty miles to their new POW camp home. Thousands of POWs died of disease, hunger or execution by the Japanese en route. However, Army Col. Jimmy Doolittle and his sixteen Raiders lifted sagging American morale with their bombing of Tokyo on April 18.



Doolittle Raid begins on April 18, 1942. Colonel Jimmy Doolittle lifts off the flight deck of the USS *Hornet* on his way to bomb Tokyo.



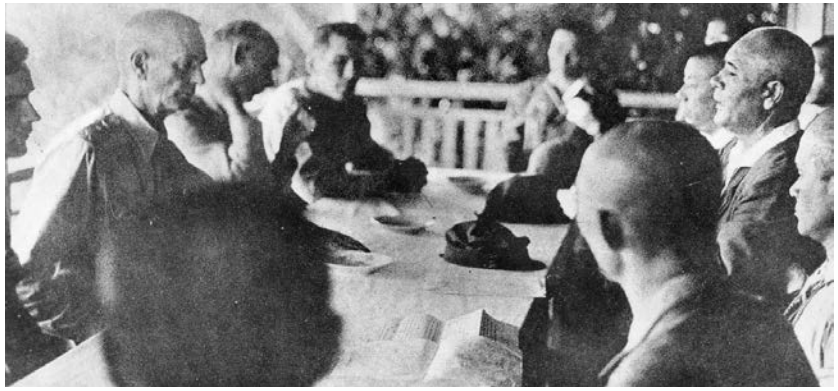
Bataan Death March begins on April 9, 1942. American prisoners of war glare at their Japanese captors during the Bataan Death March.



USS *Hornet* (CV-8) launches Army Colonel Jimmy Doolittle and his B-25s for the first American raid on Tokyo on April 18, 1942.



Japanese soldiers guard their American and Filipino prisoners during the infamous Bataan Death March in April 1942.



The Fall of the Philippines on May 6, 1942. In this captured Japanese image, US General Wainwright surrenders to Japanese General Homa, effectively ending the Philippine Campaign.



The Battle of the Coral Sea is fought May 4-8, 1942. The Japanese aircraft carrier *Shoho* burns fiercely after being struck by several bombs and torpedoes. The attack was made by US Navy dive bomber and torpedo squadrons from the carriers *Yorktown* and *Lexington*.



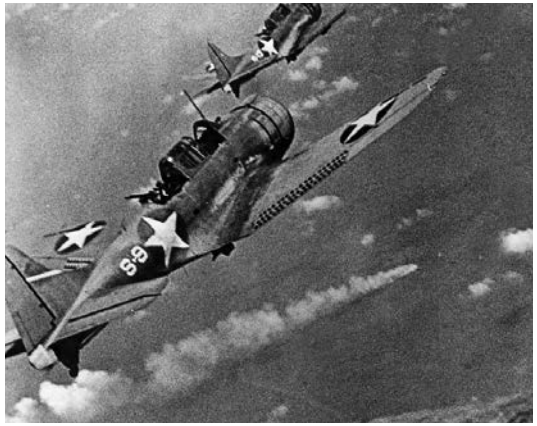
USS *Lexington* (CV-2) burns uncontrollably after internal fuel vapor explosions doomed the ship. The gallant carrier had sustained several enemy hits during the two day Battle of the Coral Sea on May 8, 1942.

May 1942

The war in the Pacific continued to rage and bad news struck home once again when, on May 6, the hard-fought but hopelessly outnumbered garrison in the Philippines officially surrendered. On May 4, the Battle of Coral Sea began. In the world's first aircraft carrier battle, the US Navy sank the Japanese light carrier *Shoho* on May 7. On May 8, the Navy inflicted heavy damage on the Japanese carrier *Shokaku* but lost the carrier *Lexington* while the carrier *Yorktown* suffered heavy damage. Despite this, the US Navy won a strategic victory as it repelled the Imperial Japanese Navy for the first time in the war.



Japanese troops invade the Aleutian islands of Attu and Kiska on June 7, 1942. Dutch Harbor, Alaska burns after a Japanese aerial attack on June 4, 1942.



SBD Dauntless dive bombers from Scouting Squadron 8 (VS-8) fly over the smoking Japanese cruiser *Mikuma* during the closing stages of the Battle of Midway on June 7, 1942.



The Battle of Midway is fought June 4-7, 1942. USS *Yorktown* (CV-5) is smoking after taking a bomb hit amidships on June 4, 1942.



The Imperial Japanese aircraft carrier *Hiryu* lies smoking and dead in the water following US Navy SBD Dauntless Dive Bomber strikes on June 4, 1942 at the Battle of Midway.



USS *Yorktown* attempts to maneuver but is struck by a Japanese torpedo during an air attack during the Battle of Midway on June 4, 1942.

June 1942

On June 3, Dutch Harbor, Alaska was attacked by Japanese aircraft. Japanese troops invaded Attu and Kiska shortly thereafter on June 6-7. On June 4, two American aircraft carrier Task Forces consisting of the carriers *Enterprise*, *Yorktown* and *Hornet* ambushed a Japanese Navy carrier task force off the coast of Midway Island. In what is called the "turning point of the Pacific War" the greatly outnumbered US Navy sank the four Japanese fleet carriers *Akagi*, *Kaga*, *Soryu* and *Hiryu* while losing the valiant carrier *Yorktown*. The incredible victory at Midway granted the US time to build its arsenal of democracy and begin to take the fight to Japan.



US Army Air Force flies first combat missions in Europe on July 4, 1942. An Eighth Air Force B-17E comes in for a landing at an airbase in England after attacking targets in Europe in July 1942.



The Battle of the Eastern Solomons is fought August 24-25, 1942. A Japanese bomb explodes on the flight deck of the USS *Enterprise* in the afternoon of August 24, 1942.

JULY-AUGUST 1942

On Independence Day of 1942, the US Army Air Force launched its first combat missions against targets on mainland Europe from the English base at Molesworth. On August 7, the first ground offensive of the war began when the 1st Marine Division landed at Guadalcanal in the South Pacific. The Guadalcanal Campaign would be a long and bloody one that hung in the balance for months. The campaign encompassed all facets of warfare, including ground, air, carrier and surface naval battles.

AUGUST 8-9, 1942 – ***Battle of Savo Island***



US Marines land on Guadalcanal on August 7, 1942. A patrol of marines from the 1st Marine Division pauses for a moment in the Tenaru River.



The rising sun reveals the corpses of Japanese soldiers of the Ichiki Battalion where they fell at the mouth of the Tenaru River on Guadalcanal after an all-night battle with men of the 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Division on August 21, 1942.



Marines of the 1st Marine Division carry a wounded comrade to safety on Guadalcanal in August 1942.



USS *Enterprise* (CV-6) conducts flight operations during the Battle of the Eastern Solomons on August 24, 1942.



The Battle of Bloody Ridge is fought on Guadalcanal on September 10, 1942. This ridge cost the Japanese 600 lives in attempts to dislodge Marine Raiders entrenched there during the night of September 10, 1942.



Two marines of the 1st Raider Battalion sit near their fighting position on Bloody Ridge on Guadalcanal.



A 100th Infantry Battalion sergeant holds his general's uniform shortly after the unit was activated on October 12, 1942.

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1942

On September 12-14, in a major offensive, the Japanese attacked entrenched Marine Raiders and Paratroopers atop a ridge near Henderson Field on Guadalcanal. Despite repeated vicious attacks and hand-to-hand combat, the marines held their ground atop aptly renamed "Bloody Ridge". The seas around Guadalcanal were anything but quiet as yet another carrier battle took place on October 26. Although a tactical victory for the Japanese, Santa Cruz did not stop the US Navy from prowling the waters off Guadalcanal. Back home in the US the Japanese-American 100th Infantry Battalion was activated.



USS *Enterprise* (CV-6) under attack from Japanese aircraft at the Battle of Santa Cruz on October 26, 1942.



Operation Torch, the Allied invasion of North Africa, begins on November 8, 1942. US infantrymen land on the coast of French Morocco.



USS Juneau (CL-52) is sunk on November 12, 1942. The Sullivan brothers Joseph, Frank, Albert, Matt and George aboard the cruiser Juneau prior to her sinking and their deaths.



Gasoline rationing begins on December 1, 1942. Rationed automobile tires are stacked up at a filling station in rural Indiana.



Harvesting bumper crop for Uncle Sam: Rita Hayworth sacrificed her bumpers for the duration.

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1942

American forces landed in North Africa on November 8 as part of Operation Torch, thereby launching the first American ground offensive against German troops. In the Pacific, the Guadalcanal Campaign continued to rage on land and on sea as the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal took place November 12-15. On November 12, the cruiser *Juneau* was sunk by Japanese surface units, resulting in the loss of the five Sullivan brothers. Back home in the US, personal automobile travel took a hit as gasoline rationing began in full force.



US troops capture Buna, New Guinea on January 2, 1943. Four American riflemen scout Japanese positions along the Giruwa River at Sananada, near Buna-Gona in January 1943.

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1943

On January 2, 1943, elements of the US Army's 41st Infantry Division succeeded in capturing Buna Mission in Papua, New Guinea. The capture of Buna was a major step in removing the Japanese threat to Australia.

JANUARY 27, 1943 – ***First "all US" bombing raid over Germany***

On February 9, Guadalcanal was declared secure after six months of bloody fighting. On February 13, the Battle of Kasserine Pass began in North Africa. The subsequent fighting would result in the routing of American forces at the pass in Tunisia.



On February 9, 1943, the island of Guadalcanal was declared secured. US Marines leaving Guadalcanal.



A US military cemetary on Guadalcanal.



The Battle for the Kasserine Pass begins on February 13, 1943. Soldiers of the 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division moving through the Kasserine Pass and on to Kasserine and Farriana, Tunisia.



A tank destroyer from Co. A, 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion moves through the Maknassy Pass in Tunisia. On March 23, 1943, US armored forces defeated German units at El Guettar.



American tank pulling a half-track over a river bed near Sidi Bou Zid, North Africa.



German Africa Corps and Italian troops in North Africa surrender to the Allies on May 13, 1943. German and Italian POWs await transportation to prison camps following the Axis surrender in North Africa on May 13, 1943.



On May 29-30, 1943, the remaining Japanese troops on Attu launched a final attack in an attempt to fight their way to the sea and escape. Following the failed attack, hundreds of Japanese soldiers committed mass suicide.

MARCH-MAY 1943

On March 23, 1943, armored units of the US II Corps under Maj. Gen. George S. Patton defeated German forces at the Tunisian city of El Guettar. Nearly two months later, on May 13, what remained of the German Africa Corps and Italian Army in North Africa surrendered to the Allies.

MARCH 2-4, 1943 – *Battle of the Bismarck Sea*

In the Pacific, the US 7th Infantry Division landed on the Aleutian island of Attu on May 11, 1943. Attu was secured on May 30, ending the first enemy occupation of American soil since the War of 1812.



Operation Husky, the Allied invasion of Sicily, begins on July 10, 1943. American soldiers march through the city of Carleone, Sicily immediately after its capture.



An American M1917 machine gun crew holds a vital position just outside of Palermo, Sicily on July 21, 1943.



Sixty US bombers are lost during the Schweinfurt/Regensburg Raid on August 17, 1943. A B-17 Flying Fortress drops its bomb load as another goes down after being hit by ground fire.



Vapor trails follow B-17F Flying Fortress bombers of the US Eighth Air Force en route to targets in Germany.

JUNE-AUGUST 1943

The Allied invasion of Sicily began on July 10, 1943. Thirty-eight days later, the island was secured and became the first Axis territory to fall to the Allies.

JUNE 20, 1943 – *Operation Cartwheel*

JULY 22, 1943 – *Fall of Palermo*

On August 17, bombers of the US Eighth Air Force attacked the German cities of Schweinfurt and Regensburg. The cost was high: sixty of the attacking bombers were lost and many more were damaged beyond repair.



US troops land at Salerno, Italy on September 9, 1943.



The Battle of Tarawa is fought November 20-23, 1943. Two US Marines carry a wounded comrade during the three day battle for the island of Tarawa.



US Marines move forward on the island of Tarawa.



US Marines land on Bougainville on November 1, 1943. American infantrymen from F Company, 2nd Battalion, 129th Infantry Regiment, 37th Infantry Division move cautiously through a jungle on Bougainville supported by tanks.

SEPTEMBER-NOVEMBER 1943

On September 9, American forces came ashore at Salerno, Italy. The subsequent fighting in what Winston Churchill referred to as "the soft underbelly of Europe" would continue until the German surrender in May 1945.

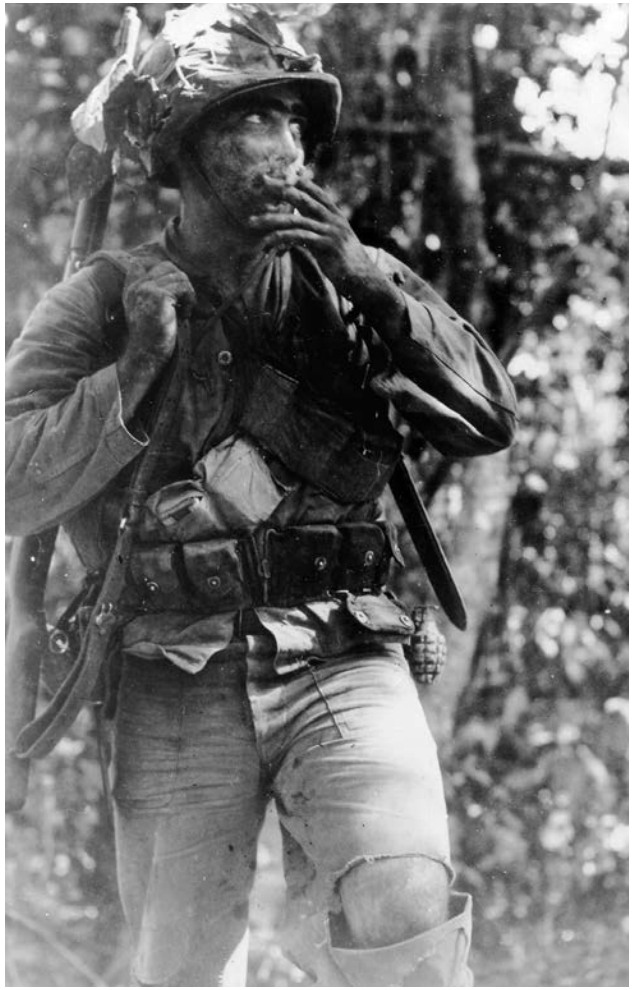
SEPTEMBER 3, 1943 – *Italy surrenders to the Allies*

On November 1, the 3rd Marine Division landed at Cape Torokina on Bougainville, beginning a campaign that would continue until August 25, 1945. On November 20, the 2nd Marine Division landed on Tarawa, securing it after suffering nearly 3,300 casualties in three days of intense fighting.

NOVEMBER 28, 1943 – *Tehran Conference*



An American infantryman fires his rifle at Japanese troops on Bougainville. US Marines had landed on Bougainville on November 1.



US Marines land at Cape Gloucester, New Britain on December 26, 1943. A marine of the 1st Marine Division smokes a cigarette before returning to the front line on Cape Gloucester.



Exhausted marines of the 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division are trucked off of Hill 660 after intense combat on Cape Gloucester, New Britain in December 1943.



George Miller of the 7th Marines trudges through the mud on Cape Gloucester with his M1917 .30-cal. machine gun over his shoulder.

DECEMBER 1943

On December 26, the 1st Marine Division landed at Cape Gloucester, New Britain. By the time the area was declared secure in April 1944, nearly 1,400 Americans had been killed or wounded.

On the other side of the globe, American General Dwight D. Eisenhower was appointed Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe on December 24, 1943.

On December 24, 1943, US Army General Dwight David Eisenhower is appointed Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe.





Marines of the 1st Marine Division land at Cape Gloucester, New Britain on December 26, 1943.



Battle of Monte Cassino begins on January 4, 1944. Two US soldiers draw a bead on German snipers in the ruins of an Italian village near Monte Cassino, Italy.



American artilery fires at night on the German positions around Monte Cassino.



The monastery at Monte Cassino still stands as artillery and bombs explode around it in January 1944.



Operation Shingle, the Allied landings at Anzio, Italy, begins on January 22, 1944. M4 Sherman tanks are unloaded from LSTs and head into the fight at the Anzio beachhead.



Men of the 1st Special Service Force return fire at German soldiers near Anzio.



A forward observer watches artillery strikes landing at the monastery near Monte Cassino in March 1944.



A soldier fires his M1 Garand rifle at Germans near Anzio.

January-May 1944

On January 17, Allied forces fighting in Italy began their assault on the town of Monte Cassino. The attack soon bogged down in the face of fierce enemy resistance. On January 22, in an attempt to alleviate some of the pressure on the Cassino front, Allied forces landed near the Italian resort towns of Anzio and Nettuno. The landing's desired effect did not materialize and the stalemates at Monte Cassino and Anzio continued until May.

January 31, 1944 – *US troops land on Kwajalein*

February 15, 1944 – *Allied bombers destroy abbey atop Monte Cassino*

May 18, 1944 – *Battle of Monte Cassino ends*

May 23, 1944 – *Allied breakout of the Anzio Beachhead/Drive to Rome begins*

May 1944 – *Intensive Allied bombing raids in preparation for D-Day*

June 1944

On June 5, Allied forces, having broken out of the Anzio Beachhead, liberated Rome. The Allied entry into "The Eternal City" was a vital victory in the Italian campaign. Rome was the first Axis capital to fall to the Allies during WWII.

On June 6, Allied forces landed on the beaches of Normandy. The Normandy invasion was the largest amphibious operation ever undertaken. The assault forces consisted of roughly 5,000 ships and landing craft, 11,000 aircraft, and almost 200,000 military and civilian personnel. Though the casualties were high, the Allies had a foothold in France from which the drive to Berlin would begin.



Rome falls to the Allies on June 5, 1944. American soldiers ride tank destroyers as they pass crowds and the Colosseum immediately after the Liberation of Rome on June 5, 1944.



Operation Overlord, the D-Day landings in Normandy, occurs on June 6, 1944. American soldiers under heavy enemy fire leave the ramp of a Coast Guard LCVP on the coast of Normandy on June 6, 1944.



LSTs unload equipment and troops along the Normandy shore immediately following the sucessful landings on June 6, 1944.



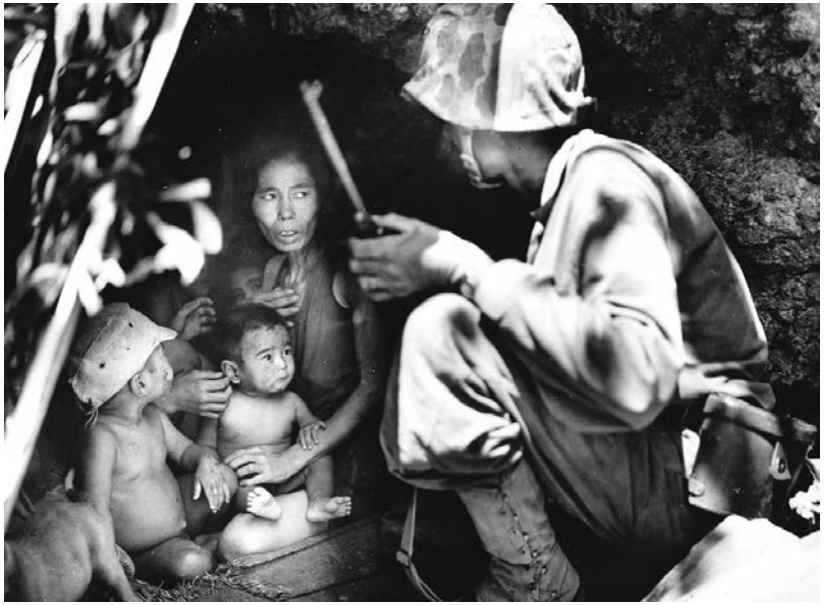
A machine gun crew from the 2nd Ranger Battalion sets up and fires at the defending Germans in Normandy, France.



American paratroopers proudly display a captured German flag in the Normandy town of St. Come du Mont.



US Marines land on Saipan on June 15, 1944.



A US Marine attempts to speak to a Japanese family hiding on Saipan. The family took shelter from the fierce fighting around their village.

June 1944

In the Pacific, on June 15, American forces landed on the island of Saipan, the first Japanese territory to be seized by the Allies. Four days later, on June 19, US Navy pilots engaged Japanese carrier and land based aircraft in what would become the most one-sided air battle of the war. The Battle of the Philippine Sea cost the Imperial Japanese Navy roughly five hundred planes and their aircrews for an American loss of fewer than three dozen planes. The following day, US Naval aviators tracked down and sank three of the five Japanese aircraft carriers involved in the battle.



A US Marine armed with a Browning Automatic Rifle advances cautiously through the debris of a village on Saipan.



Marines pay their respects to their fallen comrades after fierce action on the island of Saipan in June 1944.



As seen from the rear seat of an SBD Dauntless dive bomber, the USS *Enterprise* (CV-6) makes flank speed while launching aircraft.



Navy Ace Alex Vraciu flashes six fingers for the six Japanese planes he downed in one mission during the Battle of the Philippine Sea on June 19, 1944.



The Battle of the Philippine Sea is fought June 19-20, 1944. An SBD Dauntless dive bomber warms up its engine on the flight deck of USS *Enterprise*.



A Japanese ship is struck by bombs during the evening raid on the Japanese fleet during the Battle of the Philippine Sea on June 20, 1944.

July 1944

US soldiers and marines liberated the former US territory of Guam in the Mariana Islands after thirty-one months of brutal Japanese occupation. Three days after landing on Guam, marines landed on nearby Tinian and secured it after an eight-day battle. In Europe, the US Army finally succeeded in breaking out of the Normandy Beachhead during Operation Cobra. Bolstered by massive Allied air attacks, American units smashed through German lines near St. Lo and rapidly advanced behind the retreating Germans.



Operation Cobra, the Allied breakout from the Normandy Beachhead, occurs on July 25, 1944. An M4 Sherman tank fires its main gun at a German target near St. Lo as part of Operation Cobra.



US troops land on Guam on July 21, 1944. A 37mm anti-tank gun from the 77th Infantry Division prepares to fire on Guam on July 25, 1944.



B Company of the 305th Infantry Regiment, 77th Infantry Division moves to the front on Guam.



US Marines land on Tinian on July 24, 1944. Marines of the 4th Marine Division ignite a Japanese cave with a flamethrower on Tinian on July 25, 1944.

AUGUST 1944

Three US Infantry divisions, a Free French Armored unit and several Allied airborne units landed in Southern France as part of Operation Dragoon on August 15. German resistance was relatively weak. Ten days after the landings in Southern France, the free world rejoiced as "The City of Light," Paris, was liberated by the 2nd French Armored Division and the US 4th Infantry Division on August 25.

AUGUST 14, 1944 – *Allies close the Falaise Gap*

AUGUST 15, 1944 – *Fighting on the Gothic Line begins*



Soldiers of the US 15th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division offload from an LCI near St. Tropez during the opening stages of Operation Dragoon on August 15, 1944.



Operation Dragoon, the Allied landings in Southern France, occurs on August 15, 1944. American paratroopers move along a dusty country road near LeMuy en route to their objective on August 15, 1944, D-Day in Southern France.



Paris, France is liberated on August 25, 1944. The US 28th Infantry Division marches down the Champs Elysées in Paris on August 29, 1944.



US Marines land on Peleliu on September 15, 1944. The strain of combat shows on the face of a marine on Peleliu.



American paratroopers drop from troop carrier planes near Grave, Holland on September 23, 1944, during Operation Market Garden.



Operation Market Garden, the Allied invasion of Holland, occurs on September 17, 1944. A wounded American paratrooper in Holland during Operation Market-Garden.

September 1944

In the Pacific, the 1st Marine Division landed at Peleliu on September 15. Landing amidst incredibly heavy fire and brutal equatorial heat, the marines struggled to push inland against a camouflaged and heavily entrenched enemy. To help the operation, the 81st Infantry landed on September 23. The brutal fighting was supposed to last four days – it lasted over two months. In Europe, the Allied airborne invasion of Holland, Operation Market-Garden, took place. Initially it seemed a great success, but the British XXX Corps could not link up with their airborne counterparts at Arnhem and bogged down. As a result, the operation was cancelled on September 25 and the Germans emerged victorious.



Frank Pomroy from H Company, 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Divison rests after thirty-six hours of continuous combat on Peleliu in September 1944.



Aachen falls to US troops on October 20, 1944, making it the first major German city to be captured. An American rifleman in Aachen crouches behind a small knocked out German artillery piece.

OCTOBER 1944

On October 20, Douglas MacArthur returned to the Philippines as the largest amphibious operation to date in the Pacific theater began with the landings on Leyte. Three days later on October 23 the largest naval battle in history took place. The massive Battle of Leyte Gulf involved over 211 US vessels, including thirty-four aircraft carriers of various size and sixty-eight Japanese vessels. In the ensuing battle, the Japanese lost twenty-seven ships, whereas, the US Navy lost six ships. In Europe, the first major German city to fall, Aachen, surrendered to the American 1st and 30th Infantry Divisions after brutal house-to-house fighting that lasted for three weeks. To the west, the Battle of the Hurtgen Forest continued. The battle, which began in September, would grind on until February 1945. Over 30,000 US casualties were sustained in this often overlooked fierce battle.



The Battle of Leyte Gulf is fought on October 23, 1944. FM-2 Wildcat fighters prepare to launch from USS *Kitkun Bay* (CVE-71).



M10 tank destroyers on a muddy road as the Battle of Hurtgen Forest continues.



American soldiers hug the beach during the landings on the Philippine island of Leyte on October 20, 1944.



General Douglas MacArthur wades ashore on the island of Leyte on October 20, 1944.



USS *Gambier Bay* (CVE-73) is straddled by Japanese salvos during the Battle of Leyte Gulf on October 23, 1944.



American M10 tank destroyers of the 634th Tank Destroyer Battalion fire on enemy positions in the city of Aachen, Germany. Aachen fell on October 21, 1944, making it the first major German city to be captured.



Ragged and weary, infantrymen eat during a lull in the fighting in the Hurtgen Forest.

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The Battle of the Bulge begins on December 16, 1944. A heavily equipped Waffen SS Panzergrenadier of Kampfgruppe Hansen near Poteau, Belgium.

November-December 1944

November 24, 1944 – *First B-29 raids originating from Tinian bomb Tokyo*

November 1944 – *(all month) Kamikaze attacks*

At 5:30 am on December 16, the Germans began their surprise offensive Operation "Wacht Am Rhein" along an 80-mile front along the Belgian/German border in the Ardennes Forest. The Belgian port of Antwerp was the offensive's main objective. In the opening stages of the battle, German forces smashed through American defenses and pushed deep behind American lines, surrounding and capturing thousands of US soldiers. Despite this, isolated pockets of American resistance held out for days at a time, causing serious delays in the Germans' delicate timetable. Heavy snowstorms, fog and rain prevented Allied air power from coming to the aid of the infantry and armor on the ground and allowed the Germans to advance along the narrow Ardennes roads unmolested. In the north, the spearhead German unit, Kampfgruppe Peiper, advanced steadily towards Liege. In the center of the attack, the Germans captured St. Vith and advanced towards Bastogne. To the south, German units pushed through Luxembourg in an attempt to secure the flank of the offensive. On December 23, weather conditions improved and an Allied counterattack began. By December 24, the German advance was successfully stalled short of the Meuse River.



American infantrymen trudge through the snow past a white-washed M4 Sherman of the US 750th Tank Battalion in St Vith, Belgium during the Battle of the Bulge.



American riflemen of the 99th Infantry Division man a position outside Rocherath, Belgium during the Battle of the Bulge.

A German guard armed with a P-38 escorts US prisoners near the town of Lanzerath.





Waffen SS Panzergrenadiers of Kampfgruppe Hansen pass knocked out and burning American vehicles on the Poteau Road during the Battle of the Bulge.



Waffen-SS members of Kampfgruppe Knittel pause to consult their maps during the Battle of the Bulge.



American infantry make their way through the Ardennes Forest.

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January 1945

As a result of the American counterattack against the Bulge salient, the Germans launched another counterattack on January 1 in an attempt to regain momentum for "Wacht Am Rhein." The German attack failed and the Americans continued their advance through the German salient in the line. Despite bitterly cold temperatures and mounting American casualties, the counter offensive progressed successfully. On January 7, Hitler ordered the withdrawal of his forces from the Ardennes. The Battle of the Bulge, as it became known, was the largest land battle ever fought by the US Army. Over 89,000 US casualties were sustained during the monthlong battle that officially ended on January 25, 1945.



A snow-camouflaged Sherman tank moves down a snow-filled woodland path in the Ardennes Forest.



Young Waffen-SS soldiers surrender to American soldiers near the Belgian/ German border in January 1945.



The strain of combat shows on the face of a tired American soldier after heavy fighting in the Ardennes Forest.



A machine gun team mans its Browning 1919A4 light machine gun at their post at the edge of a woodline and awaits a German counterattack during the Battle of the Bulge.



2nd Division, 2nd Battalion, 9th Regiment soldier Cpl. Robert L. Brown of Cleveland, Ohio stops at a crucifix in Harperscheid, Germany.



US Marines land on Iwo Jima on February 19, 1945. A marine is pinned down inland on Iwo Jima on February 20, 1945.

February 1945

February 3, 1945 – *US forces enter Manila*

On February 19, the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions landed on the black sands of Iwo Jima. Marine casualties were horrendous and the floating reserve, the 3rd Marine Division, was needed urgently. The Japanese defenders were dug in and used an interconnecting series of tunnels to continuously attack the marines, even after pillboxes had been cleared. Flamethrowers, satchel charges and grenades became the weapons of choice to eliminate the Japanese and seal the pillboxes. Marine casualties were staggering as the battle wore on for a grinding thirty-six days. At the end of the battle over 26,000 marines were wounded or killed. Iwo Jima was the only battle in Marine Corps history in which US Marine casualties were higher than their enemy's. Of the over 18,000 Japanese troops on Iwo, only 216 were captured. The others were killed in combat.



Marines are pinned down under withering Japanese fire on the black sands of Iwo Jima on D-Day, February 19, 1945.



Two marine flamethrower men ignite a Japanese pillbox on Iwo Jima.

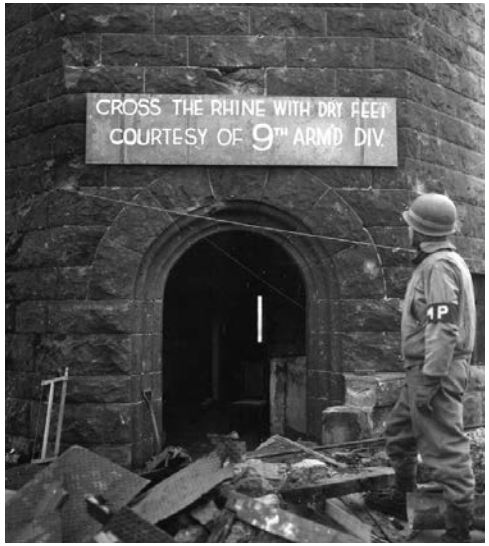


A marine helps his wounded buddy evacuate the front lines on Iwo Jima.



Marines of E-2-28 5th Marine Division raise the flag on Mount Suribachi, Iwo Jima. The men are (front left to right) Ira Hayes, Franklin Sousley, John Bradley and Harlon Block. The back two are Michael Strank and Rene Gagnon. *Credit: AP/Joe Rosenthal*

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The Remagen Bridge is captured by US troops on March 7, 1945. A sign erected by men of the 9th Armored Division greets all who cross the Ludendorf Bridge at Remagen.



B-29 heavy bombers rain incendiary bombs on a Japanese target in 1945.



B-29 heavy bombers fly in formation past Japan's legendary Mount Fuji enroute to bomb the Empire.



The Ludendorf Bridge across the Rhine River appears through a tunnel in the town of Remagen, Germany.

MARCH 1945

On March 7, American troops captured the Ludendorf Bridge at Remagen, Germany; the last surviving bridge across the Rhine River. Once American troops captured the bridge it allowed Allied forces to thrust deep into Germany's heartland. Ten days after its capture, the old railway bridge suddenly collapsed into the Rhine. By then, however, the Americans had already established a strong bridgehead and were driving deeper into Germany. Throughout the month of March in the Pacific, the strategic bombing campaign against Japan ramped up in intensity. B-29 heavy bombers rained destruction on Japanese cities almost daily, often attacking at night.



US troops land on Okinawa on April 1, 1945. A marine flamethrower and rifleman advance into the haze and smoke on Okinawa in May 1945.

April 1945

On April 1, soldiers and marines landed on Okinawa in the largest amphibious assault of the Pacific War. The battle would inevitably be the last major engagement of WWII, and, as such, would be one of the bloodiest. The battle stretched from the land into the sea and air as Japan unleashed the full fury of its kamikaze suicide squadrons. As a result of the kamikaze attacks, the US Navy had the highest death toll among Allied forces at Okinawa, losing over 4,000 men. Total US losses were over 62,000 with 12,000 killed. Japanese losses were astonishing at around 107,000 killed. Civilian casualties on Okinawa numbered around 142,000. Finally, after 82 days of brutal combat, Okinawa was declared secure. In Europe, the full horror of Nazi Germany was first revealed to American soldiers when they liberated their first concentration camp at Ohdruf. The site of the dead, emaciated bodies angered many American soldiers and further reinforced their will to defeat Nazi Germany.

April 5, 1945 – *Po Valley Campaign begins*

April 10, 1945 – *US troops liberate Buchenwald concentration camp*

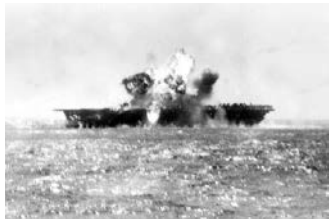
April 25, 1945 – *US and Russian forces link up at Torgau (Elbe River)*

April 29, 1945 – *US troops liberate Dachau concentration camp*

April 30, 1945 – *Adolf Hitler commits suicide*



A kamikaze slams into USS *LST-447* at Kerra Rhetto near Okinawa on April 6, 1945.



A Japanese kamikaze explodes as it hits the aircraft carrier USS *Essex* (CV-9).



The first concentration camp is liberated by US troops on April 4, 1945. Russian and Polish prisoners shot by the retreating Germans lie on the ground at Ohrdruf Concentration Camp. Allied Supreme Commander Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, Gen. Omar Bradley, and Gen. George Patton look on in disgust.

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A marine of the 6th Marine Division readies his Browning Automatic Rifle and prepares to move out and attack Sugar Loaf Hill on Okinawa in May 1945.



The terms of unconditional surrender are signed by Col. Gen. Jodl as his aides look on at SHAEF Headquarters in Rheims, France.

MAY 1945

On May 8, 1945, Nazi Germany unconditionally surrendered to the Allies. For the United States, the surrender enabled military planners to focus more intently on the war in the Pacific. From the day the United States entered WWII, the governments of the US and Britain adopted a "Europe First" strategy. With Germany out of the war, the only enemy left to be defeated was Japan.



V-E Day, May 8, 1945. Servicemen celebrate the surrender of Germany and V-E Day at a nightclub in London's West End.



The first US Naval bombardment of the Japanese home islands begins on July 14, 1945. USS *Massachusetts* (BB-59) fires her main 16-inch battery on Kaimaishi, Japan.



USS *Indiana* (BB-58) fires her 16-inch main battery at targets on the Japanese coast.



USS *Indianapolis* (CA-35), pictured here, is sunk on July 29, 1945 after delivering atomic bomb components to Tinian.

June-July 1945

June 22, 1945 – *Japanese resistance on Okinawa ends*

July 5, 1945 – *Philippine Islands declared secure*

On July 14, American warships began the first naval bombardment of the Japanese home islands. This was the first time targets on the Japanese home islands were engaged by naval gunfire.

On July 29, the USS *Indianapolis* was torpedoed and sunk by a Japanese submarine. The "Indy" had just delivered components for the atomic bomb that would be dropped on Hiroshima one week later. The *Indianapolis* was not reported overdue for nearly a week and it was only by a stroke of luck that the survivors of the sinking were found at all. It is estimated that roughly nine hundred of the 1,196 men aboard survived the sinking and went into the water. When the survivors were rescued almost five days later, only 317 remained.

USS *Indianapolis* (CA-35) survivors lie on stretchers on the deck of a landing ship awaiting transport to a shore hospital on Peleliu.



AUGUST 1945

On August 6, the B-29 *Enola Gay* dropped an atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Nearly every structure within a mile of the detonation was completely destroyed. Over 60,000 Japanese were killed and a like number wounded. The destruction was repeated three days later when, on August 9, the B-29 *Bocks Car* dropped an atomic bomb on the city of Nagasaki. Again the results were staggering, roughly 39,000 killed and 25,000 wounded. Countless others died later as a result of the bombings.

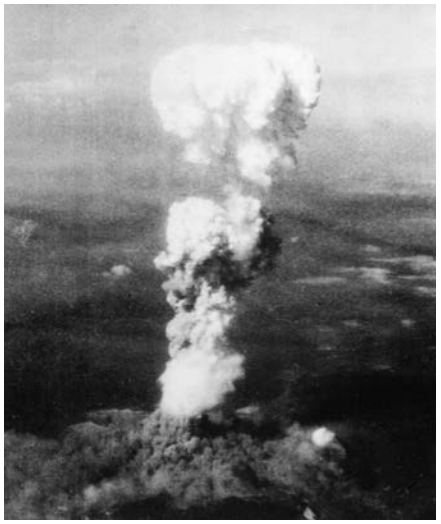
On August 14, the Japanese government verbally agreed to the surrender terms demanded by the Allies.



B-29 bomber *Enola Gay* backs over the bomb loading pit on Tinian Island to load the atomic bomb "Little Boy" prior to the Hiroshima mission.



Atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. Part of the crew of the B-29 bomber *Enola Gay* chat before the atomic bomb is loaded aboard her in preparation for the mission to Hiroshima.



A mushroom cloud of smoke rises ominously over the city of Hiroshima after the detonation of the world's first nuclear weapon used in combat on August 6, 1945.



Americans in New York City wave flags and toss paper into the air as they celebrate the news of Japan's surrender on August 14, 1945.



Sailors and marines mob Hotel Street in Honolulu Hawaii at the annoucement of Japan's surrender on August 14, 1945.



The Japanese formally surrender on September 2, 1945. Japanese delegates arrive aboard the USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay to sign the unconditional surrender of Japan.



V-J Day, August 14, 1945. In one of the most iconic images of WWII, a sailor kisses a random nurse in Times Square in celebration of V-J Day.



Japanese delegates sign the articles of surrender aboard the USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay on September 2, 1945.

SEPTEMBER 1945

On September 2, 1945, the official surrender document ending WWII was signed aboard the USS *Missouri* anchored in Tokyo Bay. For the United States, the surrender marked the end of forty-four months of brutal combat. For the world, it marked the end of the costliest conflict in human history.

Conclusion

World War II was the costliest war in human history. Over sixty-five million people were killed as a result of the war. Entire geographical regions and countries were utterly devastated and the map of the world as we know it changed forever.

At the end of World War II, the United States emerged as an international superpower along with Great Britain and the Soviet Union. With the integration of the armed forces that began during World War II, racial barriers were broken. Within twenty years of the end of the war, America, the Land of the Free, would finally offer a sense of equality for all.

As a result of the GI Bill, millions of men and women were able to attend college and acquire a degree. Energetic and confident Americans emerged from the colleges and universities and created an economic boom the likes of which this country had never seen. Those same young Americans forged this country into an economic and political powerhouse that, to this day, continues to lead the world by example.

The world that we live in today was created by the men and women who fought, and won, the world's most destructive war. It is to them that we owe the freedom so often taken for granted.



A bugler blows taps at the close of the Memorial Day service in Margraten Cemetery in Holland where thousands of American heroes lie.



Cologne Cathedral stands while the entire area surrounding it is completely devastated. April 24, 1945 in Cologne Germany.



Pfc Lee Harper, who was wounded in France, is greeted by his 2 1/2 year-old sister, whom he has never seen, upon his arrival in New York on August 1, 1945.



African Americans and whites serve alongside one another as part of a Merchant Marine ship's crew.



A youngster clutches his soldier father's leg as his mother and father embrace.

The National World War II Museum



Founded in 2000 as The National D-Day Museum, The National WWII Museum is an unforgettable way to experience World War II—from industrial efforts on the Home Front to the combat experience of the American servicemember abroad. The National WWII Museum offers a compelling blend of sweeping narrative and poignant personal detail, featuring immersive exhibits, multimedia experiences, and an expansive collection of artifacts and first-person oral histories that take visitors inside the story of the war—why it was fought, how it was won, and what it means today. Beyond its exhibits and galleries, the Museum offers unique access to experiential history, including the opportunity to view an authentically restored WWII patrol-torpedo boat, take an intimate look behind the scenes to handle artifacts alongside Museum curators, and discover firsthand an impressive collection of restored and working macro-artifacts.

Additionally, online collections, distance-learning programs, travel programs, and the renowned International Conference on World War II offer patrons and students of all ages new ways to connect to history and honor the generation that sacrificed so much to secure our freedom.

Designated by Congress in 2004 as the official WWII museum of the United States, The National WWII Museum is located in downtown New Orleans, where soaring pavilions house historical exhibits, retail outlets, restaurants, a performance theater modeled on entertainment venues for WWII servicemembers, the 4D experience *Beyond All Boundaries* (narrated by Tom Hanks), the interactive *Final Mission: USS Tang Submarine Experience*, and the immersive outdoor sound and light show *Expressions of America* (narrated by Gary Sinese). The Higgins Hotel and Conference Center debuted in 2019, and the opening of the Museum's capstone pavilion, Liberation Pavilion, in 2023 cement the institution as a state-of-the-art educational facility and a premier destination for travelers from around the world.

THE NATIONAL WWII MUSEUM

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