



# The Course of World War II

## GUIDE TO READING

### The BIG Idea

**Devastation of War** Allied perseverance, effective military operations, and Axis miscalculations brought the devastation of World War II to an end.

### Content Vocabulary

- blitzkrieg (p. 864)
- neutrality (p. 866)
- isolationism (p. 866)
- partisans (p. 871)

### Academic Vocabulary

- resolve (p. 866)
- involvement (p. 866)

### People and Places

- Franklin D. Roosevelt (p. 866)
- Stalingrad (p. 869)
- Midway Island (p. 869)
- Douglas MacArthur (p. 869)
- Winston Churchill (p. 870)
- Normandy (p. 870)
- Harry S. Truman (p. 871)
- Hiroshima (p. 871)

### Reading Strategy

#### Determining Cause and Effect

As you read, create a chart like the one below listing key events during World War II and their effect on the outcome of the war.

Event	Effect

*The first years of World War II seemed to go in Hitler's favor. With his blitzkrieg, he had gained control of much of western and central Europe. Victories over Britain and Russia remained elusive, however. When the United States entered the war, the Allies agreed to fight until the Axis Powers surrendered unconditionally. Together, the Allies strengthened their strategies and stopped the advances of both the Germans and the Japanese. Germany surrendered on May 7, 1945, and Japan surrendered on August 14.*

## Europe at War

### MAIN IDEA

Germany used a "lightning war" to gain control of much of western and central Europe, but Britain was undefeated and German troops were stopped in Russia.

**HISTORY & YOU** Have you ever known two people who were fighting, but you refused to take sides? Read how the United States remained neutral even though the British asked for help.

Hitler stunned Europe with the speed and efficiency of the German attack on Poland. His **blitzkrieg**, or "lightning war," used armored columns, called panzer divisions, supported by airplanes. Each panzer division was a strike force of about 300 tanks with accompanying forces and supplies.

The forces of the blitzkrieg broke quickly through Polish lines and encircled the bewildered Polish troops. Regular infantry units then moved in to hold the newly conquered territory. Within four weeks, Poland had surrendered. On September 28, 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union divided Poland.

## Hitler's Early Victories

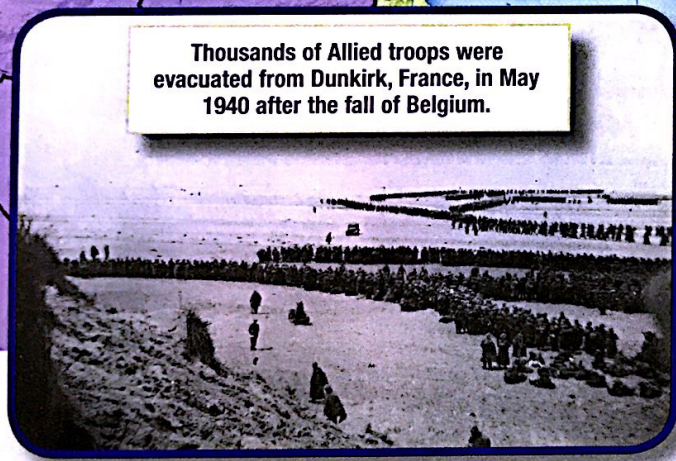
After a winter of waiting, Hitler resumed the attack on April 9, 1940, with another blitzkrieg against Denmark and Norway. One month later, on May 10, Germany launched an attack on the Netherlands, Belgium, and France. The main assault was through Luxembourg and the Ardennes (ahr•DEHN) Forest. German panzer divisions broke through weak French defensive positions there and raced across northern France.

French and British forces were taken by surprise. Anticipating a German attack, France had built a defense system, called the Maginot (MA•zhuh•NOH) Line, along its border with Germany. The line was a series of concrete and steel fortifications armed with heavy artillery.

**WORLD WAR II IN EUROPE AND NORTH AFRICA, 1939–1941**



Thousands of Allied troops were evacuated from Dunkirk, France, in May 1940 after the fall of Belgium.



**Geography SKILLS**

- 1. Movement** In what directions did the Axis Powers advance in 1939, 1940, and 1941?
  - 2. Location** Where was the eastern border of Axis territory in 1941?
- Maps in Motion** See *StudentWorks™ Plus* or [glencoe.com](http://glencoe.com).

The Germans, however, decided not to cross the Maginot Line. Instead, they went around it and attacked France from its border with Belgium.

By going around the Maginot Line, the Germans split the Allied armies. French troops and the entire British army were trapped on the beaches of Dunkirk. Only through the heroic efforts of the Royal Navy and civilians in private boats did the British manage to evacuate 338,000 Allied (mostly British) troops.

One English skipper of a small boat who helped in that rescue described the scene:

**PRIMARY SOURCE**

“The soldiers were coming off the beach clinging to bits of wood and wreckage and anything that would float. As we got close enough we began . . . picking up as many as we could . . . [and taking] them off to one of the ships lying off in the deep water.”

—Len Deighton; *Blood, Tears and Folly*, 1993

The French signed an armistice on June 22, 1940. German armies now occupied about three-fifths of France. An authoritarian regime under German control was set up over the remainder of the country.

It was known as Vichy France and was led by an aged French hero of World War I, Marshal Henri Pétain. Germany was now in control of western and central Europe, but Britain had still not been defeated. In fact, after Dunkirk, the British resolve heightened, and Britain appealed to the United States for help.

President **Franklin D. Roosevelt** denounced the aggressors, but the United States followed a strict policy of **isolationism**. A series of **neutrality** acts, passed in the 1930s, prevented the United States from taking sides or becoming involved in any European wars. Many Americans felt that the United States had been drawn into World War I due to economic involvement in Europe, and they wanted to prevent a recurrence. Roosevelt was convinced that the neutrality acts actually encouraged Axis aggression and wanted the acts repealed. They were gradually relaxed as the United States supplied food, ships, planes, and weapons to Britain.

## The Battle of Britain

Hitler realized that an amphibious (land-sea) invasion of Britain could succeed only if Germany gained control of the air. At the beginning of August 1940, the Luftwaffe (LOOFT•vah•fuh)—the German air force—launched a major offensive. German planes bombed British air and naval bases, harbors, communication centers, and war industries.

The British fought back with determination. They were supported by an effective radar system that gave them early warning of German attacks. Nevertheless, by the end of August, the British air force had suffered critical losses.

In September, in retaliation for a British attack on Berlin, Hitler ordered a shift in strategy. Instead of bombing military targets, the Luftwaffe began massive bombing of British cities. Hitler hoped in this way to break British morale. Instead, because military targets were not being hit, the British were able to rebuild their air strength



## WORLD WAR II IN EUROPE AND NORTH AFRICA, 1941–1945



quickly. Soon, the British air force was inflicting major losses on Luftwaffe bombers. At the end of September, Hitler postponed the invasion of Britain indefinitely.

## Attack on the Soviet Union

Although he had no desire for a two-front war, Hitler became convinced that Britain was remaining in the war only because it expected Soviet support. If the Soviet Union was smashed, Britain's last hope would be eliminated. Moreover, Hitler had convinced himself that the Soviet Union had a pitiful army and could be defeated quickly.

Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union was scheduled for the spring of 1941, but the attack was delayed because of problems in the Balkans. Hitler had already gained the political cooperation of Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania. However, the failure of Mussolini's invasion of Greece in 1940 had exposed Hitler's southern flank to British air bases in Greece. To secure his Balkan flank, Hitler therefore seized both Greece and Yugoslavia in April.

Reassured, Hitler invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. He believed that the Russians could still be decisively defeated before the brutal winter weather set in.

The massive attack stretched out along a front some 1,800 miles (about 2,900 km) long. German troops advanced rapidly, capturing two million Russian soldiers. By November, one German army group had swept through Ukraine. A second army was besieging the city of Leningrad, while a third approached within 25 miles (about 40 km) of Moscow, the Soviet capital.

An early winter and fierce Soviet resistance, however, halted the German advance. Because of the planned spring date for the invasion, the Germans had no winter uniforms. For the first time in the war, German armies had been stopped. A counterattack in December 1941 by a Soviet army came as an ominous ending to the year for the Germans.

**✓ Reading Check** **Evaluating** In the spring of 1941, what caused Hitler to delay his invasion of the Soviet Union? What halted the German advance once it had begun?

## Japan at War

**MAIN IDEA** The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor led the United States to enter the war.

**HISTORY & YOU** Do you think the terrorist attacks of 2001 unified Americans? Read how the attack on Pearl Harbor affected American opinion.

On December 7, 1941, Japanese aircraft attacked the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor in the Hawaiian Islands. The surprise attack damaged or destroyed over 350 aircraft, damaged or sunk 18 ships, and killed or wounded 3,500 Americans. The same day, the Japanese attacked the Philippines and advanced on the British colony of Malaya. Later, they invaded the Dutch East Indies and occupied a number of islands in the Pacific Ocean. On the Bataan Peninsula and the island of Corregidor in the Philippines, resistance was fierce. The Japanese led captured American and Filipino soldiers on a 60-mile forced march, the Bataan Death March. Thousands died of starvation or mistreatment before reaching the prison camp. By the spring of 1942, almost all of Southeast Asia and much of the western Pacific had fallen to the Japanese.

## Japan's New "Community"

A triumphant Japan now declared the creation of a community of nations. The name given to this new "community" was the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. The entire region would now be under Japanese direction. Japan also announced its intention to liberate areas of Southeast Asia from Western colonial rule. For the moment, however, Japan needed the resources of the region for its war machine and treated the countries under its rule as conquered lands.

## Global War

Japanese leaders, like Prime Minister Tōjō—formerly a general—had hoped that their lightning strike at American bases would destroy the U.S. fleet in the Pacific. The Roosevelt administration, they thought, would now accept Japanese domination of the Pacific. The American people, in the eyes of Japanese leaders, were soft. Their easy, rich life had made them unable to fight.

The Japanese miscalculated, however. The attack on Pearl Harbor unified American opinion about becoming involved in the war. Once bitterly divided over participating in the war, the American people now took up arms. The United States joined with European nations and Nationalist China in a combined effort to defeat Japan.

Believing the American involvement in the Pacific would make the United States ineffective in the European theater of war, Hitler declared war on the United States four days after Pearl Harbor. Another European conflict had turned into a global war.

**✓ Reading Check** Describing By the spring of 1942, which territories did Japan control?

## The Allies Advance

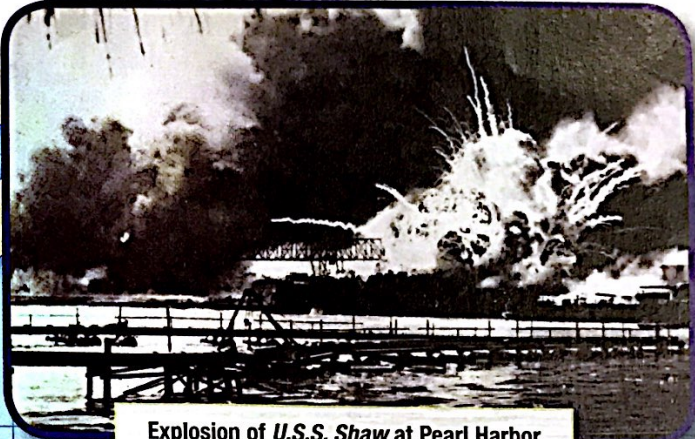
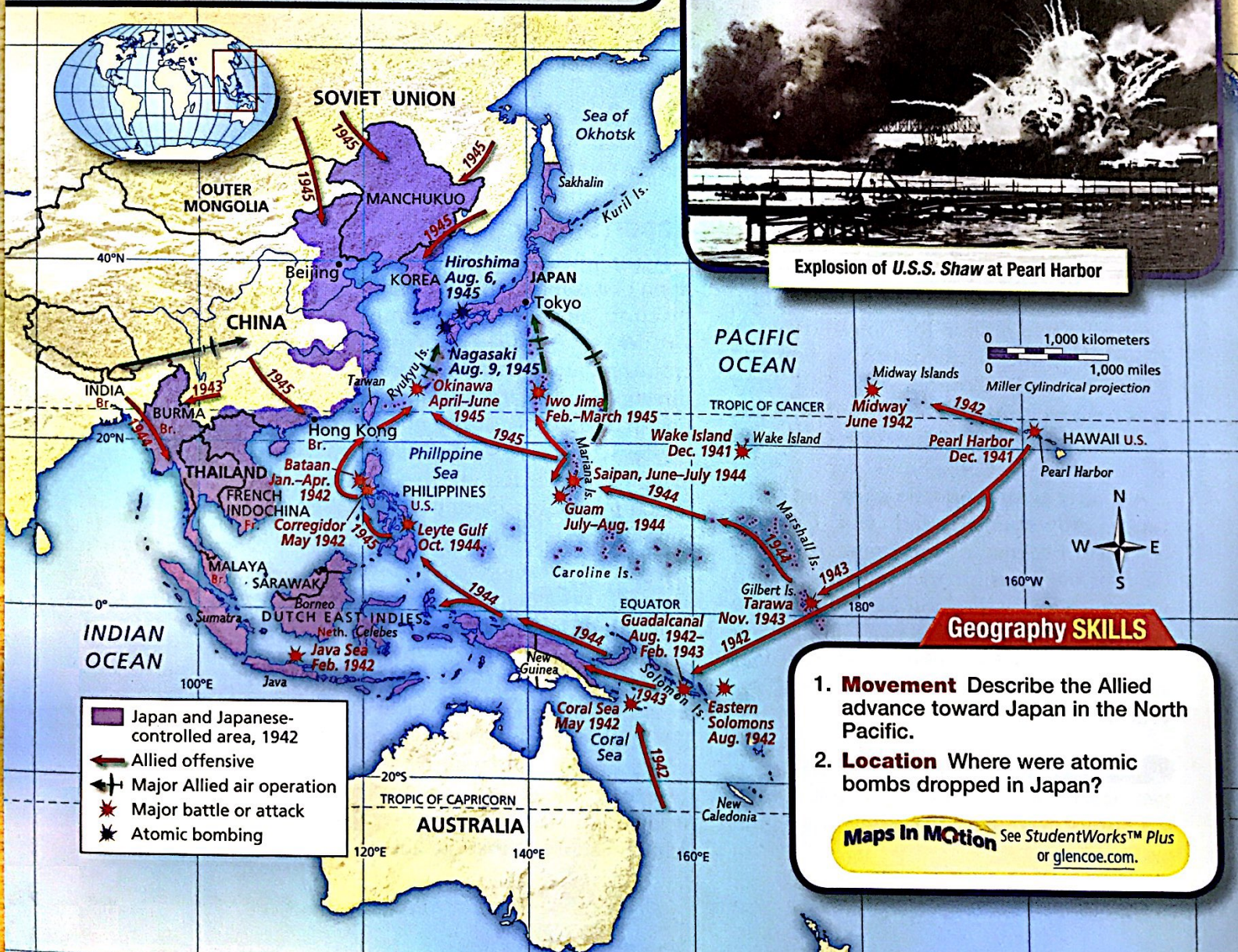
**MAIN IDEA** The Allied forces stopped the advance of the Germans and the Japanese.

**HISTORY & YOU** Have you ever had to overcome obstacles in order to achieve a goal? Read to find out how the Allied forces fought for the unconditional surrender of Germany and Japan at the end of World War II.

The entry of the United States into the war created a new coalition, the Grand Alliance. To overcome mutual suspicions, the three major Allies—Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union—agreed to stress military operations and

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

### WORLD WAR II IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC, 1941–1945



Explosion of U.S.S. Shaw at Pearl Harbor

ignore political differences. At the beginning of 1943, the Allies agreed to fight until the Axis Powers—Germany, Italy, and Japan—surrendered unconditionally. The unconditional surrender principle, which required the Axis nations to surrender without any favorable condition, cemented the Grand Alliance by making it nearly impossible for Hitler to divide his foes.

## The European Theater

Defeat was far from Hitler's mind at the beginning of 1942. As Japanese forces advanced into Southeast Asia and the Pacific, Hitler and his European allies continued fighting the war in Europe against the armies of Britain and the Soviet Union.

Until late 1942, it appeared that the Germans might still prevail on the battlefield. In North Africa, the Afrika Korps, German forces led by General Erwin Rommel, broke through the British defenses in Egypt and advanced toward Alexandria.

A renewed German offensive in the Soviet Union led to the capture of the entire Crimea in the spring of 1942. In August, Hitler boasted:

### PRIMARY SOURCE

"As the next step, we are going to advance south of the Caucasus and then help the rebels in Iran and Iraq against the English. Another thrust will be directed along the Caspian Sea toward Afghanistan and India. Then the English will run out of oil. In two years we'll be on the borders of India. Twenty to thirty elite German divisions will do. Then the British Empire will collapse."

—*Spandau*, Albert Speer, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston, 1976

This would be Hitler's last optimistic outburst. By the fall of 1942, the war had turned against the Germans.

## The Tide Turns

In North Africa, British forces had stopped Rommel's troops at El Alamein (EHL A•luh•MAYN) in the summer of 1942. The Germans then retreated back across the desert. In November 1942, British and American forces invaded French North Africa. They forced the German and Italian troops there to surrender in May 1943.

On the Eastern Front, after the capture of the Crimea, Hitler's generals wanted him to concentrate on the Caucasus and its oil fields. Hitler, however, decided that **Stalingrad**, a major industrial center on the Volga River, should be taken first.

In perhaps the most terrible battle of the war, between November 1942 and February 2, 1943, the Soviets launched a counter-attack. German troops were stopped, then encircled, and supply lines were cut off, all in frigid winter conditions. The Germans were forced to surrender at Stalingrad. The entire German Sixth Army, considered the best of the German troops, was lost.

By February 1943, German forces in Russia were back to their positions of June 1942. By the spring of 1943, even Hitler knew that the Germans would not defeat the Soviet Union.

## The Asian Theater

In 1942 the tide of battle in the East also changed dramatically. In the Battle of the Coral Sea on May 7 and 8, 1942, American naval forces stopped the Japanese advance and saved Australia from being invaded.

One turning point of the war in Asia came on June 4, at the Battle of **Midway Island**. U.S. planes destroyed four attacking Japanese aircraft carriers. The United States defeated the Japanese navy and established naval superiority in the Pacific.

By the fall of 1942, Allied forces in Asia were gathering for two operations. One, commanded by U.S. general **Douglas MacArthur**, would move into the Philippines through New Guinea and the South Pacific Islands. The other would move across the Pacific with a combination of U.S. Army, Marine, and Navy attacks on Japanese-held islands. The policy, called "island hopping," was to capture some Japanese-held islands and bypass others to reach Japan. In August 1942, Americans made the first assault on a Japanese-held island—Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. The Japanese evacuated in February 1943 after months of brutal fighting.

**✓ Reading Check** Summarizing Why was the German assault on Stalingrad a crushing defeat for the Germans?

## Last Years of the War

**MAIN IDEA** Allied victories forced Germany and Japan to surrender unconditionally.

**HISTORY & YOU** Do the ends justify the means? Read about the decision to use the atomic bomb.

By the beginning of 1943, the tide of battle had turned against Germany, Italy, and Japan. Axis forces in Tunisia surrendered on May 13, 1943. The Allies then crossed the Mediterranean and carried the war to Italy, an area that **Winston Churchill**, prime minister of Great Britain, called the “soft underbelly” of Europe. After taking Sicily, the Allies began an invasion of mainland Italy in September.

### The European Theater

After Sicily fell, King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy arrested Mussolini, but in a daring raid, the Germans liberated him. He was then made the head of a German puppet

state in northern Italy as German troops moved in and occupied much of Italy.

The Germans set up defense lines in the hills south of Rome. The Allies advanced up the peninsula with heavy casualties, but they took Rome on June 4, 1944. By then, the Italian war was secondary as the Allied forces opened their long-awaited “second front” in western Europe.

Since the autumn of 1943, the Allies had planned an invasion of France from Great Britain, across the English Channel. Finally, on June 6, 1944 (D-Day), Allied forces under U.S. general Dwight D. Eisenhower landed on the **Normandy** beaches in history’s greatest naval invasion. The Allies fought their way past hidden underwater mines, treacherous barbed wire, and horrible machine gun fire. Believing the battle was a diversion and the real invasion would occur elsewhere, the Germans responded slowly. This gave the Allied forces time to set up a beachhead. Within three months, the Allies had landed two million men and 500,000 vehicles. Allied forces then began pushing inland and broke through German defensive lines.

Allied troops liberated Paris by the end of August 1944. In December, with Allied aircraft grounded, the Germans launched a counter-offensive to regain the seaport of Antwerp. The Battle of the Bulge was named for the “bulge” the German attack caused in Allied lines. By January 1945, both sides had suffered heavy losses, but the Allied lines held. In March 1945, the Allied forces crossed the Rhine River and advanced into Germany. At the end of April 1945, Allied armies in northern Germany moved toward the Elbe River, where they linked up with the Soviets.

The Soviets had come a long way since the Battle of Stalingrad in 1943. The Soviets had soundly defeated the German forces at the Battle of Kursk (July 5 to 12), the greatest tank battle of World War II. Soviet forces now began a steady advance westward. Reoccupying the Ukraine by the end of 1943, they moved into the Baltic states by early 1944. Advancing along a northern front, Soviet troops occupied Warsaw in January 1945 and entered Berlin in April. Meanwhile

## PEOPLE *in* HISTORY

**Hirohito**  
1901–1989 Emperor of Japan



Emperor Hirohito ruled Japan longer than any other emperor. During his reign, Japan fought in World War II. Historians debate his wartime decision-making power, but he was responsible for accepting the Allies’ terms of unconditional surrender that ended the war. After the war, with the aid of advisors, Hirohito was able to distance himself from other wartime leaders and avoid a war crimes trial. Under the new U.S.-drafted Japanese constitution, he remained on the throne. U.S. General MacArthur believed retaining Hirohito would provide stability and ease Japan’s transition to democracy. However, the emperor’s new role was largely ceremonial with no official governmental influence. **Why was Hirohito able to remain emperor?**

By January 1945, Adolf Hitler had moved into a bunker 55 feet (almost 17 m) under the city of Berlin. In his final political testament, Hitler, consistent to the end in his anti-Semitism, blamed the Jews for the war. He wrote, "Above all I charge the leaders of the nation and those under them to scrupulous observance of the laws of race and to merciless opposition to the universal poisoner of all peoples, international Jewry."

Hitler committed suicide on April 30, two days after Italian **partisans**, or resistance fighters, shot Mussolini. On May 7, 1945, Germany surrendered. The war in Europe was finally over.

## The Asian Theater

The war in Asia continued. Beginning in 1943, U.S. forces went on the offensive and advanced across the Pacific. Along with their allies, the U.S. forces continued their island-hopping campaign. At the beginning of 1945, the acquisition of Iwo Jima and Okinawa helped the Allied military power draw even closer to the main Japanese islands. The islands of Iwo Jima and Okinawa were of great strategic importance. Iwo Jima was essential to the air war on Japan. This small volcanic island had two airfields used by the Japanese to attack Allied aircraft and support their naval forces. The Allies felt that capturing Iwo Jima would lessen the Japanese threat and could aid in the invasion of the Japanese mainland. The Allies hoped that controlling Okinawa would also provide them with a base near the mainland.

The Allies were victorious in both battles, but the victories came at a great cost. Casualties were great on both sides, and many began to fear even more losses if the war in the Pacific continued. This left **Harry S. Truman**, who had become president after Roosevelt died in April, with a difficult decision to make. Should he use newly developed atomic weapons to bring the war to an end? If the United States invaded Japan, Truman and his advisers had become convinced that American troops would suffer heavy casualties. At the time, however, only two bombs were available; no one knew how effective they would be.

Truman decided to use the bombs. The first bomb was dropped on the Japanese city of **Hiroshima** on August 6. Three days later, a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. Both cities were leveled. Thousands of people died immediately after the bombs were dropped. Thousands more died in later months from radiation. The devastation led Emperor Hirohito to accept the Allied forces' demands for unconditional surrender on August 14, 1945.

World War II was finally over. Seventeen million had died in battle. Perhaps 20 million civilians had perished as well. Some estimates place total losses at 60 million.

**✓ Reading Check** **Identifying** What was the "second front" that the Allies opened in western Europe?

### Vocabulary

1. **Explain** the significance of: blitzkrieg, resolve, Franklin D. Roosevelt, isolationism, neutrality, involvement, Stalingrad, Midway Island, Douglas MacArthur, Winston Churchill, Normandy, partisans, Harry S. Truman, Hiroshima.

### Main Ideas

2. **Explain** why Hitler ordered a shift in strategy after the British bombed Berlin in August 1940. What was the result of Hitler's new strategy?
3. **List** the series of events that began to turn the war against Germany in 1942. Use a chart like the one below to make your list.

Events That Turned the War Against Germany, 1942–1943	
1.	
2.	

4. **Describe** how the war ended on the Asian front.

### Critical Thinking

5. **The Big Idea Evaluating** How did the entry of the United States into World War II affect the war's progression and outcome?
6. **Sequencing** Put the events of World War II in chronological order.
7. **Analyzing Visuals** Examine the photograph on page 865. What impact would the evacuation of so many troops have on morale?

### Writing About History

8. **Persuasive Writing** Imagine you are Harry S. Truman. You must end the war quickly on the Asian front, and you have decided to use the atomic bomb against Japan. You must convince your cabinet that your choice of action is the best alternative. Write a short essay defending your position.

### History ONLINE

For help with the concepts in this section of *Glencoe World History*, go to [glencoe.com](http://glencoe.com) and click Study Central™.