

4. WORLD WAR II

Victory over Germany

When the United States entered World War II in 1941, the Allies gained a huge superiority in numbers and a tremendous advantage in material resources. They needed time, however, to organize their efforts and to develop their strengths before they could hope to defeat the Axis powers.

This need for time prevented the Allies from launching a major offensive against the Axis in 1942. The Soviets pressed the western Allies to establish a "second front" in France to take some of the pressure off of Soviet troops in the East, but British military leaders convinced the U.S. to wait until more troops and supplies could be sent to Europe. That decision strained relations between the Soviet Union and the western Allies.

The Soviets had reason to be concerned. Hitler was determined to finish in 1942 what he had been unable to accomplish in 1941: the complete domination of Russia. Accordingly, huge numbers of German troops were sent to the East.

In August 1942 the Nazis began a massive assault on Stalingrad. Like many other Nazi operations, the invasion was initially successful. By early fall, a force of 300,000 German troops was marching on the city.

Stalingrad was extremely important to

the Russian defense of valuable oil fields. Perhaps even more importantly, Stalin considered it the symbolic center of Soviet strength. He threw all available resources into defending it.

The Soviets desperately held their ground in Stalingrad. By the end of 1942, the Nazi attack on the city had ground to a halt.

The Soviets then mounted a huge counteroffensive. They forced thousands of German soldiers in Stalingrad to surrender and quickly gained back all of the land they had lost in the previous year. Under pressure from the Soviet advance, the Nazis began a long westward march toward Germany.

Stalingrad marked a major turning point in the war in the East. The seemingly invincible Nazi military machine had not only been halted, but forced into retreat. Never again would Hitler have the advantage on the eastern front.

While the Soviets were turning the war in the East around, the western Allies started to win important victories in Africa.

The Allies and the Axis had jockeyed for position in Africa since the beginning of the war. In 1940 Italian forces advanced from Ethiopia and Libya into British Somaliland and British-controlled



The fighting in North Africa left the ruins of these German Mark IV tanks scattered along the countryside. Germany was forced to surrender North Africa to the Allies in the spring of 1943.

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Egypt. The Allies forced the Italians back into Libya in 1941.

In response a Nazi force called the *Afrika Korps*, under the leadership of General Erwin Rommel, was sent to Africa. In May 1942 Rommel launched a powerful offensive in Libya.

Rommel advanced until October when his forces were defeated at El Alamein, Egypt, by British troops under the leadership of General Bernard L. Montgomery. The British drove the Afrika Korps out of Egypt. In early November the Allies took the offensive in the Middle East, moving into Libya and Tunisia.

On November 8 a combined British and American force invaded French North Africa. The western Allies hoped an attack there would draw some German attention away from the Soviet Union. They still did not feel ready for a full-scale invasion of western Europe.

The North African invasion, led by General Dwight D. Eisenhower of the United States, took the Nazis completely by surprise. Combined Allied forces easily defeated the Germans. Then they moved eastward across Algeria, meeting up with Montgomery's troops, which were marching westward. By May 1943 all Axis forces had been driven out of Algeria.

The Allies quickly followed up their victories in Africa by moving toward Italy. In July 1943 they invaded the island of Sicily in the Mediterranean. As the Allies invaded the island, Mussolini's government in Italy fell. The Italian dictator was forced into northern Italy. There he set up a "Fascist republic" that was a puppet

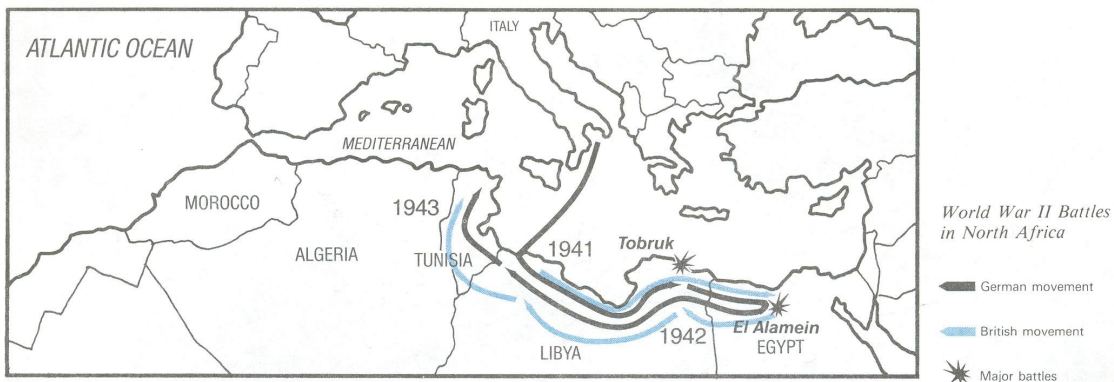


After defeating Germany in North Africa, the Allies quickly invaded Italy through Sicily, which had been liberated by September 1943.

government of the Nazi regime.

Pietro Badoglio became premier of Italy after Mussolini fell. Badoglio's government signed an armistice with the Allies on September 3, 1943.

That same day the Allies moved onto the Italian peninsula. They advanced until September 9, when the Nazis counterattacked. The Allies held their ground and then began a slow march through Italy. They continued until they were within about seventy-five miles of Rome, where Axis troops held their ground. The Allied advance was checked until June 1944 when



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Rome became the first Axis capital to fall.

By then the Allies clearly had the upper hand in the war. The American military machine was moving weapons, supplies, and troops to Europe at an amazing rate. Soviet troops were advancing in the East.

On June 6, 1944, the Allies made their move in Europe. Almost three million men were assembled in Great Britain for an invasion of France. They were led by General Eisenhower, who became supreme commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force.

On June 6, known as D-Day, the Allies launched a massive invasion of Europe on the Normandy coast in France. On the first day, about 130,000 troops were sent ashore. Within a month, more than a million men had landed in France and had started marching eastward.

The Nazis underestimated the size of the Allied advance and were quickly forced to retreat deep into France. Allied air raids left the skies clear of German planes, and Allied paratroopers cleared the way for massive land invasions. In August 1944 Paris was liberated.

As the Allies advanced in Europe, the outlook grew progressively bleaker for the Axis powers. On July 20 a plot by German military leaders against Hitler culminated in an attempt on his life. A bomb hidden in Hitler's headquarters exploded, but he was only slightly injured.

Meanwhile, Allied forces moved into Belgium and the Netherlands. Afterwards, though, increased German resistance slowed their advance.

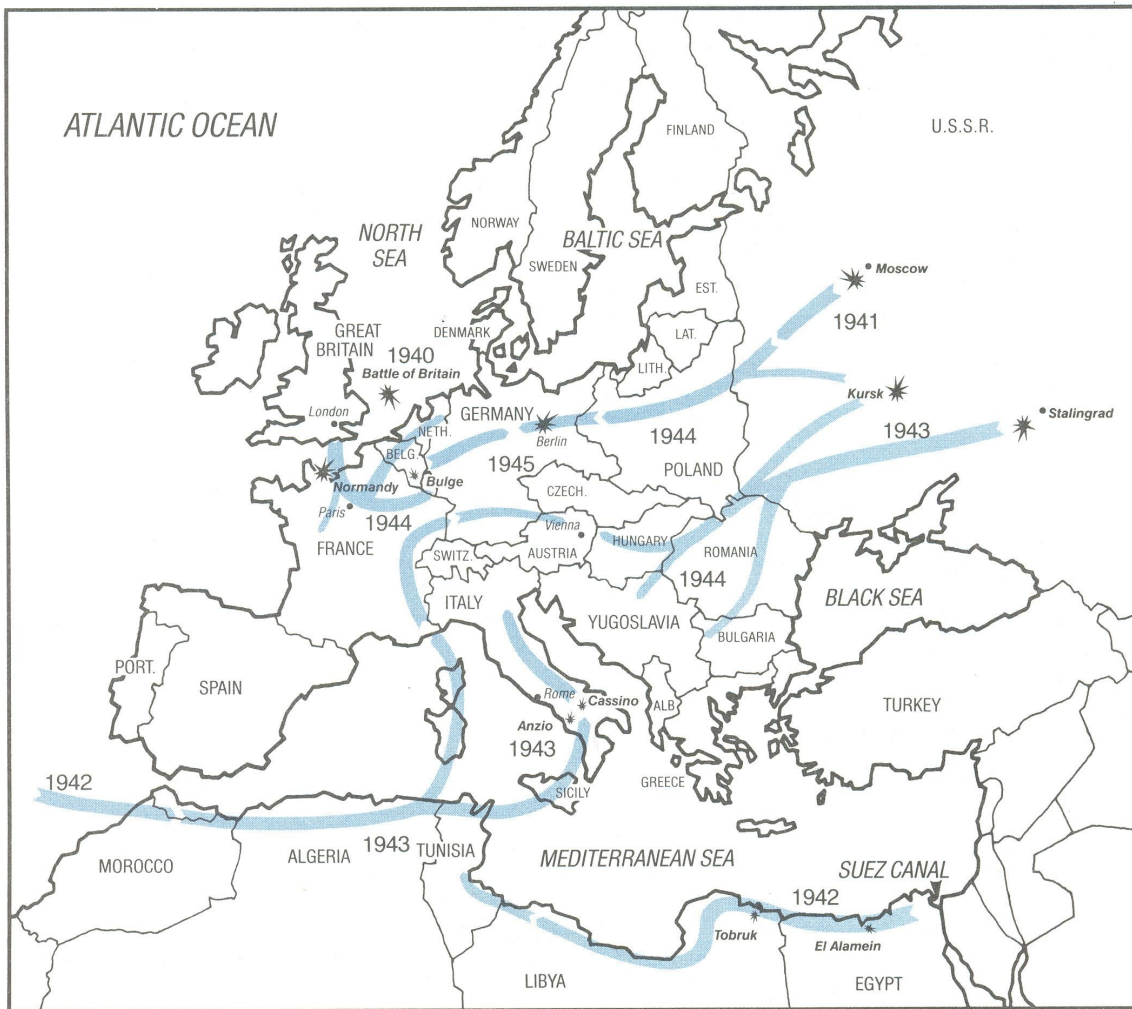
In December 1944 Hitler made a last-ditch effort to turn the war around in the West. He ordered a massive attack on Allied lines in the Ardennes Forest of southern Belgium. Nazi troops advanced quickly, opening a "bulge" in the Allied line. After two days, Allied reinforcements were sent to the area. The "Battle of the Bulge" was reversed by January 1945. The Allies continued their rapid advance toward the heart of Germany.

At the same time, the Soviets pressed on in the East. In 1943 and 1944 they recaptured all of the territory the Germans had won in the Soviet Union. Afterwards, they pressed further, moving into eastern Europe. By late 1944, the Soviets had cap-

General Eisenhower gives the order, "Full victory—Nothing else" to 101st Airborne paratroopers somewhere in England just before they board their airplanes to participate in the D-Day invasion.



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tured the Axis satellites of Romania, Bulgaria, and Finland.

Now the war in Europe was all but over. By February 1945, the Soviets were within fifty miles of Berlin, and the western Allies had mounted a new offensive in the West. Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt met at Yalta on the Black Sea to discuss plans to end the war. They decided that the Soviets should take Berlin in recognition of the fight they had put up against the Germans in the East.

In late April 1945, Soviet, British, and

American troops converged on Berlin. They met at the Elbe River outside the city, and the Soviets marched in.

On April 28 Mussolini was captured and killed in Italy. His dead body was hung upside down and put on public display. Two days later Hitler committed suicide at his Berlin headquarters.

The remaining Nazi leaders surrendered their country to the Allies on May 7. On May 8 the Allies celebrated VE (Victory in Europe) Day. The war in Europe was over.

Major World War II Battles in Europe

Allied advances

Key Allied victories

4. WORLD WAR II: REVIEW

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A. People

DIRECTIONS: Match each phrase to the person it describes. Then, on the lines provided below, write a short essay explaining the roles these people played in the western Allies' victories in Africa and Italy.

- a. Rommel
- b. Montgomery
- c. Eisenhower
- d. Badoglio
- e. Mussolini

- _____ 1. leader of the Afrika Korps
- _____ 2. set up a "Fascist republic" in Italy
- _____ 3. British general
- _____ 4. supreme commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force
- _____ 5. became premier of Italy in 1943

6. _____

B. True or False

DIRECTIONS: Read each of the following statements. If the statement is true, mark "T" in the space provided. If the statement is false, mark "F" in the space and change the statement to make it true.

- _____ 7. Shortly after the United States entered the war, the Allies opened a second front in Europe.
- _____ 8. The Battle of Stalingrad was a major turning point in the war in the East.

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- _____ 9. In 1942 the Afrika Korps won a major victory at El Alamein in Egypt.
- _____ 10. The June 6, 1944, Allied invasion of Europe at the Normandy coast in France, was also known as the Battle of the Bulge.
- _____ 11. Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt met at Yalta in February 1945.

C. Short Answer

DIRECTIONS: Answer each question in the space provided.

12. Why did the Nazis fail in their effort to take Stalingrad in 1942?
13. Why did the western Allies attack in North Africa rather than set up a "second front" in Europe?
14. Briefly describe the "D-Day" invasion of France.
15. Why did the Allies decide that the Soviets should take Berlin?