

2 War in Africa and Europe

TERMS & NAMES

Dwight D. Eisenhower

D-Day

Battle of the Bulge

Yalta Conference

Holocaust

MAIN IDEA

The Allies defeated the Axis powers in Europe and Africa.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

During World War II, the United States assumed a leading role in world affairs that continues today.

ONE AMERICAN'S STORY

Private First Class Richard Courtney could hardly believe it. Rumors had been circulating for weeks that his 26th Infantry Division was heading overseas to fight the Nazis in Europe. Now it was finally happening. His ship pulled out of New York harbor on a late summer morning in 1944. As the ship started down the river and headed out to sea, Courtney, a 19-year-old native of Altoona, Pennsylvania, described his feelings.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

I was eager to see all the ships in the harbor and to look up at the *Statue of Liberty*, which I had seen two years before on a trip to New York with my father. . . . For a moment I considered missing Mass and staying on deck with the others to see the statue. Then my better sense took over, and I headed down the stairs to Mass. As soon as Mass ended, I hurried up the stairs and rushed out on deck to see water, nothing but water. Well, Old Girl [*Statue of Liberty*], I will just have to wait for the return trip to see you again.

Richard Courtney, *Normandy to the Bulge*

Courtney was just one of millions of soldiers who left American shores to fight around the world. In this section, you will learn how American troops, along with those of its allies, defeated Germany and Italy and freed Europe.



U.S. troops stand beside their train as they wait to travel overseas for duty in World War II.

Mobilizing for War

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor pulled the United States into World War II. Now, there was little time to waste. The nation quickly had to build up its armed forces. Millions of Americans volunteered for duty. Millions more were drafted, or selected for military service. Under the Selective Service Act, all men between the ages of 18 and 38 had to register for military service.

Those who served represented many of the nation's ethnic and racial groups. For example, more than 300,000 Mexican Americans fought in Europe as well as Asia. Nearly one million African Americans served in

the armed forces. Native Americans and Asian Americans also took part in the struggle. African-American and some Japanese-American soldiers fought in segregated, or separate, units. For example, the 99th Fighter Squadron, known as the Tuskegee Airmen, consisted of African-American pilots. They served in North Africa and Italy.

More than 300,000 women also served in the U.S. armed forces. Many worked for the Women's Army Corps (WAC) as mechanics, drivers, and clerks. Others joined the Army and Navy Nurse Corps. Thousands of women also joined the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard, where they performed important noncombat duties.

Battles in Africa and Italy

The Allies began making plans to invade Europe. The Americans wanted to land in France as soon as possible. Stalin agreed. But Churchill believed the Allies were not prepared for such an invasion. He convinced the Americans that the Allies should first drive the Germans out of North Africa. This action would help the Allies gain control of the Mediterranean and open the way to invade Europe through Italy.

Since the summer of 1940, Britain had been battling Axis forces for control of northern Africa—especially Egypt. Without Egypt, the British would lose access to the Suez Canal. The canal was the shortest sea route to Asia and the Middle Eastern oil fields.

ReadingHistory

A. Making Decisions Why did the Allies decide to attack the Nazis in North Africa before invading France?

World War II in Europe and Africa, 1942–1945



The Tuskegee Airmen were an all-black unit of pilots that fought in North Africa and Italy.

GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Maps

- 1. Movement** Which Allied power captured Berlin?
- 2. Place** What was the last territory in North Africa held by the Axis?



British troops in northern Africa faced a tough opponent in Germany's General Erwin Rommel. Rommel's skills had earned him the nickname "The Desert Fox." He commanded Germany's Afrika Korps, including two powerful tank divisions. In June 1942, Rommel's tanks pushed the British lines to the Egyptian town of El Alamein. The Desert Fox was just 200 miles from the Suez Canal.

He would go no further, however. The British stopped the German advance at El Alamein and then forced them to retreat. A wave of Allied troops, led by American General **Dwight D. Eisenhower**, landed in northern Africa in November 1942. They advanced toward Rommel's army in Tunisia. In February 1943, the two sides clashed. The inexperienced Americans fell to Rommel's forces. However, the Allies regrouped and continued attacking. In May, the Axis powers in northern Africa surrendered. The Allies now could establish bases from which to attack southern Europe.

The invasion of Italy got under way with an attack on the island of Sicily in July 1943. Allied and German forces engaged in a month of bitter fighting. American nurse June Wandrey recalled trying to help the wounded.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

Many wounded soldiers' faces still haunt my memory. I recall one eighteen year old who had just been brought in from the ambulance to the shock ward. I went to him immediately. He looked up at me trustingly, sighed and asked, "How am I doing, Nurse?" . . . I put my hands around his face, kissed his forehead and said, "You are doing just fine, soldier." He smiled sweetly and said, "I was just checking up." Then he died. Many of us shed tears in private.

June Wandrey, quoted in *We're in This War, Too*

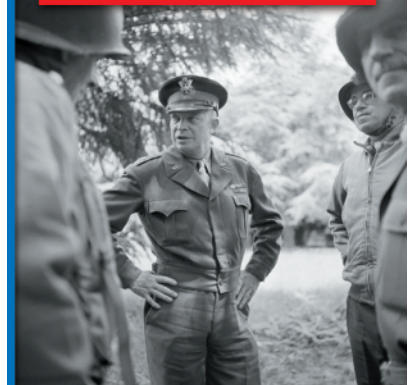
The Allies forced the Germans out of Sicily and then swept into Italy. By this time, the Italians had turned on Mussolini. Officials had imprisoned their leader. However, he escaped. The new Italian government surrendered to the Allies in September 1943.

The Allied Advance and D-Day

Meanwhile, Germany's difficulties in the Soviet Union had grown worse. In September 1942, German forces attacked the Russian city of Stalingrad, an important industrial center. A brutal battle took place. The Soviet army fiercely defended the city. As winter approached, the German commander begged Hitler to let him retreat. The *Führer* refused.

Fighting continued through the winter. The trapped Germans had no food or supplies. Many thousands of Nazi soldiers froze or starved to death. In February 1943, the remaining German troops surrendered.

AMERICA'S HISTORY MAKERS



DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER
1890–1969

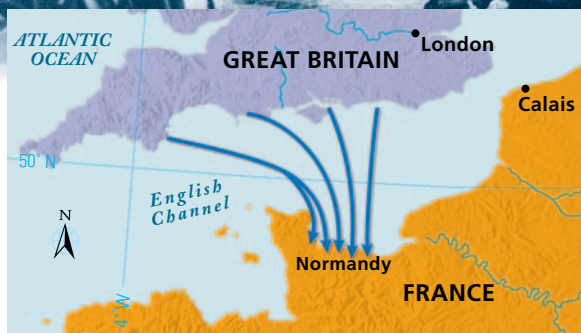
If ever there was a general who cared about his troops, it was General Dwight Eisenhower. As Allied forces battled in Italy, Eisenhower learned that he and another general were scheduled to stay in two large villas. He was not happy. He exploded.

That's *not* my villa! And that's not General Spaatz' villa! None of those will belong to any general as long as I'm Boss around here. This is supposed to be a rest center—for combat men—not a playground for the Brass!

How might Eisenhower's concern for the common soldier have affected his standing with the troops?

ReadingHistory

B. Summarizing
What prevented the Germans from conquering the Soviet Union?



American troops storm Omaha Beach in Normandy in northern France on June 6, 1944.

Each side had suffered staggering losses. With Germany's defeat at Stalingrad, its hopes of conquering the Soviet Union appeared gone.

Hitler soon had other things to worry about in the West. In June 1944, the Allies' plan to invade France got under

way. On the morning of June 6, more than 5,000 ships and landing craft carried more than 130,000 soldiers across the English Channel to a region in northern France called Normandy. The attackers included American, British, and Canadian forces. The day of this historic assault became known as **D-Day**. It was the largest seaborne invasion in history.

The attack surprised the German forces positioned along the beach. Nonetheless, they defended the region fiercely. As Allied troops hit the shore, they endured a hail of gun and mortar fire. More than 10,000 Allied soldiers were killed or wounded as they attempted to move inland. By the end of the day, however, the Allies had secured the beaches.

By the end of June 1944, 850,000 Allied troops had poured into France. They moved inland toward Paris, battling German troops along the way. On August 25, Allied forces liberated, or freed, the French capital. As they continued fighting to recapture the rest of France from the Germans, numerous American heroes emerged. One of them was Audie Murphy, the most decorated U.S. soldier of World War II. In January 1945, German troops attacked Murphy's unit in France. The 20-year-old Murphy climbed on a burning tank destroyer and used its machine gun to kill about 50 enemy troops. The U.S. government awarded him the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest military award.

As Allied forces advanced through Europe from the west, Soviet troops were beating back Hitler's army in the East. In December 1944, the German leader launched one final assault. In what became known as the **Battle of the Bulge**, German troops attacked Allied forces in the Ardennes region in Belgium and Luxembourg. The Nazi troops overwhelmed the Allies and pushed them back. U.S. forces regrouped and defeated the Germans. The Battle of the Bulge was costly. German casualties totalled 120,000. Meanwhile, nearly 80,000 Americans were killed, captured, or wounded.

Background

The Germans were surprised by the attack at Normandy because many, including Hitler, thought it would occur at Calais—150 miles away—where the English Channel is narrowest.

Victory in Europe

By February 1945, the Germans were retreating everywhere. That month, Allied leaders met in the Soviet resort of Yalta. Attending the **Yalta Conference** were the “Big Three” as they were called—Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin. During the conference, these leaders made plans for the end of the war and the future of Europe.

Stalin promised to declare war on Japan after Germany surrendered. The three leaders also agreed to establish a postwar international peace-keeping organization. In addition, they discussed the type of governments that would be set up in Eastern Europe after the war.

By the time of the Yalta Conference, President Roosevelt was in poor health. In April 1945, just months after being sworn in for a fourth term, the president died. Roosevelt’s vice-president, Harry S. Truman, succeeded him. As the nation mourned Roosevelt’s death, the new president continued the war effort.

In late April 1945, the Russians reached Berlin. Deep inside his air-raid bunker, Adolf Hitler sensed the end was near. On April 30, the man who had conquered much of Europe committed suicide.

On May 2, the Soviet Army captured Berlin. Five days later, German leaders officially signed an unconditional surrender at General Eisenhower’s headquarters in France. The Allies declared the next day, May 8, as V-E Day, or Victory in Europe Day. The war in Europe was finally over.



Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin meet during the Yalta Conference in 1945.

The Horrors of the Holocaust

As the Allies fought toward Berlin, they made a shocking discovery. Scattered throughout German-occupied Europe were concentration camps where Jews and people of other persecuted groups had been murdered. The world would soon learn of the horrifying events that took place behind German lines during the war. In what has become known as the **Holocaust**, the Nazis killed about 6 million Jewish men, women, and children—more than two-thirds of the Jews in Europe. The Nazis also killed millions of people of other ethnic groups, including Gypsies, Russians, and Poles. An estimated 11 million people were killed in all.

The roots of the Holocaust lay in Adolf Hitler’s intense racism. He preached that other groups, particularly the Jews, were inferior to Germans. As he rose to power in the 1930s, Hitler blamed the Jews for many of Germany’s troubles. After becoming leader of Germany, Hitler enforced anti-Semitism, prejudice against Jews, in numerous ways. He denied Jews many of their rights and possessions.

ReadingHistory

C. Finding Main

Ideas What was the purpose and outcome of the Yalta Conference?

Vocabulary

concentration camp: place where Germans held persecuted groups during World War II



Survivors of the concentration camp at Buchenwald in central Germany stand behind a fence in April 1945.

Soon after war broke out, Germany's anti-Semitic policies took an even darker turn. In a policy decision labeled "The Final Solution," Nazi leaders set out to murder every Jew under German rule. To accomplish this evil scheme, the Germans built huge facilities known as concentration camps. Officials crammed Jews into railroad boxcars and sent them to these camps. They forced able-bodied people to work. All others were slaughtered. The Germans carried out their killings with terrible efficiency. For example, they killed hundreds of people at a time in gas chambers disguised as showers. They then burned the bodies in large ovens or open pits. The largest concentration camp was Auschwitz in Poland. More than 1 million people are thought to have been murdered there.

On reaching the camps, the advancing Allies were outraged by what they saw. The Allies would battle this type of hate and bias by bringing German leaders to trial for what they had done. First, however, they had to defeat the Japanese. In the next section, you will read about the war in the Pacific.

Section 2 Assessment

1. Terms & Names

Explain the significance of:

- Dwight D. Eisenhower
- D-Day
- Battle of the Bulge
- Yalta Conference
- Holocaust

2. Taking Notes

Use a cluster diagram like the one shown below to identify the key battles and events that led to the Allies' victory in Europe.



3. Main Ideas

- How did the United States build an army for the war?
- Why did the Allies try to conquer North Africa before attacking southern Europe?
- Why was the Battle of Stalingrad considered the turning point of the war in the east?

4. Critical Thinking

Supporting Opinions How might the war have been different if Hitler had decided to fight alongside the Soviet Union instead of against it?

THINK ABOUT

- the difficulties of fighting a two-front war
- the resources of Germany and the Soviet Union

ACTIVITY OPTIONS

GEOGRAPHY TECHNOLOGY

Research the El Alamein battle. Draw a **map** of the battle or make a **database** showing the resources, such as the weapons and troops, of each side.