

A SUMMARY OF WORLD WAR II AFTER PEARL HARBOR

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Although World War II had been raging in Europe for over two years, the United States was not plunged into the conflict until December 7, 1941, when Japan attacked the American Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared December 7 "a date which will live in infamy" and urged Congress to declare war on Japan, which it did on December 8. Immediately Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan's Axis allies, declared war on the United States.

After the Pearl Harbor attack, Japan seemed unbeatable. In the first half of 1942, the Japanese captured Guam, Wake Island and the Philippines from the Americans, adding more territory to their vast Pacific empire.

All along, the Japanese had calculated it would take months, even years, for the U.S. Navy to recover from the Pearl Harbor attack. But the tide turned in the Pacific war in June 1942 at the Battle of Midway, in which the Japanese lost four aircraft carriers to just one for the Americans.

Meanwhile, in the Atlantic, German submarines took a heavy toll of allied shipping throughout 1942. But improvements in anti-submarine warfare and the use of large convoys greatly reduced the U-boat menace by early 1943.

Still, Germany held on to most of Europe in 1942. While the British had staved off a likely German invasion by defeating the Nazi air force in the Battle of Britain, only the Soviet Union was left to battle the German army. After invading the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Nazis besieged Leningrad, threatened Moscow and drove deep into the Ukraine. Elsewhere in 1942, German armies swept across North Africa, endangering the Suez Canal and the oil-rich Middle East.

But in February 1943 Soviet forces won the Battle of Stalingrad, a major turning point of the European war. In the spring of 1943, British, American and Free French troops drove the Germans out of North Africa. Afterwards, the Allies invaded Italy, which withdrew from the war, although German troops in Italy continued to fight.

Also in 1943, British and American long-range bombers began large raids on German cities and industrial centers. The British bombed by night, the Americans by day.

By 1944, the defeat of Japan and Germany seemed only a matter of time. Anglo-American bombers were pounding the Nazi homeland. Soviet troops, having pushed the Germans away from Moscow and Leningrad, were on the offensive on the Eastern Front.

In June 1944, British, American and other Allied forces invaded French Normandy. Within weeks, Paris was liberated and Anglo-American troops had reached the German border.

The British-American drive stalled in late 1944 when German troops launched a swift, surprise counterattack in the snowy Battle of the Bulge. But by early 1945, the offensive resumed. British and American troops knifed through the Nazi "Siegfried Line," forged across the Rhine River and raced into central Germany.

As the Anglo-Americans pressed from the west, Soviet troops drove hard from

the east. The Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler and Germany were caught in a vice from which there would be no escape. Hitler committed suicide just before Soviet troops captured Berlin in April 1945. On May 8, 1945, the war in Europe ended with Germany's unconditional surrender.

Germany's defeat revealed first-hand the brutality of the Nazi regime. Late in World War II, American, British and Soviet soldiers liberated many death camps where the Nazis had systematically murdered six million Jews and thousands of other Europeans they considered racially inferior to the Germans.

Meanwhile, in the Pacific, the Americans were fighting a long "island hopping" campaign against Japan; American, British and other Allied forces also fought the Japanese in China and Burma. By 1944, the Japanese had been driven out of their central Pacific islands. By mid-1945, the Americans had seized the Philippines, Iwo Jima and Okinawa after bloody battles that included many Japanese "kamikaze" or suicide attacks.

Worried about the possible loss of millions of American lives in an invasion of Japan, Harry S. Truman, who became president upon Roosevelt's death in April 1945, approved the dropping of atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. Japan unconditionally surrendered on September 2.

