

Overview of World War II Military Events

The War in Europe and North Africa

The United States entered World War II on December 8, 1941, one day after Japan bombed the U.S. naval base at Hawaii's Pearl Harbor. When Germany and Italy declared war on the United States on December 11, the country found itself at war with well-armed enemies in both Europe and Asia. The United States formed an **Alliance with Great Britain and the Soviet Union**. Together, the three countries led the Allies in the fight against the Axis powers, specifically Germany, Italy, and Japan. Believing that Adolph Hitler was a greater threat than Japan, the "Big Three"—British prime minister Churchill, Soviet prime minister Stalin, and U.S. president Roosevelt—agreed to first focus on the war in Europe. After the Allies defeated Hitler, they would then focus on the war against Japan.

The Soviet Union's Eastern Front was the site of some of the war's bloodiest fighting. Stalin wanted the Allies to open up a western European fighting front to divert German troops and provide relief for the devastated Red Army. But Churchill felt the Allies had neither the resources nor the ability to defeat the Germans in Western Europe. Instead, he argued that the Allies should attack Europe's "soft underbelly" in North Africa and Italy. In July 1942 the Allies led intensive military campaigns in North Africa, defeating the German and Italian occupying forces in May 1943. Meanwhile the Red Army had managed to force a German retreat in the ferocious and bloody Battle of Stalingrad in early 1942. The Soviets suffered millions of casualties waiting for the Allies to open a second front in Western Europe.

The Allies invaded northwestern Europe on June 6, 1944. The Allies launched the invasion, known as **D-Day**, in an attack on the beaches of Normandy in northern France. As thousands of soldiers poured onto the Normandy beaches, aircraft rained a steady stream of bombs from above and ships anchored offshore fired round after round of ammunition toward the German coastal defenses. The invasion of Normandy lasted from June 6 to July 25, 1944, when the Allies finally broke free of the beachhead and began to push east toward Paris. Allied forces liberated France and Belgium in August 1944 and began their march on Germany. Hitler made a last-ditch attempt to break Allied lines and reclaim the advantage on the Western Front. On December 16, 1944, 14 German divisions attacked Allied forces stationed in the Ardennes region of Belgium and neighboring Luxembourg in the **Battle of the Bulge**. The outnumbered and unprepared American troops held the Germans off while they waited for reinforcements. The Allies won the Battle of the Bulge in January 1945, after successfully pushing the Germans back to the east. In March 1945 the Allies entered Germany and began moving toward the heart of Hitler's empire in Berlin.

Meanwhile, the Soviets plowed through Poland and entered Germany from the east. The Soviets made their first assault on Berlin on April 16, 1945. Facing defeat, Hitler committed suicide on April 30. On May 7, 1945, Hitler's successor, Admiral Karl Dönitz, signed a document declaring Germany's unconditional surrender to the Allies. The **Allies' Victory in Europe** was complete.

The Pacific War

Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor launched World War II's Pacific War. Japan's main objective was to conquer as much territory as possible in Asia and the Pacific region. After Pearl Harbor, Japan quickly attacked Pacific territories controlled by the United States, Great Britain, and the Netherlands. Japanese forces then swiftly entered Burma, Hong Kong, Malaya, and Thailand on the Asia mainland. By the spring of 1942, Japan controlled over 4,500 miles of Pacific Ocean.

The main U.S. **Strategy in the Pacific War** was a concept called "island hopping." Because it had to fight over a vast space, the United States decided to attack Japan on selected islands and "hop" over others. The U.S. plan specifically focused on capturing islands where the Japanese had fewer defenses. They then set up airbases on these islands and bombed the more heavily protected Japanese outposts. However, since the only way to reach the islands was by sea or air, the key to winning the Pacific War was establishing control over the skies and waters of southeast Asia. Japan and the United States fought to keep waterways clear for troops and supply ships. Two of the most important naval battles in the Pacific War were the Battle of the Coral Sea and the Battle of Midway. In May 1942 Japan planned an attack on three locations in the Coral Sea. The United States found out about the Japanese plan and prepared a counter attack. In a two-day battle, the Americans achieved a strategic victory by stopping a portion of the Japanese invasion and damaging two important aircraft carriers. As a result, the carriers were unable to participate in what proved to be the **Turning Point of the Pacific War**, the Battle of Midway. On June 3, 1942, Japanese forces attacked U.S. troops near the Central Pacific island of Midway. However, by June 5 the Japanese had lost all four of their aircraft carriers and were without the aircraft necessary to successfully fight the Americans. The Japanese were forced to retreat.

The U.S. island-hopping strategy required the American forces to fight many difficult battles across the Pacific. Over time, the American forces captured numerous islands, shrinking the distance between themselves and the Japanese home islands. By early 1945 the Pacific War was entering its final phase. Needing an airbase from which to eventually launch an attack on Japan, the United States invaded the island of Iwo Jima on February 19, 1945. The fighting at the **Battle of Iwo Jima** was brutal and continuous, but the American forces eventually overpowered the outnumbered Japanese troops. Soon after, the United States launched an attack on the neighboring island of Okinawa in April 1945. By June 1945 U.S. forces had captured Okinawa and successfully reclaimed the Philippine Islands. The United States was now ready to invade the main island of Japan. By this time, the war in Europe had ended and additional Allied troops were freed up for an invasion of Japan. However, that invasion never occurred. On August 6, 1945, the United States dropped the world's first atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. On August 9, the United States dropped a second atomic bomb on Nagasaki. A devastated Japan surrendered to the Allies on August 14, 1945. The **End of World War II** was official on September 2, when General MacArthur accepted Japan's surrender on the U.S. battleship *Missouri*.

Details on the U.S. Alliance with Great Britain and the Soviet Union

An Uneasy Alliance

The United States' entry into World War II on December 8, 1941, secured its alliance with Great Britain and the Soviet Union in the war against Hitler. The alliance among the "Big Three"—British prime minister Churchill, Soviet prime minister Stalin, and U.S. president Roosevelt—was uneasy at best. Great Britain and the United States despised the Soviet Union's communist government and the Soviet Union, in turn, was fiercely opposed to the West's capitalism and possible territorial expansion into Eastern Europe. Britain and the United States also took a very dim view of the non-aggression pact the Soviet Union had signed with Nazi Germany in 1939, in which the two countries promised not to attack each other. Another source of tension was the possibility that one country might sign a separate peace agreement with Germany, leaving the other countries to fight Hitler alone. Nonetheless, the Allies knew they needed each other to win World War II. As agreed, they focused first on the war in Europe.

The Eastern Front

Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, opened what became known as the war's Eastern Front. Located in Eastern Europe and the western part of the Soviet Union, the Eastern Front was the site of some of the war's bloodiest fighting. After Hitler's invasion, Soviet prime minister Stalin made the first of many requests that the Allies open up a second front in Western Europe. Stalin knew the establishment of a second front in northwestern Europe, most likely in France, would divert a substantial number of German troops from the Eastern Front and provide some relief for the devastated Red Army. However, Churchill believed that an invasion of Nazi-occupied France would be, as one author wrote, "nothing less than sheer suicidal folly." Churchill felt that the Allies had neither the resources nor the ability to defeat the Germans in France. Instead, he convinced Roosevelt that the Allies should attack Europe's "soft underbelly" in the Mediterranean region, specifically North Africa and Italy. For the meantime, the Soviets were on their own.

North Africa and Italy

In July 1942 the Allies began a series of intensive military campaigns in North Africa that ended with the defeat of the German and Italian occupying forces in May 1943. Within weeks of the North African defeat, the Allies invaded the Italian island of Sicily. Meanwhile, without a second front to relieve the pressure, the Soviet forces on the Eastern Front continued to fight for their lives against the Germans. The Red Army managed to force a German retreat in the ferocious and bloody Battle of Stalingrad in early 1942, but relief was still needed. The war was taking a terrible toll on the Soviet population. By 1943 millions of Soviets had died. One Soviet soldier recalled, "[The local people] called [one] field the white field, because it was all white with skeletons and skulls. Of Soviet soldiers and German soldiers." Finally, toward the end of 1943, Great Britain and the United States began making plans to invade France and open a second front in northwestern Europe.

Details on the Allied Invasion of Northwestern Europe

Operation Overlord: Planning the Normandy Invasion

In the fall of 1943, the Allies began to plan an invasion of Nazi-occupied France. They agreed the best strategy would be to cross the English Channel from Great Britain and make an amphibious attack (an attack on both land and sea) on the Normandy coast in northern France. The Allies selected a 60-mile stretch of beaches as the site of the attack. They code named the invasion Operation Overlord and appointed U.S. general Dwight D. Eisenhower supreme commander of the Allied forces. Eisenhower was charged with leading the complex planning and execution of the designated day of invasion, or D-Day. As one scholar has written, "The Normandy invasion was the greatest military undertaking in history." By mid 1944, the Allies had assembled staggering numbers of soldiers, military equipment, and supplies in Great Britain. Two million soldiers were stationed in south Britain, as well as thousands of airplanes, ships, and tanks. Eisenhower called this assembly "a great human spring, coiled for the moment when its energy should be released and it would vault the English Channel in the greatest amphibious assault ever attempted."

D-Day Begins

On June 6, 1944, the Allies stormed the German-fortified beaches of Normandy. The initial invasion forces included 150,000 soldiers, 1,500 tanks, 5,300 ships, and 12,000 aircraft. The Allies' attack on the Germans was threefold: As thousands of soldiers poured onto the beaches, aircraft rained a steady stream of bombs from above and ships anchored offshore fired round after round of ammunition toward German coastal defenses. In addition, 24,000 airborne Allied troops that had parachuted behind enemy lines the night before sandwiched the Germans between the airborne troops and the beachhead forces.

German leaders were taken by surprise by the date and location of the Normandy invasion. An elaborately planned Allied hoax led them to believe the attack would come at Calais instead of Normandy. Nevertheless, they fought back ferociously from their entrenched positions. The fighting was particularly difficult at Omaha Beach, where Allied casualties reached 2,500 soldiers. First, the sea through which the Allied forces had to wade was choppy and difficult to navigate. Worse, the Germans were positioned high above the Allies on cliffs surrounding the beach, making the Allied troops easy targets. One soldier felt like "a pigeon in a trap shoot." Also, the over 50 pounds of equipment each soldier carried made it hard to move quickly, and hidden land mines on the beach made movement dangerous.

The Germans Are Driven from France

The invasion of Normandy lasted from June 6 to July 25, 1944. The Allies finally broke free of the beachhead and began to push east toward Paris. The Allies launched yet another attack in the south of France, and by late August 1944 a jubilant Paris was liberated from the Germans. The Allied forces liberated Belgium next, and began their march toward Germany. Allied caution and careful planning had proved disastrous for the German forces.

Details on the Battle of the Bulge

Hitler Near Defeat

The tide of World War II turned against Germany after the Allies' successful invasion of northwestern Europe and subsequent liberation of France and Belgium in the fall of 1944. Hitler was now forced to fight the Allies on two fronts. In the west, Allied ground forces slowly advanced toward Germany while aircraft rained an almost ceaseless stream of bombs on German factories, railways, oil refineries and supply lines, and other military targets. The Allies also bombed German cities, killing 25,000 civilians in Berlin and over 60,000 in a devastating firestorm in Dresden in early 1945. Meanwhile, the Soviet Red Army pushed westward, crushing German forces in Poland. The Germans lost over 1.3 million soldiers between June and September 1944 alone.

The Battle of the Bulge

In the winter of 1944, Hitler made a last-ditch attempt to break Allied lines and reclaim the advantage on the Western Front. His highly ambitious and secret plan involved launching a massive attack on Allied forces stationed in the Ardennes region of Belgium and neighboring Luxembourg. This was weak point in the Allied line of defense, and an ideal target for a German offensive. In the early morning hours of December 16, 1944, 14 German divisions crept through the foggy woods surrounding the Allied forces at Ardennes. The Germans launched their attack just before dawn, bombarding the surprised Allies with a rain of gunfire from 2,000 guns. Outnumbered, unprepared, and with their air bombers grounded due to winter snowstorms, the Allies dug in their heels and fought back. But the advancing German troops created a dangerous bulge in the Allied line of defense. If the Germans broke through, they would split the Allied lines in half and possibly capture Antwerp, an important port on the coast of Belgium. The German advance had to be stopped.

Thousands of American troops were caught behind German lines and captured. Others fought in the bitter cold to keep the Germans at bay until reinforcements could arrive. In the small western town of Bastogne, outnumbered American troops held the Germans off for eight days without reinforcements. The Americans' defiance was summed up in the one-word response by their commander, General McAuliffe, when the Germans asked him to surrender: "Nuts!" Eventually, 200,000 reinforcements did arrive and the Allies successfully pushed the Germans back east in January 1945. The Allies had won the Battle of the Bulge.

The Race to the Rhine

After the Allies' success in Ardennes, they began to make their way toward the Rhine River. Most of the bridges spanning the Rhine had been blown up to stop an enemy invasion. Allied troops managed to cross the one remaining bridge at Remagen on March 7, 1945. Other Allied troops soon followed suit, and the march toward the heart of Hitler's empire, Berlin, began.

Details on the Allied Victory in Europe

The Fall of Berlin and the Death of Hitler

The Allies' victory at the Battle of the Bulge and their march across the Rhine River into Germany was a major step toward defeating Hitler. The final blow was a tremendous push from the Soviet Red Army in the east. Hitler, obsessed with beating the Allies in the west, refused to send additional troops to the Eastern Front. By the time his advisers convinced him to send reinforcements, it was too late. The Soviets plowed through Poland and entered Germany. By March 1945 the Soviets were within 35 miles of Hitler's headquarters in Berlin and the Allies in the west were 200 miles away.

In a conference at Yalta in February 1945, the "Big Three"—British prime minister Churchill, U.S. president Roosevelt, and Soviet prime minister Stalin—met to discuss the terms of a likely German surrender. Stalin was intent on establishing communist control over Eastern Europe, and it was generally understood that whatever regions the Red Army occupied at the close of the war would fall under the Soviet sphere of influence. Therefore, when General Eisenhower stopped his troops 50 miles outside of Berlin in April 1945, it ensured that the Soviets would reach Berlin first and maintain control over the city after the war. The Soviets made their first assault on Berlin on April 16, 1945. On April 25, 1945, the American and British forces in the west and the Soviet forces in the east met by the Elbe River, 75 miles south of Berlin. Here, the differences among the nations were forgotten.

Hidden deep beneath the earth in his bunker in Berlin, an enraged Hitler knew he was defeated. His country was in shambles around him, and his enemies virtually outside the bunker door. On April 29 he married his longtime lover Eva Braun in a civil ceremony. Several hours later, they both committed suicide. As the Soviets began bombing the building, several of Hitler's associates burned the bodies and buried the ashes in the garden. As one author wrote, "All that was mortal of Adolph Hitler, the vilest tormentor of mankind, was now but a handful of dust." The war was all but over.

Victory in Europe and the Discovery of the Death Camps

On May 7, 1945, Hitler's successor, Admiral Karl Dönitz, signed a document declaring Germany's unconditional surrender to the Allies. The next day, known as "Victory in Europe" or V-E Day, Europe exploded with joy and relief. However, the victory could not erase the memory of what the Allies had found upon liberating the Nazi death camps. The prisoners still alive were skeletal due to starvation, suffering from a host of terrible diseases, and deeply in shock. The dead bodies of those that had not survived the camp lay in piles. After witnessing the horror of the death camps, a shaken Eisenhower vowed: "I want every American unit not actually in the front lines to see this place. We are told that the American soldier does not know what he is fighting for. Now, at least, he will know what he is fighting against."

Details on U.S. Strategy in the Pacific War

Early Japanese Victories

Japan's attack on the U.S. naval base at Hawaii's Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, launched World War II's Pacific War. That same day, Japanese forces quickly attacked Pacific territories controlled by the United States, Great Britain, and the Netherlands, including the U.S. Philippine Islands and the island of Guam. The Japanese forces then swiftly entered Burma, Hong Kong, Malaya, and Thailand on the Asia mainland. They also captured Wake Island in the South Pacific, and the Gilbert Islands in the Central Pacific.

While Guam immediately fell to Japan, American forces in the Philippines attempted to hold the Japanese forces back. The 80,000 American and Filipino troops led by famed U.S. general Douglas MacArthur retreated to the Bataan Peninsula, located on the northern Philippine island of Luzon. On Luzon, American forces suffered huge losses due to combat, malaria, and the Japanese blockade of the island. In danger of losing an outstanding general, Roosevelt ordered MacArthur out of the Philippines. Upon leaving, MacArthur promised, "I shall return." The overwhelmed American forces on Bataan surrendered to the Japanese on April 9, 1942. In what became known as the Bataan Death March, the Japanese forced 70,000 captured American and Filipino troops to walk 60 miles to San Fernando, where they were sent on to prison camps. Fourteen thousand prisoners died on the march.

The Allies Adopt an "Island Hopping" Strategy and Attack Japan

Initially, Japan's war of conquest proceeded quickly and with great success. By the spring of 1942, Japan occupied virtually every island in over 4,500 miles of Pacific Ocean, extending from the Asia mainland to as far east as the Gilbert Islands. Japan also controlled key portions of the Asia mainland. Given the vast and far-flung regions in which the United States had to fight the Pacific War, they decided to adopt an "island hopping" strategy. That is, the United States would attack Japan on selected islands and "hop" over others, thereby conserving their resources. The Americans' plan specifically focused on attacking and capturing islands where the Japanese had fewer defenses. This strategy went against the traditional military approach of attacking the most heavily defended outposts first, but it would prove to be key to the United States' ultimate success in the Pacific. Military success would have to be won, in large measure, through relentless bombing from the air.

The Doolittle Raid

The Japanese received the first taste of the power of American bombing on April 18, 1942. Under the command of U.S. Air Force commander Lieutenant General James Doolittle, U.S. planes launched a daring attack on the Japanese capital of Tokyo and other key Japanese cities. In the attack, American bomber planes took off from an aircraft 400 miles off the Japanese coast and dropped 500-pound bombs on the region. The mission greatly raised American morale and deeply shocked Japan: "For the first time ever," one historian noted, "an enemy had struck at the homeland."

Details on the Turning Point of the Pacific War

The Importance of Controlling the Air and Sea

The key to winning the Pacific War was establishing control over the skies and waters of the Pacific. Most strategically important battles occurred on the islands of the Pacific. Since the only way to reach the islands was by sea or air, the side with the greatest sea power and air power had the advantage. As a result, Japan and the United States fought many naval battles to keep vital waterways clear.

The Battle of the Coral Sea

In April 1942 Japanese admiral Yamamoto hatched a plan to engage the Allied Pacific Fleet. Yamamoto recognized growing U.S. naval strength and felt the fleet must be destroyed if Japan was to hold onto captured territories. Yamamoto ordered his fleet toward Australia. The U.S. fleet maneuvered into position to stop them. The U.S. and Japanese fleets clashed on May 7 and 8, 1942, in the Battle of Coral Sea. Changes in the methods of war were strikingly evident. In this battle, neither side could see the enemy from aboard the ships. It was a battle of aircraft carriers, fighters, and bombers. Both sides inflicted heavy damage. The Americans lost the carrier *Lexington*, but after heavy fighting, forced a Japanese retreat. The Japanese lost many aircraft and two vital aircraft carriers. The Battle of the Coral Sea was a prelude to another naval battle—Midway, the turning point in the Pacific War.

The Battle of Midway

After the Battle of the Coral Sea, Japan devised a complex plan to attack the island of Midway, located in the Central Pacific. While Midway was not as strategically important as some of the other Pacific islands, it was about 1,000 miles west of Hawaii's Pearl Harbor. By attacking Midway, Japan hoped to draw the American fleet away from Pearl Harbor and into a naval battle the Japanese were confident they could win. However, U.S. military intelligence intercepted and decoded Japan's secret plans and informed the commander in chief of the U.S. Navy, Admiral Chester Nimitz. Nimitz assembled his forces north of Midway in preparation for the Japanese attack. However, the American forces were significantly outnumbered—they possessed only 76 ships to Japan's 162.

On June 3, 1942, 108 Japanese aircraft made a successful first strike on a small number of American marine fliers. While the Japanese prepared for a second air strike, the American forces began their approach toward Midway. The Japanese were taken by surprise and caught virtually disarmed, with their fighter planes chasing the marine fliers and their ships in mid-preparation for the second strike. Nevertheless, the Japanese forces destroyed virtually all of the planes in the American's first wave of air attacks. However, the Americans soon struck back. By the evening of June 5, the Japanese had lost all four of their aircraft carriers and were without the aircraft necessary to successfully fight the Americans. Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, commander in chief of the Japanese naval forces, ordered a retreat. The victory in the Battle of Midway gave the United States the upper hand for the first time in the Pacific War. The tide had begun to turn.

Details on the Battle of Iwo Jima

Difficult Island Campaigns

The Allies' victories at sea allowed them to invade numerous Japanese-held islands. In 1943 and 1944, Americans captured Guadalcanal in the Solomon Island chain, Tarawa, and the Marshall and Marianas Islands in the Central and South Pacific. The attacks on these islands were filled with danger. Monsoons drenched troops and rotted uniforms, and coral ripped boots open. Soldiers faced malaria and temperatures as high as 115 degrees in the shade. In addition, an earthquake interrupted fighting on Guadalcanal, and heavy equipment sank in the jungles at Bougainville. Everywhere men faced bugs, and sweat, and blood. Much of the fighting was hand to hand against an enemy that often refused to surrender. Still American forces moved forward, tightening the noose for an attack on the Japanese home islands.

The Battle of Iwo Jima

By early 1945 the Pacific War was entering its final phase. Successful campaigns in the South and Central Pacific had pushed back the Japanese line of defense. Now the United States needed an airbase from which they could eventually launch an attack on the Japanese homeland. Therefore, they planned an attack on the nearby island of Iwo Jima, a 4-mile-long and 2-mile-wide volcanic island off the southern coast of Japan. The island was a dismal place, its blackened and burnt terrain covered in volcanic ash. The northern half of the island was protected by steep cliffs, and the approximately 23,000 Japanese troops stationed on the island had built many strong and well-concealed defense barriers. The Japanese forces also possessed an elaborate underground tunnel system and could hide in Iwo Jima's 1,500 caves.

Before the Americans launched their attack on Iwo Jima, they attempted to "soften" Japanese defenses by bombing the island from the air and shelling the beaches from the sea. The first of 250,000 American troops landed on Iwo Jima on February 19, 1945. The well-protected but vastly outnumbered Japanese troops launched a furious counterattack, raining a hail of mortar shells and automatic gunfire on the American forces. Many American soldiers scrambling up the beach were wounded or killed by land mines. The fighting on Iwo Jima was brutal and continuous. As one soldier recalled, "The battle was all night long. It went on, day in and day out. The war I knew was totally savage." Committed to the warrior code of honor known as *bushido* (no surrender), the Japanese troops held off the American forces for over four weeks. On March 26, 1945, the Japanese surrendered. Of the original 23,000 Japanese soldiers, only 1,000 had survived the siege on Iwo Jima. The Americans suffered over 22,000 casualties, including approximately 5,300 deaths.

Okinawa and the Philippines

After establishing a base on Iwo Jima, the United States launched another ferocious attack on the neighboring island of Okinawa on April 1, 1945. By June 1945 U.S. forces had captured Okinawa and successfully reclaimed the Philippine Islands. The United States was now ready to launch its attack on the main islands of Japan.

Details on the End of World War II

The Planned Invasion of Japan

After the United States captured the Japanese islands of Iwo Jima and Okinawa in the spring of 1945, it began planning an invasion of the Japanese homeland. The U.S. Air Force firebombed numerous Japanese cities to weaken Japan's defenses and pave the way for the invasion. The firebomb raid on the Japanese capital of Tokyo in March 1945, destroyed over 25,000 buildings and killed over 80,000 people. The U.S. Navy cut off Japan's food and other supplies by destroying incoming Japanese supply ships. Japan attempted to counteract American attacks with air strikes, including suicide missions called *kamikaze*, which means "divine wind." These missions involved Japanese pilots dive-bombing American warships in an attempt to destroy them. In April 1945 Japan directed over 1,000 kamikaze attacks on U.S. warships. While many died in the process, Japanese pilots managed to damage or sink over 200 vessels.

The Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

U.S. scientists had been working on the development of an atomic bomb since 1940. An atomic bomb would be hundreds of times more powerful than any bomb then in existence. On July 16, 1945, the first atomic bomb was successfully tested in New Mexico. President Harry S. Truman, who became president after Roosevelt's death in April 1945, was deeply concerned that a direct invasion of Japan would result in the death of hundreds of thousands of U.S. soldiers. He came to believe that dropping an atomic bomb on Japan would be the quickest way to end the Pacific War and would save thousands of American lives.

On August 6, 1945, the United States dropped the world's first atomic bomb, nicknamed "Little Boy," on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. In a sickening flash of light and a billowing mushroom-shaped cloud of smoke, the bomb instantly destroyed 60 percent of the city and killed 100,000 of its people. On August 8, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan and the next day, the United States dropped another atomic bomb—this one nicknamed "Fat Man"—on the city of Nagasaki. Over 70,000 Nagasaki residents were killed. A devastated Japan surrendered to the Allies on August 14, 1945. On September 2, General Douglas MacArthur officially accepted Japan's surrender on the U.S. battleship *Missouri*. World War II was officially over.

The Costs of War

By the time World War II drew to a close, over 300,000 Americans had died and 700,000 had been wounded. Worldwide, more than 50 million lives were lost in the war. The almost 3 million tons of bombs dropped overseas during the war destroyed at least 7 million homes, and left hundreds of towns, villages, and cities in ruins. But many Americans felt the U.S. participation in World War II was worth the costs. The United States had played a major role in stopping the rise of fascism and Hitler's horrific genocide. In addition, the United States had halted Japan's war of conquest in the Pacific. At the end of World War II, most Americans felt that the United States had indeed fought the "good war" against evil.