

World War II interactive Timeline

1939

1941

1943

1945

1940

1942

1944

1939

1st September 1939 the Nazi's invaded Poland. The following day Britain and France declared war on Germany.

The German's employed a new form of military tactic known as Blitzkrieg.

1939 Also saw the beginning of a period known as the Phoney War

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1940

May: Hitler orders the invasion of the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and then France. On 22 June, [France surrenders](#) after a mere six weeks of fighting.

May-June: As the German army advance through France the British & French armies retreated to the Channel coast. Between 24 May and 4 June, the entire British Expeditionary Force was rescued in the [Dunkirk Evacuation](#).

July-September: Germans began to gather an invasion fleet to begin the conquest of Britain. Throughout the summer of 1940 the German Luftwaffe sent fighter and bomber aircraft to attack Britain in the [Battle of Britain](#).

7 September: German bombers begin attacks on British cities in a series of air attacks known as the [Blitz](#).

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1941

June: Hitler launches [Operation Barbarossa](#), his attack on the Soviet Union.

August: German forces attacking the USSR begin the siege of Leningrad. Over the next two and a half years a million Russians will die there. Most from starvation.

December: America officially joins the war on the side of Britain & the USSR following the Japanese attack on the American naval base at [Pearl Harbour](#).

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1942

October: The Japanese plan to invade British controlled India. To help them transport troops they begin work on the Burma Railway, built with slave labour from British and Allied prisoners of war.

The Royal Air force and the American USAF begins intensive bombing of German cities under plans laid down by [Sir Arthur "Bomber" Harris](#).

November: German Eighth Army defeated by the British under Field Marshall Montgomery at the battle of [El Alamein](#).

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1943

February: After many months of bitter fighting in the frozen Russian winters, the German general Von Paulus, disobeyed Hitler and surrendered to the Russians. The Germans had lost 20,000 soldiers and faced their first major land defeat.

April: The turning point in the Battle of the Atlantic is reached. Improved convoy systems and the breaking of German secret codes greatly helps in safeguarding supply ships coming to Britain from the USA.

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1944

6 June: Operation Overlord begins. More commonly referred to as "D-DAY" this is the Allied attempt to smash their way back into Nazi occupied Europe.

25 August: Allied soldiers free the French capital Paris from German control.

September: British and American attack on the bridges over the river Rhine (the gateway to Germany) fails at Arnhem.

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1945

February: Massive bombing raid destroys the German town of Dresden, killing possibly 150,000 people.

30 April: Hitler commits suicide.

2 May: The Russian army take control of the German capital Berlin.

6 August: American B-52 bomber drops the first atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima.

9 August: Second atomic bomb dropped on the Japanese city of Nagasaki.

14 August: Japan surrenders bringing the war in the Pacific to an end.

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Blitzkrieg

When the German army invaded Poland in early 1939 it employed a new tactic known as Blitzkrieg (**lightning war**). Relying upon speed and mechanised infantry they hit the enemy fast and hard. Stuka dive bombers destroyed the Polish air force on the ground, tanks smashed holes in Polish defences and soldiers using trucks and motor cycles penetrated deep into enemy territory. **The German army advanced further into Poland in six weeks than they had into France in the whole of the First World War.**



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The Phoney War

Once war was declared many people in Britain feared an immediate start to bombing by German aircraft. In cities around Britain air raid shelters were constructed, gas masks issued and anti-aircraft guns readied. In an effort to safeguard British children **1.5 million** of them were **evacuated** to areas of the country though to be safe from bombing. However, there were **no air-raids for the first six months of the war.**



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The surrender of France

Following the withdrawal of British forces from the beaches of Dunkirk France was **easy prey to Hitler's armies**. On 14 June 1940 **Paris finally fell** to the Germans. For most of the rest of the war, France would be under German occupation.

As a result of their surrender to the Germans the **French army was dismantled** and for most of the rest of the war 1.5 million French soldiers remained prisoners of the Germans.



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The Dunkirk Evacuation: Disaster or Miracle?

When France was invaded in early 1940 the British Expeditionary Force was sent to France. The German advance through France was so quick that the British were caught by surprise and pushed back to Dunkirk on the French channel coast. The troops were trapped between the German army and the Channel. The **only escape route was the sea.**

27 May, Winston Churchill issued a call for all ships of all shapes and sizes to join the Royal Navy in pulling the troops off the beaches to safety.

The Daily Mirror newspaper described the lucky escape as "**BLOODY MARVELLOUS**" despite the fact that no journalists were allowed to be present on the beaches.



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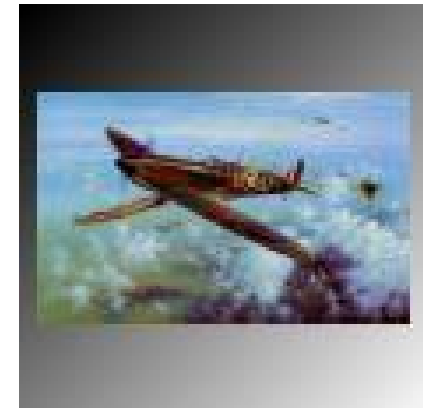
The Battle of Britain

1940 Hitler turned his attention to the **invasion of Britain**. Throughout the summer of 1940 the RAF and the German Luftwaffe fought for control of the skies over the Channel. For Britain this was a **time of crisis**

- German pilots were **better trained** than the British.
- The German's had **superior numbers** of aircraft.
- The Germans could cross the channel in 5 minutes, it took **15 minutes** for the British to intercept them.

Luckily the Germans lost planes at a greater rate than the British and radar systems helped the British to detect incoming aircraft.

On 7 September the Germans abandoned their attacks on British airfields and began to bomb London. Hitler had faced his first major setback of the war and had to **abandon the planned invasion of Britain**.



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The Blitz

Having **failed to destroy the Royal Air Force** in the battle of Britain, the Luftwaffe (German air force) switched tactics and began the concentrated bombing of British cities. This was a **crisis time for Britain**. Civilians were being deliberately targeted. Casualties were high. In May 1941 alone, 1453 people were killed in Liverpool. Many deaths were the result of **lack of shelters**. The government did provide 2 million Anderson shelters that could be set up in back gardens. However, while these would protect you from flying glass and debris, they were **little protection against a direct bomb** hit or from a falling house.



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Operation Barbarossa

22 June 1941. **German troops invaded Russia.** This attack was a **major drain on German troops**, especially diverting German aircraft from the Battle of the Atlantic. The Germans were **initially very successful**, covering huge areas of Russian territory quickly. However, many historians believe that this attack was a **miscalculation** by Hitler. In the long run Russia would prove to be the **graveyard of much of the German army**. Freezing temperatures and constant attack from Russian partisans wore the Germans down.



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Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour

On 7 December the **Japanese** launched a **surprise attack on Pearl Harbour**, an American naval base in Hawaii. Some historians believe that Japan intended to destroy the American Pacific fleet while it was in dock.

At 7.55 am, while many American servicemen were still asleep, 183 Japanese planes began to rain bombs onto the base and its warships.

In under two hours **18 warships** were sunk or crippled, **177 planes** were destroyed and **2300 Americans** were killed. The Japanese lost 29 planes.

The main consequence of this attack was that on 8 December 1941 **America joined the war** on the side of Britain. This was a huge morale boost for the Allies.



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The Bombing campaign



From 1942 onwards British and American bombers flew missions over Germany. Night after night, they bombed industrial, military and civilian targets. Thousands of civilians were killed and millions made homeless. The bombing was not always accurate. Many **British and American pilots were killed** in these raids but a leading historian, Professor Richard Overy **does** believe that the **air raids were successful** in depriving the German army of vital battlefield equipment and weapons.

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The Battle of the Atlantic

British Prime Minister Churchill said after the war that the battle of the Atlantic was the part of the war that really scared him. By mid 1940 **German submarines were sinking 25% of British ships** bringing vital supplies from America. Slowly, however, **radar systems were improved** to help protect British shipping. In addition special long-range aircraft were developed to hunt German submarines. At the same time, having stolen German code making machines the British were able to **crack German secret codes**. From 1943 onwards, no Royal Navy battleships or aircraft carriers were sunk at all.

As a result of winning the battle of the Atlantic millions of American troops and tons of equipment were **safely transported to Europe** These forces would play a key role in the D-Day invasions which would liberate Europe from the Nazis.



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D-Day

On 6 June 1944 the armies of Britain & America attacked the beaches of Normandy in north west France. This was the first real attempt to get the Allied armies back into Europe after the defeat of Dunkirk. The Allies were faced with very strong German defences along the French coast. Despite this, the attack, known as Operation Overlord was a great success. **By 11 June the Allies had landed 300,000 British, American and Commonwealth troops in German occupied France.** Supplied by the navy and protected by RAF/USAF air power this invasion force would soon begin the liberation of Europe from Nazi control.

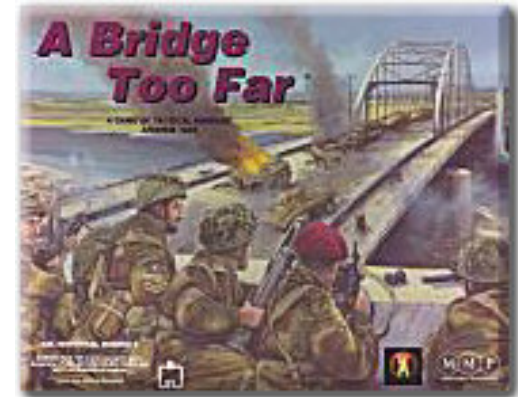


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Arnhem

This attack was aimed at capturing the bridges over the River Rhine and so allowing British and American forces access into Germany.

Following bombing by the RAF and USAF, the main attack was undertaken by 1,500 troops carrying planes and 500 gliders. Thirty six gliders were destroyed in flight, but the troops who landed safely were soon locked into fierce battles with German SS troops. These German troops were often fanatical and the **British and Americans failed to capture the Rhine bridges.**



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Dresden



In two nights of bombing by the RAF and the USAF as many as 150,000 people were killed in air raids on the German city of Dresden. It is believed that the bombing **destroyed as much as 70% of the city's buildings.**

Under the strain of such bombing, normal German life began to break down. The government found it increasingly difficult to function. Ration cards were replaced by the black market and German civilian morale began to suffer.

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The atomic bomb



In order to force the Japanese to surrender, the Americans had begun "island hopping", moving slowly up the chain of Pacific islands that led to Japan. **The Japanese fought very hard, often refusing to surrender and attacking the Americans with Kamikazi raids (suicide attacks).**

The American government were worried that an invasion of Japan would lead to tens of thousands of American soldiers being killed.

The Americans decided that the weapon that would force Japan to surrender was the new atomic bomb. **On the morning of 6 August 1945 a single American B-52 bomber flew over the Japanese city of Hiroshima and dropped the worlds first atomic bomb.** In the city below 70,000 died in the blast and firestorms, many more would die in the months to follow from radiation sickness.

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El Alamein

Germany's ally Italy had a strong military presence in North Africa and after the withdrawal of the BEF from Dunkirk this area was the only place left for the British to fight the enemy on land.



When the battle of El Alamein was over Churchill declared the battle was "the end of the beginning".

What the battle did do was **serious damage to Italy and draw off a large number of German reinforcements.** By early May of 1943 the German's had lost two whole tank divisions and thousands of soldiers.



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