

V-E Day

On March 7, 1945, the Western Allies—whose chief commanders in the field were Omar N. Bradley and Bernard Law Montgomery—crossed the Rhine after having smashed through the strongly fortified Siegfried Line and overran West Germany. The German collapse came after the meeting (Apr. 25) of the Western and Russian armies at Torgau in Saxony, and after Hitler's death amid the ruins of Berlin, which was falling to the Russians under marshals Zhukov and Konev. The unconditional surrender of Germany was signed at Rheims on May 7 and ratified at Berlin on May 8.

May 8 marks the formal celebration of the Allies' victory in Europe during World War II

By the beginning of 1944 air warfare had turned overwhelmingly in favour of the Allies, who wrought unprecedented destruction on many German cities and on transport and industries throughout German-held Europe. This air offensive prepared the way for the landing (June 6, 1944) of the Allies in N France and a secondary landing (Aug. 15) in S France. After heavy fighting in Normandy, Allied armoured divisions raced to the Rhine, clearing most of France and Belgium of German forces by Oct., 1944. The use of V-1 and V-2 rockets by the Germans proved as futile an effort as their counteroffensive in Belgium under General von Rundstedt.

On the Eastern Front Soviet armies swept (1944) through the Baltic States, E Poland, Belorussia, and Ukraine and forced the capitulation of Romania (Aug. 23), Finland (Sept. 4), and Bulgaria (Sept. 10). Having evacuated the Balkan Peninsula, the Germans resisted in Hungary until Feb, 1945, but Germany itself was pressed. The Russians entered East Prussia and Czechoslovakia (Jan, 1945) and took E Germany to the Oder.

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1939

Hitler invades Poland on 1 September. Britain and France declare war on Germany two days later.

1940

Rationing starts in the UK.

German 'Blitzkrieg' overwhelms Belgium, Holland and France.

Churchill becomes Prime Minister of Britain.

British Expeditionary Force evacuated from Dunkirk.

British victory in Battle of Britain forces Hitler to postpone invasion plans.

1941

Hitler begins Operation Barbarossa - the invasion of Russia.

The Blitz continues against Britain's major cities.

Allies take Tobruk in North Africa, and resist German attacks.

Japan attacks Pearl Harbor, and the US enters the war.

1942

Germany suffers setbacks at Stalingrad and El Alamein.

Singapore falls to the Japanese in February - around 25,000 prisoners taken.

American naval victory at Battle of Midway, in June, marks turning point in Pacific War.

Mass murder of Jewish people at Auschwitz begins.

1943

Surrender at Stalingrad marks Germany's first major defeat.

Allied victory in North Africa enables invasion of Italy to be launched.

Italy surrenders, but Germany takes over the battle.

British and Indian forces fight Japanese in Burma.

1944

Allies land at Anzio and bomb monastery at Monte Cassino.

Soviet offensive gathers pace in Eastern Europe.

D Day: The Allied invasion of France. Paris is liberated in August.

Guam liberated by the US Okinawa, and Iwo Jima bombed.

1945

Auschwitz liberated by Soviet troops.

Russians reach Berlin: Hitler commits suicide and Germany surrenders on 7 May.

Truman becomes President of the US on Roosevelt's death, and Attlee replaces Churchill.

After atomic bombs are dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan surrenders on 14 August.