

The **HUTCHINSON**

ATLAS OF

WORLD WAR II BATTLE PLANS

BEFORE AND AFTER



Edited by Stephen Badsey
Royal Military Academy Sandhurst

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General Editor
Stephen Badsey

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key to symbols used on Plan and Outcome maps

• town or village

 built-up area

==== road or track

==+== railroad

▲ peak

~~~~ coastline

~~~~ river or stream

~~~~ river

~~~~ canal

⋈ marsh

 lake

Castelforte town or village

Stalingrad town battle named after



FRANCE country

PACO state or area

Rhine river, canal

Monte Cairo peak, mountains

Prinz Eugen ship

 arrows on the Plan maps are shown in outline to show the planned direction of attack
 on the Outcome maps solid arrows show the direction of actual attacks and counter-attacks

 Allied deployment

 Axis or Japanese deployment

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Introduction

The Strategy of World War II

“Now at this very moment I knew that the United States was in the war, up to the neck and in to the death. So we had won after all! ... How long the war would last or in what fashion it would end no man could tell, nor did I at this moment care ... We should not be wiped out. Our history would not come to an end ... Hitler’s fate was sealed. Mussolini’s fate was sealed. As for the Japanese, they would be ground to a powder. All the rest was merely the proper application of overwhelming force.”

WINSTON CHURCHILL, ON HEARING THE NEWS OF PEARL HARBOR

ON 7 DECEMBER 1941 the Japanese attacked the United States Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, bringing the United States into World War II on the side of Britain and its Empire. On 11 December Adolf Hitler declared war on the United States on behalf of Nazi Germany, accompanied by Fascist Italy under Benito Mussolini. Germany and Italy were already fighting against Britain in North Africa, and against the Soviet Union. Hitler’s decision to declare war on the United States linked this war in Europe with the war in the Far East, so creating the world’s first truly global war.

Pearl Harbor is only one of 21 major battles of World War II described in this book. The outcome of each of these battles played a major part in deciding which side would eventually win the war. This introduction describes the wider events and national strategies of World War II, placing all these battles into a context so that their origins and their consequences can be better understood.

What convinced the British prime minister Winston Churchill that Pearl Harbor was the turning point from which victory would eventually come? Unlike his arch-enemy Hitler, Churchill had a good understanding of military strategy, and of what produces victory in war. Britain and its two major Allies in the war, the United States and the Soviet Union, also learned how to cooperate together despite their differences, and to produce a winning strategy of war on a global scale.

To put it at its most simple, a strategy of war is just a plan to defeat the enemy. Once a war has begun, strategy is concerned first of all with how to fight, and then with where and when to fight. Strategy sets basic objectives for a country at war and its armed forces, which its leaders hope will result in victory. In order to achieve these objectives it is almost always necessary to fight battles, and so victory in battle brings the objectives of strategy closer. It sounds simple enough. But even leading a country successfully in peacetime is one of the most difficult and demanding of all human endeavours. Mobilizing and channelling the immensely complex and powerful resources of the 20th century's industrial global empires, including the skills and determination of their people, so that they could fight a war on the scale of World War II through to success, was an achievement without parallel in history.

For the people of Europe, World War II began on 1 September 1939, when the armed forces of Nazi Germany invaded Poland. Shortly before this, Germany had signed a non-aggression pact with Poland's enemy to the east, the communist Soviet Union under its effective dictator, Joseph Stalin. Britain and France had both offered security guarantees to Poland, and two days later both countries declared war on Germany. Poland faced strong German attacks from the north out of East Prussia, from the west, and from the south. On 17 September the Soviet Union joined in with an attack on eastern Poland. With nothing that the British and French could do to help them, the Poles fought hard until their defeat on 28 September. This left Poland partitioned between Germany and the Soviet Union. However, Britain and France did not declare war on the Soviet Union, realizing the artificial nature of its agreement with Germany and hoping to secure its help.

Within Europe, all other countries stayed neutral, but this was already a war of considerable size. The British Empire at that date included Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as British India (which stretched from modern Iran almost to Thailand), and many other countries round the globe. With the second largest navy in the world after the United States, Britain also controlled much of the world's shipping and natural resources. The French Empire was not quite as large, but included much of North Africa as well as colonies in the Far East. Nazi Germany had, by 1939, absorbed Austria and the Czech Republic as the 'Third Reich' (Empire), and had alliances or close ties with many of the smaller countries of Eastern Europe. Most important was the three-power Axis between Germany, Italy, and Japan.

The world before the start of World War II had been far from peaceful. The Spanish Civil War, begun in 1936, had only ended in March 1939 with victory for the Fascists, while Italy had expanded its own empire to include Ethiopia

and Albania as well as Libya. The Japanese had occupied Chinese Manchuria in 1931, and in 1937 had invaded China itself, where a protracted, if technically undeclared, war was already raging. In 1939 the Soviet Union fought an undeclared war with the Japanese at Nomonhan, on the border between its own territory in Mongolia and Manchuria, leading to a peace settlement between the two countries in 1941.

The war aims of Germany, Italy, and Japan, and the strategies by which they hoped to achieve them, have been subject to argument for the obvious reason that they eventually failed to carry them out. No strategy or plan of war can ever be so precise that it is written down exactly before the war and then followed in every detail. The same is true of any plan for a battle, if only because the enemy also has his own plans. But the broad shape of these plans and their associated strategies is clear for each of the three countries.

As *Führer* ('Leader') of Nazi Germany, a title that he gave himself in 1934, Adolf Hitler was the chief architect of German strategy. In the widest sense, its objectives were to spread and establish Nazi ideology, and with it the domination of the 'Superior Races' – of which the Germans were believed by Hitler to be the highest form – over the 'Inferior Races' of the world. This included the policies that produced the extermination camps of World War II. It is probable that Hitler's Germany aimed at eventual domination of the entire world. But his first ambition was *Lebensraum* ('space to live'), the creation of a Reich stretching into eastern Europe as far as the Ural Mountains, which would become an area of settlement for German peoples. The 'Inferior' peoples of occupied countries would either be wiped out – particularly the Jewish population – or kept in a condition of semi-slavery.

Aims on this scale would keep Germany at war for many years. But historically Germany (and its chief predecessor state Prussia) had won its wars if these had been short, fought against one enemy at the time, and if Germany had been able to attack first. Long wars against many enemies on more than one front – most obviously World War I – had produced defeats for Germany. So before World War II, Hitler had sought to dominate Eastern Europe by threats, without Britain or France intervening. Their declaration of war over Poland came as a genuine surprise to the Nazis.

For World War II, Germany also added new technology to its traditional strategy of fighting short aggressive campaigns one at a time. This new technology was based chiefly on tanks and aircraft, and became known as the blitzkrieg ('lightning war'). There was always a problem at the heart of German strategy between the desire to fight these short blitzkriegs, and the desire for large territorial conquests. The concentration on the blitzkrieg also meant that Germany had a fairly weak navy, dependent chiefly upon

submarines ('U-boats'), and an airforce better suited to supporting ground attacks than to long-range bombing.

Italy and Japan had altogether lesser ambitions than Germany. Italy was the weakest of the Axis powers, and Mussolini's aims were to create an Italian colonial empire from the countries that border the Mediterranean Sea. Japan had rather greater ambitions to create an empire on the Asian mainland, largely from the disintegration of China. Emperor Hirohito, who traditionally took no direct part in politics, was powerless to stop the ambitions and rivalries of the Japanese Imperial Army and Navy. Japan boasted some of the largest and most modern ships in the world, but Japanese strategy was beset by problems of attempting too much with forces that were too small.

Given the strength of their fleet, the British had planned for a long war, with their military strength peaking in about 1943. They started with a small army, most of which was sent to France in 1939. The British Royal Air Force (RAF) had based its strategy largely on bombing industrial targets in daylight. The first few experiences made it clear that existing bombers were too slow and lightly armed to survive over Germany in daylight. This led the British to turn to bombing at night, and a debate began over bombing strategies that would continue throughout the war.

Unlike Britain, France had a powerful army in 1939, together with quite a strong navy and air force. But strategy was based on the defence of France, chiefly by the formidable system of concrete bunkers and emplacements along the common border with Germany, known as the Maginot Line. Germany also had a similar, if weaker, defensive system along its western border, known as the Westwall. The French, like the British, planned for a long war in which they would be ready to attack in one or two years.

The defeat of Poland therefore produced the odd situation that, of all the countries at war, none was ready to attack. Germany had no interest in a long war with Britain and France, and continued to hope for a peace settlement. Only limited fighting took place at sea and in the air. American journalists called this period 'the phoney war'. Instead, all sides worked to strengthen their positions politically, with the British in particular hoping to convince the United States to enter the war. The Soviet Union used threats of force to occupy more territory in Eastern Europe, and in November attacked Finland in the 'Winter War', which lasted until March. On 9 April the Germans invaded Norway and also Denmark, and after brief resistance both countries surrendered.

Then the situation in Europe, and the war strategies that went with it, changed dramatically. On 10 May 1940 the Germans launched their long-awaited attack in the west, striking at the French and British armies through

neutral Belgium and the Netherlands in order to avoid the Maginot Line. The result of this battle, the first of the great armoured blitzkriegs of the war, was as unexpected as it was dramatic. The French forces were defeated and collapsed in a matter of weeks. **The Fall of France** led to a complete French surrender on 22 June. Germany occupied the Netherlands, Belgium, and northern France. A puppet French state, known as 'Vichy France', was established in the south, and was responsible for controlling the French colonial empire. As with other countries overrun by the Germans, a number of Free French escaped to Britain to continue the fight. The British faced their greatest test in July as the **Battle of Britain**, a German attempt to establish air superiority over southern England, began as a preliminary to an amphibious invasion. The German failure in this battle represented their first important defeat in World War II, and left Britain as a critical threat in the west.

Nevertheless, Germany now controlled Europe from the Arctic to the Mediterranean. Italy had also declared war on 10 June, meaning that the Italian fleet in the Mediterranean and troops in the Italian colony of Libya both threatened Britain's control of the Suez Canal and communications with the Far East. Most of the countries of Eastern Europe now joined the Axis. Britain had no allies, and was facing a much greater threat at sea as German submarines could now sail from French and Norwegian ports. The long campaign called the Battle of the Atlantic had already begun, with Germany attempting to starve Britain into surrender. But the Royal Navy remained very powerful, and the German attempt to win the war in the Atlantic by including battleships led to the dramatic **Sink the Bismarck!** chase in March 1941.

In response to all these events the United States under President Franklin D Roosevelt, while remaining neutral, started to rearm and to tilt strongly towards the British side by offering economic and naval support. In August 1941 Britain and the United States issued the 'Atlantic Charter', a statement of mutual beliefs and future policy.

The British could attack Germany directly only by building up their bomber fleet, while the Royal Navy imposed a limited blockade on the Reich. Neither of these methods would be very effective for at least another year. Instead, the main theatre of war shifted to the Mediterranean. On 28 October 1940 Italian forces from Albania invaded Greece, only to be repulsed. In December a major attack by British forces from Egypt defeated the Italians in Libya. The German response was to send their own forces to North Africa to support the Italians. For the next two years a series of armoured battles would be fought in the Western Desert along the North African coast.

The British also hoped for allies in southern Europe and offered military support, a hope that ended in April 1941 when the Germans overran both

Yugoslavia and Greece. This campaign ended with the German capture of **Crete** using airborne forces in May. Having to be rescued by the Germans in this manner confirmed Italy's position as a subordinate partner in the Axis.

Hitler now decided that Britain was no threat, and would eventually either make peace or collapse from defeat by the U-boats. It was time for the campaign that had always been at the heart of Nazi war aims. On 22 June 1941 Germany launched its attack on the Soviet Union, **Operation Barbarossa**. This massive land and air campaign grew to include troops from virtually all the Axis countries in Europe. At first the Soviet forces reeled back under this hammer-blow. Within a few weeks the Germans had reached the outskirts of Leningrad (St Petersburg), the largest Soviet city in the north. But Leningrad held out, and as winter approached, what had been planned as another German blitzkrieg became a slow slogging match across the entire Eastern Front. In December the Germans were held just short of Moscow, their second major defeat in the war and their first on land.

Meanwhile on the far side of the world, the Japanese were having no success in their war with China. Their strategic response was to widen the war. In July, Japanese forces moved into French Indo-China. The British and Americans countered by imposing an oil embargo. South East Asia was rich in economic resources, and mostly controlled by European powers, which were in no position to defend them. The Japanese planned one swift operation that would take them as far south as New Guinea, as far west as Burma, and as far east as the Philippines (which were under American control). To make this happen, they needed to eliminate the only fighting unit powerful enough to intervene: the United States Pacific Fleet. This is why on 7 December 1941 the Japanese attacked **Pearl Harbor**, bringing the United States into the war.

The main reason that the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor caught the Americans by surprise was that they were absolutely convinced that Japan could not defeat them in war. Much of the formidable United States Navy was now in the Atlantic, and its Army (including the Army Air Force) was only slowly building up from small beginnings. But so great was American industrial strength that within two years they would have overwhelming superiority over Japan. In fact the Japanese knew this too, but they were not prepared to give up the chance of an Asian empire by backing down to the Americans. Part of the Japanese strategic plan was based on exploiting the riches of South East Asia with what they called the 'Pan Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere'. They also hoped to provoke uprisings by Asian independence movements, particularly against the British in India.

Out in the Pacific Ocean the Japanese occupied a chain of islands, which

they called the 'Line of the Rising Sun'. Their strategy was based on the fact that fighting through the jungles of South East Asia was formidably difficult. In order to reach the Japanese home islands with either bombers or ground troops the Americans would have to conduct an 'island hopping' campaign across the Pacific, taking the important islands in turn. If the Japanese could inflict heavy losses on the United States for each island, then the Americans might decide that the loss was too great and agree a negotiated peace.

Pearl Harbor and the capture of so much territory by the Japanese coincided with the Germans almost reaching Moscow, and represented a high point of the war for the Axis. Even so, Hitler's decision to declare war on the United States ranks with his decision to turn east before defeating Britain as among the greatest blunders in the whole of military history. Although the Soviet Union remained at peace with Japan, even China formally declared war on 9 December 1941, joining the United States and Britain.

Also in December 1941, at a major planning conference in Washington, the British and Americans decided on their basic strategy for the rest of the war. First, Germany was seen as the most powerful and most dangerous enemy, and priority would be given to defeating Germany before Japan. On the Eastern Front the Soviet Union was fighting desperately. The sheer size of the country and terrible nature of the war was absorbing two-thirds of the entire German war effort. It would clearly be a catastrophe for the Allies if the Soviet Union was defeated, and Stalin called repeatedly for a 'Second Front', an Allied attack into Western Europe. The British, who had already fought almost alone for over a year, were fighting in North Africa, the Far East, in the Atlantic, and in the Mediterranean, and were beginning to develop a bomber offensive over Germany. The United States was creating what Roosevelt called the 'Arsenal of Democracy' in terms of weapons and troops to use them. But first it needed to construct a global transport system in the form of ships, trucks, and aircraft to get them to the fighting areas. The most immediate help that it could give was in the Atlantic, and by creating a daylight bomber force to attack Germany from British bases in coordination with the RAF. All this would take about another year, during which the Allies would still be vulnerable to Axis attacks.

1942 was the last year in which the Axis could hope to win World War II by defeating the major Allies outright before increased Allied strength made this virtually impossible. On the Eastern Front the year opened with another German offensive, aimed not at Moscow but south towards the oil-producing regions of the Caucasus. The continuing war in the Western Desert also swung the Axis way with a brilliant blitzkrieg victory over British forces at the **Battle of Gazala** in May. The Japanese overran the Philippines, pressed deep into

Burma, and even raided Ceylon with aircraft carriers.

If only on the biggest maps and for a few weeks, the prospect of Axis world domination beckoned. The Germans and Italians might defeat the British and drive on through the Middle East towards Iran, meeting other German forces coming south out of the Caucasus. With the Japanese in Burma so close, India might rise in revolt and overthrow the British, letting Japanese forces through to link up with the Germans and Japanese. Then all that would be left would be the final confrontation with the United States.

It cannot be said with certainty that this could *never* have happened, but the Axis forces were already reaching the limit of their strength. They were overstretched against enemies who were growing stronger and who were no longer at a disadvantage. In the Far East the Japanese were losing control of the Pacific in a series of defeats by the Americans, while fighting continued in Burma and New Guinea. The Battle of the Atlantic was effectively won by November 1942, the record month for Allied sinkings of German U-boats. In the Mediterranean the hard fought success of **Operation Pedestal** in August, and many other convoys, helped preserve the British base on Malta in its efforts to harass Axis supplies.

The limit of the Axis advance westward across the desert came just inside Egypt at the **Second Battle of El Alamein** in October, a slogging match that forced a headlong Axis retreat back through Libya into Tunisia. In November American and British amphibious forces landed along the North Africa coast in the Vichy French territories of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. Many of the French garrisons declared for the Allies, and all but Tunisia were soon pacified. The Germans occupied Vichy France and rushed reinforcements to Tunisia, but their position in North Africa was clearly doomed. Finally, and most terribly of all for the Germans, their entire strategy on the Eastern Front suffered catastrophic defeat in the great city battle of **Stalingrad**, which began in September.

In January 1943 the British and Americans met in Casablanca for one of their frequent strategic planning conferences. The war in North Africa was not over, and the Axis forces in Tunisia did not surrender until 12 May. Germany and its allies controlled by force of arms virtually the whole of Europe except for a handful of neutral countries, and in eastern Europe the death camps had been established for the 'Final Solution', the wiping out of Jews and other 'Inferior' people. But for the first time the Allies could think in terms of planning the battles that would defeat Germany and Italy, rather than fighting to prevent further Axis victories and expansion.

At Casablanca the importance of a strategic bombing offensive against Germany's heartland was first agreed. But the practical problems of mounting

mass bombing raids deep into Germany were considerable. The disastrous USAAF **Schweinfurt Raid** in October showed just how much had to be overcome before strategic bombing became truly effective.

Also at Casablanca, the British and Americans announced their policy for the defeat of Germany: there would be no negotiation, and Germany must surrender unconditionally. This was understandable in the light of everything that had gone before, but meant that there would be no quick or negotiated end to the war.

As the western Allies prepared to launch their attack on mainland Europe, the German and Axis forces on the Eastern Front were as strong as they would ever be. Soon the need to defend in the west meant that the Germans must split their forces further. In July the Germans launched their last great attack in the east, the **Battle of Kursk**. This was the biggest armoured battle in history, a desperate slogging match resulting in a decisive Soviet victory. From this time on, few in the German high command had any doubt that the war itself was lost.

In order to enter occupied Europe, the western Allies needed the kind of cooperation between countries that had never been seen in war before. They had to consider the damage they might do to occupied countries in liberating them, and the need to keep their own casualties low. They also needed cooperation between navies, armies, and airforces in order to mount large amphibious operations. All these problems were being slowly, and sometimes painfully, solved through experience against the Germans and the Japanese.

Where to launch their next campaign caused a serious debate between the British and the Americans. The United States favoured the direct route into Europe, using Britain as a base for an amphibious force to liberate northern France, and so move directly into Germany from the west. This had the advantage of probably being the fastest way to defeat Germany, and so end the war with fewest American casualties. Stalin, still calling for his 'Second Front', also favoured this route. The British were more concerned with what Europe would look like after the war. They also knew how many months it would take to build up the forces for the liberation of France, and the catastrophic consequences if the attempt failed. Churchill and his senior officers argued for a continued Mediterranean strategy. The idea was that the western Allies would first defeat Italy and then press on northwards into central Europe. The main advantage of this strategy was that it would meet the advancing Soviet forces much farther east, and prevent Stalin dominating Eastern Europe after the war.

The result of this debate was a compromise. The liberation of France would go ahead in 1944, but until then the Mediterranean strategy would continue.

On 10 July 1943 Allied forces landed in Sicily. Italy was even more convinced than Germany that the war was lost, and on 25 July Mussolini was forced out of power and imprisoned. On 3 September the Allies landed in southern Italy itself, the new Italian government surrendered, and on 13 October Italy declared war on Germany.

The German response was to turn their armed forces in Italy into an occupying force to prevent the Allies overrunning Italy and quickly reaching the southern Alps. Mussolini was rescued by a daring German raid in September and set up in northern Italy as a German puppet. The geography of Italy, narrow and with a mountain spine, lent itself to solid lines of defence across the country from coast to coast. After a retreat through the autumn, the main German stand came just south of Rome on the 'Gustav Line' at the end of the year.

The Allies were now prepared for what would be the decisive year of the war, both against Germany and against Japan. By air, sea, and land, in 1944 they would launch coordinated campaigns all around the world, each planned to help each other and to prevent their enemies from switching forces. This was an incredible achievement in global strategy, something that had never been done or even planned before.

At their conference in Cairo in November 1943 the British and Americans announced that their policy towards Japan also would be one of unconditional surrender. At a further conference in Tehran with the Soviet Union later that month, the basic strategy for 1944 against Germany was agreed. Although Britain continued as an important member of the Allies, the industrial strength of the United States and the Soviet Union, and the power of their forces, was now reaching its height. For the rest of the war, these two countries would increasingly dominate Allied strategy.

By early 1944 Italy had become a secondary theatre, less important than the forthcoming liberation of France, which was given priority in equipment and resources. But it was considered important for the Allies to keep attacking in Italy. With virtually complete control of both the air and the sea, they looked for new ways to break the Gustav Line. The amphibious contribution, the landing at **Anzio** on the west coast of Italy just south of Rome in January, was a failure ending in stalemate. And although air power contributed to the Fourth Battle of **Monte Cassino**, which also began in January and succeeded in liberating Rome on 5 June, the contribution was a controversial one. Fighting continued into northern Italy until the end of the year, with Italian forces fighting alongside the other Allies.

The main British and American campaign of the year began on 6 June, with the **D-Day** amphibious landings on the French coast. The Allies, with their

almost complete control of the air and sea, could move troops and equipment across the English Channel and into Normandy faster than the Germans could move their reserves from other parts of occupied Europe. The reward for the success of D-Day came two months later with a complete Allied victory in the Battle of Normandy. A second Allied landing took place in the south of France on 15 August. Paris was liberated on 25 August, and most of France within a few weeks.

The Germans were in full retreat in the west, with the Allies in pursuit, entering Belgium and the Netherlands in early September. It looked possible that they could reach the industrial heartland of western Germany, so probably winning the war before the end of the year. But the risks involved in this strategy were considerable, not least because it meant a single thrust into Germany that could be counter-attacked, rather than an advance on a broad front. In September an attempt at a single thrust was made, using Allied airborne forces to open up a route through the Netherlands, in cooperation with a British advance. But **Operation Market-Garden** failed, and the decision to continue the broad front advance remained in force. By the end of the year the Allies had closed up to the German frontier from the North Sea to Switzerland, and to the Westwall defences.

Normandy was the largest amphibious battle in history, but it was small compared to any of the great battles on the Eastern Front, which continued to demand the bulk of the German war effort. In January 1944 Soviet forces finally drove the Germans back from Leningrad, so ending a siege that had lasted for over 900 days. This was followed by a succession of hammer blows at every point of the Axis line. The most important of these, **Operation Bagration**, was planned to start in June to coincide both with the D-Day landings and with the Allied breakthrough in Italy. In a spectacular demonstration of their own style of blitzkrieg, the Soviets liberated the city of Minsk and drove as far as eastern Poland before halting.

In September Finland asked the Soviet Union for an armistice. Romania, whose oilfields were almost the only natural source of oil for the Axis, was overrun by the Soviets in the same month, followed by much of Hungary. In October Soviet forces entered Yugoslavia and the Germans had to retreat hurriedly from Greece. Other than territorial conquest, one of Stalin's concerns was to build a barrier of eastern European states between his country and an attack from the west in some future war.

Germany's position was now hopeless. On 22 June a group of German Army officers tried unsuccessfully to assassinate Hitler, hoping that his death might lead to a negotiated peace with the Allies. The Axis had virtually disintegrated, and Germany had no effective supporters left. Bombing of

German cities and industrial targets by the British and Americans continued round the clock. From the east, south, and west Allied armies surrounded the Reich. The defeat of a last German attack in the west in December, known as the 'Battle of the Bulge', left Germany without any reserves. For most Germans, the chief reasons for fighting on were that they had no choice, and in the hope of surrendering to the western Allies rather than the hated Soviets.

All this time the war against Japan had been a secondary priority for the Allies, although the Japanese could have been forgiven for thinking otherwise. The powerful United States Navy had inflicted multiple defeats on the Japanese at sea, often in great battles between aircraft carriers in which the two fleets never saw each other. In June 1943 the Americans began their campaign to liberate New Guinea. In November their 'island hopping' advance reached as far as the Gilbert and Marshall islands, the first landings coming at 'bloody Tarawa' atoll. The Line of the Rising Sun was broken.

But Japan was still capable of two last major campaigns, one in China starting in April 1944 and another in Burma against the British in the hope of finally reaching India. The Americans also had forces both in Burma and China, with the strategic objective of building and training a Chinese Army large enough to defeat the Japanese, so allowing the USAAF to use the east coast of China for a bombing offensive against Japan.

The Japanese attack in Burma began in February, culminating in the decisive battles at Kohima and Imphal. With the Japanese supply line running across the jungle mountains of central Burma, the British strategy was to defend until the Japanese ran out of supplies, and then counter-attack. The largest airborne operation mounted in the Far East, **Operation Thursday**, was part of this larger British plan. A large airborne force was inserted into central Burma in March using gliders and succeeded in cutting the Japanese supply lines. By September the Japanese had been completely defeated, and by May 1945 Burma had been almost completely retaken by the Allies.

In January 1945 American forces landed back in the Philippines, retaking the capital **Manila** next month in a city battle of great destruction. Even more than the Germans, the Japanese troops fought to the last, and often committed suicide rather than face capture. Also in February American troops made a landing on **Iwo Jima** in the Volcano Islands, followed by a landing on Okinawa Island in April. This completed the American plans to bring Japan under long-range bombing, and also provided bases for possible amphibious landings.

Japan had lost control of the seas around its home islands. Between the starvation caused by the Allied blockade and the bombing which had devastated most of its cities, it was clear that the country could not last long.

The only remote Japanese hope was that the Soviet Union, still at peace with Japan, might negotiate a settlement with the other Allies.

In February 1945 Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill met for the last time at the Allied planning conference at Yalta, near Sevastopol. (Roosevelt died shortly afterwards, while Churchill lost the 1945 British election.) Soviet troops had already overrun Poland in January, and although the last battles against Germany had to be fought, the issue was never in doubt. Attacked from east and west in the spring, Germany collapsed. On 27 April Mussolini was captured and shot in northern Italy. On 30 April, as Soviet troops fought their way through the **Battle of Berlin**, the last great city battle, Hitler committed suicide. Germany surrendered completely on 8 May 1945.

The end of Japan was also a foregone conclusion. At Yalta the Soviets had promised to enter the war against Japan three months after the defeat of Germany. At the Allied conference held in Potsdam near Berlin in July, the American government learned that its new secret weapon, the atomic bomb, had been tested successfully. On 6 August the first of these bombs destroyed the Japanese city of Hiroshima. On 8 August the Soviet Union declared war on Japan and overran Japanese-held Manchuria down as far as the Korean peninsula. On 9 August a second atomic bomb destroyed the city of Nagasaki. On 15 August Japan finally surrendered, so ending World War II.

STEPHEN BADSEY

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THE ARMoured BLITZKRIEGS

“For better or worse, soldiers will have to come to terms with the tank... It will be the main battle-winning weapon, wherever it is put into action, and other weapons must accommodate themselves to its needs.” HEINZ GUDERIAN, 1937

THE BATTLES OF World War II will be forever associated with the dominance of the tank on the battlefield, replacing the infantry, which for centuries had held the dominant position as the most important of the arms of war. Although the tank itself was first invented and used in World War I, the interwar years saw the development of the genuinely *fast* tank, a machine that was both armed and armoured well enough to fight its way across the battlefield and also to drive deep behind enemy lines once it reached open and undefended country. This combination of speed and strength suggested new ways of fighting battles based on the tank, and the period before World War II saw the development of ideas forever associated with the German word *Blitzkrieg* – ‘lightning war’. All three of these battles show the same use of tanks in combination with other forces – particularly airforces – to defeat the enemy by strength and speed, bringing about not only a defeat but a collapse into chaos.

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The Fall of France

Blitzkrieg in the West

10 MAY – 22 JUNE 1940

The German Armed Forces under Führer Adolf Hitler

VERSUS

The French Army and British Expeditionary Force under
General Maurice Gamelin

CHRONOLOGY

- 10 May 1940 – The start of the German offensive
 - 13 May 1940 – German forces cross the River Meuse
 - 14 May 1940 – The Netherlands surrenders
 - 20 May 1940 – German forces reach the English Channel
 - 28 May 1940 – Belgium surrenders
 - 4 June 1940 – End of the Dunkirk evacuation
 - 22 June 1940 – France surrenders and signs an armistice
-

“No one has ever achieved what I have achieved... I have led the German people to a great height, even if the world does hate us now.” ADOLF HITLER

THE CLASH OF two warring equals often produces lengthy wars, but occasionally such conflicts are resolved rapidly because one of the belligerents better appreciates the potential of the military technologies of the time. If a superior grasp of how to wage war is joined with the advantages of surprise, an imaginative plan opposed to a poor plan, and good fortune, then the defeat inflicted is likely to be catastrophic. Such a defeat was suffered by the Allies – the French and British – in 1940; they were overwhelmed by German forces in just six weeks. So comprehensive was the

German victory that the Netherlands, Belgium, and much of France were occupied, what was left of France was reduced to a rump satellite state of the greater German Reich, and the victors and many neutrals expected Britain to sue for a humiliating peace.

The Rival Armies

So unexpectedly decisive was the Allied defeat that many commentators blamed British and French defeatism – a consequence of memories of the slaughter of World War I and, in the case of France, interwar political turmoil. Britain and France were reluctant to go to war with Germany, and Britain refused to pull its weight in continental land warfare, committing only ten divisions. Memories of World War I weighed heavily on both the Allied governments and people. However, reluctance to fight another great European war was common to all belligerents, and the public mood on the outbreak of World War II in Germany was bleak. Much more detrimental to the Allies than the horror with which they regarded the necessity to wage war again, was the impact of 1914–18 on how they wished to conduct this new war.

Far from being defeatist in 1940, the Allied governments believed that the Germans had already missed their opportunity for a quick victory. The Allies believed they were militarily the equal of the Germans in 1940 and this optimism was based on some powerful military assets. The Allies matched the Germans in troops, and had 5,600 more guns – mainly the excellent French artillery. On the Franco-German frontier, the Maginot Line – a powerful belt of fortifications named after the French minister of war André Maginot – rendered any direct German attack on the Allies problematic. The Allies believed they could withstand any German offensive in 1940; and that in a long war the balance of military power would inexorably shift against Germany. Allied confidence in the ‘long game’ of attritional war partly resulted from their naval supremacy, which kept Germany blockaded from most of the outside world, ensuring that the Allied economies would out-produce Germany. This belief that the Allies would win a long attritional war – often labelled the ‘Maginot Mentality’ – was not as unrealistic as some historians suggest. But Allied leaders failed to appreciate that mechanized forces and air power gave Germany the potential to wage a swift and decisive campaign.

Contrary to popular belief, the Allies did not intend to fight a static war, and with more tanks and vehicles than the Germans they were certainly capable of waging mobile war. Unfortunately, over half of Allied mechanized forces were ‘penny-packeted’ (scattered in small groups along the front).