

<p>Prime Minister Churchill arrived at the White House on December 22, 1941, and spent the next three weeks working out war plans with President Roosevelt and his advisors. Believing that Germany and Italy posed a greater threat than Japan, Churchill convinced Roosevelt to strike first against Hitler. Once the Allies had gained an upper hand in Europe, they could pour more resources into the Pacific War.</p>	<p>By the end of their meeting, Roosevelt and Churchill had formed, in Churchill's words, "a very strong affection, which grew with our years of comradeship." When Churchill reached London, he found a message from the president waiting for him. "It is fun," Roosevelt wrote in the message, "to be in the same decade with you."</p>
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<p>After the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hitler ordered submarine raids against ships along America's east coast. The German aim in the Battle of the Atlantic was to prevent food and war materials from reaching Great Britain and the Soviet Union. Britain depended on supplies from the sea. The 3,000-mile-long shipping lanes from North America were her lifeline. Hitler knew that if he cut that lifeline, Britain would be starved into submission.</p> <p>For a long time, it looked as though Hitler might succeed in his mission. Unprotected American ships proved to be easy targets for the Germans. In the first four months of 1942, the Germans sank 87 ships off the Atlantic shore. Seven months into the year, German wolf packs had destroyed a total of 681 Allied ships in the Atlantic. Something had to be done or the war at sea would be lost.</p> <p>The Allies responded by organizing their cargo ships into convoys. Convoys were groups of ships traveling together for</p>	<p>mutual protection, as they had done in the First World War. The convoys were escorted across the Atlantic by destroyers equipped with sonar for detecting submarines underwater. They were also accompanied by airplanes that used radar to spot U-boats on the ocean's surface. With this improved tracking, the Allies were able to find and destroy German U-boats faster than the Germans could build them. In late spring of 1943, Admiral Karl Doenitz, the commander of the German U-boat offensive, reported that his losses had "reached an unbearable height."</p> <p>At the same time, the United States launched a crash shipbuilding program. By early 1943, 140 Liberty ships were produced each month. Launchings of Allied ships began to outnumber sinkings.</p> <p>By mid-1943, the tide of the Battle of the Atlantic had turned. A happy Churchill reported to the House of Commons that June "was the best month [at sea] from every point of view we have ever known in the whole 46 months of the war."</p>
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<p>By the winter of 1943, the Allies began to see victories on land as well as sea. The first great turning point came in the Battle of Stalingrad.</p> <p>The Germans had been fighting in the Soviet Union since June 1941. In November 1941, the bitter cold had stopped them in their tracks outside the Soviet cities of Moscow and Leningrad. When spring came, the German tanks were ready to roll.</p> <p>In the summer of 1942, the Germans took the offensive in the southern Soviet Union. Hitler hoped to capture Soviet oil fields in the Caucasus Mountains. He also wanted to wipe out Stalingrad, a major industrial center on the Volga River.</p> <p>The German army confidently approached Stalingrad in August 1942. "To reach the Volga and take Stalingrad is not so difficult for us," one German soldier wrote home. "Victory is</p>	<p>not far away." The Luftwaffe—the German air force—prepared the way with nightly bombing raids over the city. Nearly every wooden building in Stalingrad was set ablaze. The situation looked so desperate that Soviet officers in Stalingrad recommended blowing up the city's factories and abandoning the city. A furious Stalin ordered them to defend his namesake city no matter what the cost.</p> <p>For weeks the Germans pressed in on Stalingrad, conquering it house by house in brutal hand-to-hand combat. By the end of September, they controlled nine-tenths of the city—or what was left of it. Then another winter set in. The Soviets saw the cold as an opportunity to roll fresh tanks across the frozen landscape and begin a massive counterattack. The Soviet army closed around Stalingrad, trapping the Germans in and around the city and cutting off their supplies. The Germans' situation was</p>
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<p>hopeless, but Hitler’s orders came: “Stay and fight! I won’t go back from the Volga.”</p> <p>The fighting continued as winter turned Stalingrad into a frozen wasteland. “We just lay in our holes and froze, knowing that 24 hours later and 48 hours later we should be shivering precisely as we were now,” wrote a German soldier, Benno Zieser. “But there was now no hope whatsoever of relief, and that was the worst thing of all.” The German commander</p>	<p>surrendered on January 31, 1943. Two days later, his starving troops also surrendered.</p> <p>In defending Stalingrad, the Soviets lost a total of 1,100,000 soldiers—more than all American deaths during the entire war. Despite the staggering death toll, the Soviet victory marked a turning point in the war. From that point on, the Soviet army began to move westward toward Germany.</p>
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<p>While the Battle of Stalingrad raged, Stalin pressured Britain and America to open a “second front” in Western Europe. He argued that an invasion across the English Channel would force Hitler to divert troops from the Soviet front. Churchill and Roosevelt didn’t think the Allies had enough troops to attempt an invasion on European soil. Instead, they launched Operation Torch, an invasion of Axis-controlled North Africa, commanded by American General Dwight D. Eisenhower.</p> <p>In November 1942, some 107,000 Allied troops, the great majority of them Americans, landed in Casablanca, Oran, and Algiers in North Africa. From there they sped eastward, chasing the Afrika Korps led by General Erwin Rommel, the legendary</p>	<p>Desert Fox. After months of heavy fighting, the last of the Afrika Korps surrendered in May 1943. British general Harold Alexander sent a message to Churchill, reporting that “All enemy resistance has ceased. We are masters of the North African shores.” American war correspondent Ernie Pyle caught the mood of the victorious troops.</p> <p>“ This colossal German surrender has done more for American morale here than anything that could possibly have happened. Winning in battle is like winning at poker or catching lots of fish. . . . As a result, the hundreds of thousands of Americans in North Africa now are happy men.”</p> <p>—<i>Ernie Pyle</i> Ernie’s War: The Best of Ernie Pyle’s World War II Dispatches</p>
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<p>Even before the battle in North Africa was won, Roosevelt, Churchill, and their commanders met in Casablanca. At this meeting, the two leaders agreed to accept only the unconditional surrender of the Axis powers. That is, enemy nations would have to accept whatever terms of peace the Allies dictated. The two leaders also discussed where to strike next. The Americans argued that the best approach to victory was to assemble a massive invasion fleet in Britain and to launch it across the English Channel, through France, and into the heart of Germany. Churchill, however, thought it would be safer to first attack Italy.</p> <p>The Italian campaign got off to a good start with the capture of Sicily in the summer of 1943. Stunned by their army’s collapse in Sicily, the Italian government forced dictator Benito</p>	<p>Mussolini to resign. On July 25, 1943, King Victor Emmanuel III summoned Il Duce (Italian for “the leader”) to his palace, stripped him of power, and had him arrested. “At this moment,” the king told Mussolini, “you are the most hated man in Italy.” Italians began celebrating the end of the war.</p> <p>Their cheers were premature. Hitler was determined to stop the Allies in Italy rather than fight on German soil. One of the hardest battles the Allies encountered in Europe was fought less than 40 miles from Rome. This battle, “Bloody Anzio,” lasted four months—until the end of May 1944—and left about 25,000 Allied and 30,000 Axis casualties. During the year after Anzio, German armies continued to put up strong resistance. The effort to free Italy did not succeed until 1945, when Germany itself was close to collapse.</p>
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