Key Events of World War II

Invasion of Poland (1939)

On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland, triggering the beginning of World War II. This act of aggression led Britain and France to declare war on Germany just two days later. The German army used a military strategy known as 'blitzkrieg', or lightning war, involving rapid attacks with tanks and aircraft to overwhelm the Polish defenses. Poland was quickly defeated, and this marked the start of a devastating global conflict.

Fall of France (1940)

In May 1940, Germany launched an invasion of France and the Low Countries. Within six weeks, German forces had bypassed the heavily fortified Maginot Line and captured Paris. The swift defeat shocked the world and left Britain to stand alone against Nazi Germany for much of the next year. France was divided into an occupied zone and a nominally independent Vichy government that collaborated with the Nazis.

Operation Barbarossa (1941)

In June 1941, Nazi Germany launched Operation Barbarossa, a massive invasion of the Soviet Union. This marked a major escalation of the war and opened the Eastern Front, which became the largest and bloodiest theater of conflict in World War II. Despite early successes, German forces were eventually halted outside Moscow and faced fierce Soviet resistance, especially in Stalingrad.

Pearl Harbor (1941)

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese navy launched a surprise attack on the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. The attack killed over 2,400 Americans and led the United States to declare war on Japan the following day. This event brought the United States into the global conflict, which shifted the balance of power among the Allied and Axis forces.

Battle of Stalingrad (1942-1943)

One of the turning points of the war, the Battle of Stalingrad saw Soviet forces defending the city from a brutal German siege. After months of fierce combat and enormous casualties, the Soviet Union encircled and defeated the German 6th Army. This defeat marked the beginning of a major Soviet offensive pushing westward.

D-Day - Normandy Invasion (1944)

On June 6, 1944, Allied forces launched the largest amphibious invasion in history, landing on the beaches of Normandy, France. Codenamed Operation Overlord, this marked the beginning of the liberation of Western Europe from Nazi control. Despite strong German resistance, the Allies successfully established a foothold and began pushing inland.

Fall of Berlin and Hitler's Death (1945)

By April 1945, Soviet troops had reached Berlin. After weeks of intense street fighting, the city fell. Adolf Hitler committed suicide in his bunker on April 30. Germany surrendered shortly after, bringing an end to the war in Europe.

Atomic Bombs and Japan's Surrender (1945)

In August 1945, the United States dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The devastation and loss of life were immense, leading Japan to surrender on August 15. The formal surrender was signed aboard the USS Missouri on September 2, officially ending World War II.