

1941-1945

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WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945

Transcript (1941-1945)

From late 1941 the war in Western Europe was comparatively quiet. Most of the region was under German control. Other areas were controlled by Germany's allies or states like Vichy France that were independent but had to follow German policies. In most of the occupied lands there were resistance movements that were given training, equipment and other help by Britain's Special Operations Executive. Hitler's main focus in this period was, however, on his war in the east with the USSR whom he had attacked in June 1941. Britain supported the USSR by supplying weapons and experts and when the USA joined the war in December 1941 this help increased. The Soviet leader Joseph Stalin pressured his Allies to open a second front in Western Europe against Germany to help his troops.

The western Allies were simply not ready to invade Europe in 1942. However, they did have one weapon that could reach Germany - heavy bombers. At first the RAF tried precision bombing of military and industrial targets. From February 1942 the RAF's Bomber Command began area bombing German cities. In the summer of 1942 US Army Air Force bombers joined this offensive. And for the next three years German cities were constantly under air attack. Bombing certainly damaged the German war effort but it also cost the lives of many aircrew and killed hundreds of thousands of civilians.

From July 1943 the Allies also began a very slow but steady advance up through Italy having crossed from North Africa.

While the bombing campaigns went on the commanders of the western Allies were also building up large forces in Britain. Despite this build up it was not until 1944 that they had enough trained troops and enough of the right types of equipment to plan and carry out an invasion of Nazi controlled Western Europe across the English Channel. The invasion finally came on June 6th 1944, known as D-Day. British, US and Canadian troops landed at five beaches in Normandy.

Weeks of intense fighting followed as the Germans resisted stubbornly. It was not until August 25th that the French capital, Paris, was liberated from German control.

There was still much hard fighting. In September 1944 an attack through The Netherlands was halted by German forces around Arnhem. In December 1944 a major German counter attack in the Ardennes region caused many Allied casualties and disrupted the Allied advance. At the same time the Germans were using new weapons to attack Britain. V1 rockets and V2 missiles were launched at London, causing many civilian casualties. The Germans also introduced other new weapons such as jet fighters.

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Despite this the Allies finally entered Germany in 1945. By April 1945 they had advanced deep into western Germany. By May 1945 western Allied forces met up with their Soviet allies in Berlin. Hitler killed himself and the war in Europe ended on May 8th 1945. Germany was left in ruins.

The country was then divided into zones, occupied by Britain, the USA, France and the USSR.
