By Stephen J. Bedard

The Second World War

The major events of the largest conflict in history — from Poland to the Pacific.



Allied troops come ashore in Normandy on D-Day, 6 June 1944 — the largest seaborne invasion in history.

1939–1945	70–85 million	100+ million	61 countries
SIX YEARS OF WAR	ESTIMATED DEATHS	PERSONNEL MOBILIZED	DRAWN INTO THE CONFLICT

1939–40 The War Begins

1 SEPT 1939 — INVASION OF POLAND
Germany invades Poland; Britain and France declare war on **3 September**. The Soviet Union invades Poland from the east.

SPRING 1940 — BLITZKRIEG
Germany overruns Denmark, Norway, the Low Countries and France in weeks. British troops are evacuated from **Dunkirk**.

JULY–OCT 1940 — BATTLE OF BRITAIN
The Royal Air Force defeats the Luftwaffe over Britain. Hitler postpones invasion — his first major setback.

1941 The War Goes Global

22 JUNE 1941 — OPERATION BARBAROSSA
Germany invades the Soviet Union — the largest invasion in history — opening the Eastern Front.

7 DEC 1941 — PEARL HARBOR
Japan attacks the U.S. Pacific Fleet in Hawaii. The United States enters the war.

1940–43 — BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC
German U-boats hunt Allied convoys — Canada helps keep Britain supplied — until new tactics and air cover turn the tide in 1943.

1942–43 The Tide Turns

JUNE 1942 — MIDWAY
U.S. forces sink four Japanese carriers, ending Japan's early expansion. That autumn, the Allies also prevail at **El Alamein** in North Africa.

19 AUG 1942 — DIEPPE
A largely Canadian raid on Dieppe fails at heavy cost — lessons that later help shape D-Day.

FEB 1943 — STALINGRAD
Germany's Sixth Army surrenders at Stalingrad; the Soviets advance west. In July, the Allies land in **Sicily**, then mainland Italy.

1944–45 Liberation & Victory

6 JUNE 1944 — D-DAY
156,000 Allied troops land in Normandy. Canadians storm **Juno Beach**; Paris is liberated in August.

8 MAY 1945 — V-E DAY
After the fall of Berlin and Hitler's death by suicide, Germany surrenders unconditionally. War in Europe is over.

2 SEPT 1945 — V-J DAY
Following atomic bombs on **Hiroshima** (6 Aug) and **Nagasaki** (9 Aug), Japan formally surrenders aboard USS Missouri.

The human cost & the Holocaust: Nazi Germany murdered six million Jews in the Holocaust; millions of others — Roma, people with disabilities, Polish and Soviet civilians, and political prisoners — were also persecuted and killed. The war left cities in ruins and led to the United Nations, the Cold War, and a new world order.

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