

# Nearing the End of the War in Europe

## HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT




### AUDIE MURPHY

Near the end of the Second World War, Audie Murphy became famous as the most decorated American soldier of the war. He received 24 medals from the United States—including the Congressional Medal of Honor. He was also awarded three medals by France and one more by Belgium.

Born in Kingston, Texas, Murphy enlisted in the army in 1942. He served in North Africa and Europe, and in 1944 he rose to the rank of second lieutenant. His most impressive act of bravery occurred in January 1945 near Colmar, France, when in the midst of a furious German attack, he jumped onto a burning tank destroyer and killed about 50 Axis troops with his machine gun. Although wounded in the leg, he rallied his troops to retake the ground the Germans had gained earlier in the day.

**THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE** In October 1944, Americans captured their first German town, Aachen. Hitler responded with a desperate last-gasp offensive. He ordered his troops to break through the Allied lines and to recapture the Belgian port of Antwerp. This bold move, the Führer hoped, would disrupt the enemy's supply lines and demoralize the Allies.

On December 16, under cover of dense fog, eight German tank divisions broke through weak American defenses along an 80-mile front. Hitler hoped that a victory would split American and British forces and break up Allied supply lines. Tanks drove 60 miles into Allied territory, creating a bulge in the lines that gave this desperate last-ditch offensive its name, the **Battle of the Bulge**. As the Germans swept westward, they captured 120 American GIs near Malmédy. Elite German troops—the SS troopers—herded the prisoners into a large field and mowed them down with machine guns and pistols.

The battle raged for a month. When it was over, the Germans had been pushed back, and little seemed to have changed. But, in fact, events had taken a decisive turn. The Germans had lost 120,000 troops, 600 tanks and assault guns, and 1,600 planes in the Battle of the Bulge—soldiers and weapons they could not replace. From that point on, the Nazis could do little but retreat. 

**LIBERATION OF THE DEATH CAMPS** Meanwhile, Allied troops pressed eastward into the German heartland, and the Soviet army pushed westward across Poland toward Berlin. Soviet troops were the first to come upon one of the Nazi death camps, in July 1944. As the Soviets drew near a camp called Majdanek in Poland, SS guards worked feverishly to bury and burn all evidence of their hideous crimes. But they ran out of time. When the Soviets entered Majdanek, they found a thousand starving prisoners barely alive, the world's largest crematorium, and a storehouse containing 800,000 shoes. "This is not a concentration camp," reported a stunned Soviet war correspondent, "it is a gigantic murder plant." The Americans who later liberated Nazi death camps in Germany were equally horrified.

### A PERSONAL VOICE ROBERT T. JOHNSON

"We started smelling a terrible odor and suddenly we were at the concentration camp at Landsberg. Forced the gate and faced hundreds of starving prisoners. . . . We saw emaciated men whose thighs were smaller than wrists, many had bones sticking out thru their skin. . . . Also we saw hundreds of burned and naked bodies. . . . That evening I wrote my wife that 'For the first time I truly realized the evil of Hitler and why this war had to be waged.'"


—quoted in *Voices: Letters from World War II*

**UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER** By April 25, 1945, the Soviet army had stormed Berlin. As Soviet shells burst overhead, the city panicked. "Hordes of soldiers stationed in Berlin deserted and were shot on the spot or hanged from the nearest tree," wrote Claus Fuhrmann, a Berlin clerk. "On their chests they had placards reading, 'We betrayed the Führer.'"

**Vocabulary**  
**elite:** a small and privileged group

### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Effects

 Why was the Battle of the Bulge important?

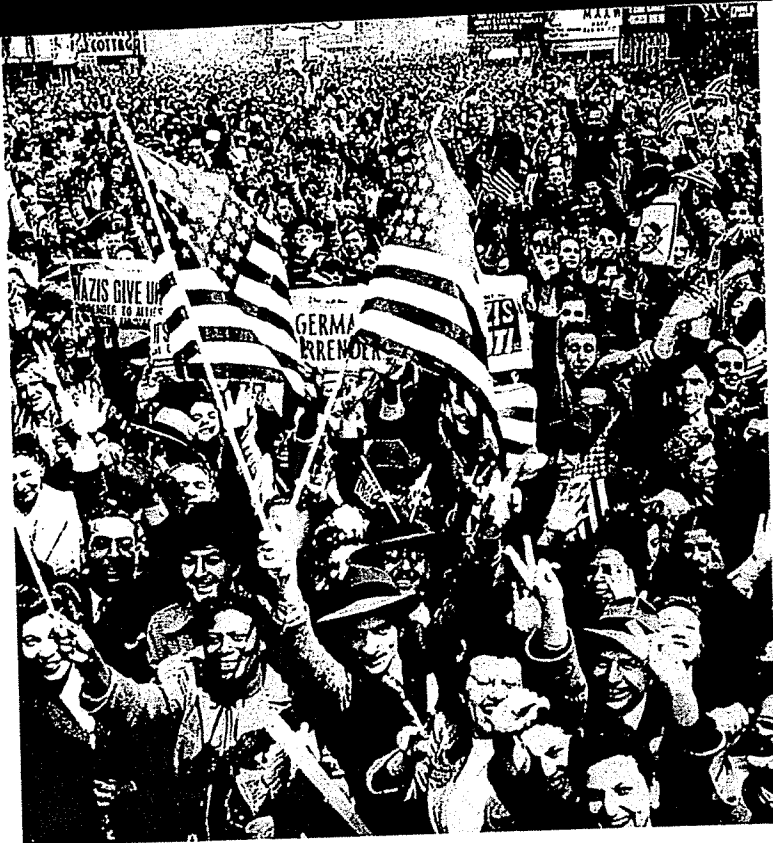
**Vocabulary**  
**cap**  
**suri**

**Vocabulary**  
**capitulation:**  
 surrender

In his underground headquarters in Berlin, Hitler prepared for the end. On April 29, he married Eva Braun, his longtime companion. The same day, he wrote out his last address to the German people. In it he blamed the Jews for starting the war and his generals for losing it. "I die with a happy heart aware of the immeasurable deeds of our soldiers at the front. I myself and my wife choose to die in order to escape the disgrace of . . . capitulation," he said. The next day Hitler shot himself while his new wife swallowed poison. In accordance with Hitler's orders, the two bodies were carried outside, soaked with gasoline, and burned.

A week later, General Eisenhower accepted the unconditional surrender of the Third Reich. On May 8, 1945, the Allies celebrated **V-E Day**—Victory in Europe Day. The war in Europe was finally over.

**ROOSEVELT'S DEATH** President Roosevelt did not live to see V-E Day. On April 12, 1945, while posing for a portrait in Warm Springs, Georgia, the president had a stroke and died. That night, Vice President **Harry S. Truman** became the nation's 33rd president.



▲ New Yorkers celebrate V-E Day with a massive party that began in Times Square and went on for days at sites throughout the city.

## SECTION 2

### ASSESSMENT

**1. TERMS & NAMES** For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

•Dwight D. Eisenhower  
 •D-Day

•Omar Bradley  
 •George Patton

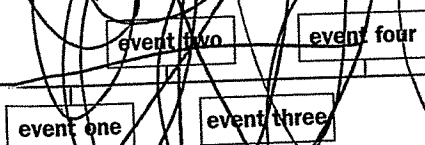
•Battle of the Bulge  
 •V-E Day

•Harry S. Truman

### MAIN IDEA

#### 2. TAKING NOTES

Create a time line of the major events influencing the fighting in Europe and North Africa.



Write a paragraph indicating how any two of these events are related.

### CRITICAL THINKING

#### 3. EVALUATING DECISIONS

Do you agree with the decision made by Roosevelt and Churchill to require unconditional surrender by the Axis powers? Why or why not?

**Think About:**

- the advantages of defeating a foe decisively
- the advantages of ending a war quickly
- how other conflicts, such as the Civil War and World War I, ended

#### 4. ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

When President Roosevelt's body was brought by train to Washington, Betty Conrad was among the servicewomen who escorted his casket.

"The body in the casket was not only our leader but the bodies of all the men and women who had given their lives for freedom. They must not and will not have died in vain."

What did Roosevelt's body symbolize to Betty Conrad?