

# The End of World War II

Throughout the years of World War II, the Allied nations (led by the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union) struggled against the tyranny and aggression of Hitler's Germany, Mussolini's Italy, and the imperialism of Japan.

In May of 1945, the war in Europe came to an end, with the German army, navy, and air force surrendering to the Allies (Italy had surrendered as early as 1943). That summer, the United States and Britain successfully tested a new type of weapon—the atomic bomb—which they used to bring the Japanese government to its knees after dropping two of these highly destructive devices on the Japanese mainland cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in early August.

World War II was a conflict of monumental scope. Nearly 50 million people worldwide lost their lives during the war. From Europe to Asia, cities and infrastructures such as roads, bridges, tunnels, and airports lay in ruin.

Unlike World War I, which was fought on a limited scale across the farmlands of rural France and the eastern front, World War II was a conflict of modern weapons, high mobility, and much urban destruction. The brutality of war produced tens of millions of homeless refugees and many starving people. In the Netherlands, occupied by the Germans since 1940, people were on the brink of starvation until the Allies organized an airlift of food. Not only did millions of soldiers lose their lives on hundreds of battlefields, but many civilians suffered the trials of war. Some of the refugees of the war were former inmates in Nazi concentration camps, liberated by victorious Allied armies.

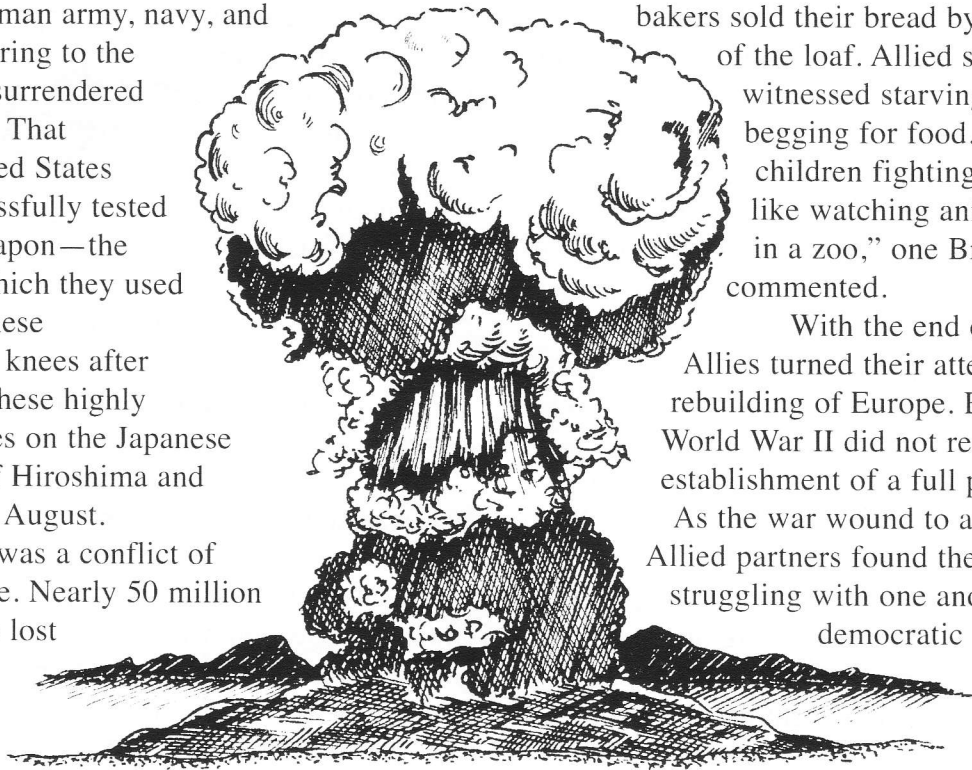
The devastation of the war was evident everywhere. Cities were reduced to rubble. Bridges were destroyed. In Europe, several key rivers did not

have a single standing bridge. In the Soviet Union alone, 70,000 peasant villages were destroyed, plus several major cities. There were shortages of all the necessities of life, from fuel to food. No one had money, so those in need bartered for what little was available. In Italy, food was in such shortage that bakers sold their bread by the slice instead of the loaf. Allied soldiers witnessed starving children begging for food. "To see the children fighting for food was like watching animals being fed in a zoo," one British soldier commented.

With the end of the war, the Allies turned their attention to the rebuilding of Europe. But the end of World War II did not result in the establishment of a full peace.

As the war wound to a conclusion, the Allied partners found themselves struggling with one another. The democratic nations of the United States and Great Britain faced a new challenge from their

former communist ally, the Soviet Union. What brought about this conflict between former allies amid the ashes and rubble of World War II—this conflict which would soon be termed the *Cold War*?



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## Review and Write

1. How and when did World War II end in Europe and in the Pacific?
2. Describe in detail the extent of the devastation experienced by Europe at the end of World War II.