



World War II

In A Nutshell

World War II, as our school textbooks have taught us, ushered in a new world order, bringing an end to [Hitler's Third Reich](#), [Mussolini's fascist dictatorship](#) in Italy, and an aggressive [Japanese empire](#) in the Pacific. For the part it played in Allied victory, the United States earned a new, powerful and coveted role on the world stage. Thus, Americans commonly refer to World War II as "[The Good War](#)," a conflict in which the forces of good triumphed over evil. But no war is ever quite that simple, especially a conflict as widespread, as destructive, and as deadly as the Second World War.

Why Should I Care?

["The Good War."](#) You've likely seen this phrase before in reference to World War II. Odd, right? It's a strange title, to say the least, for a bloodiest military conflict in human history. It's a weird way for Americans, specifically, to remember a war that took four times as many American lives as World War I, seven times as many as the [Vietnam War](#), and one-hundred times as many as the American Revolutionary War. It may not be the best choice of words to describe a period in history in which the [methodical murder of millions of Jews](#) and the [use of nuclear weapons](#) in the final days of war exposed the awful truth that science and technology, rather than promoting human progress, could lead to the destruction of mankind.

There are certainly reasons why World War II *would* be remembered as "Good." Take, for instance, the fact that by war's end, Allied forces had successfully defeated Hitler's Nazi regime, preventing the Third Reich from gaining domination over all of Europe (and potentially the globe) and putting an end to some of history's most gruesome and terrifying racial crimes. That's undeniably "good." Plus, the war ushered in a new world order in which imperialism could no longer be sustained. In other words, immediately following the war, people long under the control of powerful colonial governments claimed their independence and the right to rule themselves. It's fair to say that this also is "good." And the United States emerged from the war as one of, if not *the*, most powerful nations on the globe. Pretty much all "good"-at least for the U.S.

But, as we hope you're beginning to see, World War II cannot be so easily summed up. Well, perhaps it can on a final exam (or in a study guide for said exam), but we think this event is far more memorable and entirely more fascinating than that... and, we've got some stories about the warfront-some familiar, others shocking-to prove that to you. (And we promise to use lots of adjectives *other* than "good." In fact, we vow to avoid the word "good" whenever at all possible.) So read on!