SSgt Henry E. Erwin (1922–2002) was a radio operator on a B-29 bomber in the Pacific. On 12 April 1945 he and his crewmates were targeting a chemical plant in Koriyama, Japan. Erwin’s other duty on board was to light and drop phosphorus smoke bombs.

One of the bombs he lit blew back up the bomb chute and struck him in the face. The bomb’s flare was 1,100 degrees. It burned off his nose and one of his ears, and temporarily cost him his sight. In terrible pain, Erwin knew he had to get the fiery bomb canister out of the plane. For one thing, he was afraid the canister would burn through the metal floor into the bomb bay. For another, the smoke was making it impossible for the pilot to navigate. The aircraft was diving toward earth.

Although gravely injured and on fire, Erwin carried the burning bomb canister to the front of the aircraft. He tossed it out of the copilot’s window. The smoke cleared enough for the pilot to level out at 300 feet and make an emergency landing on Iwo Jima.

No one thought Erwin would live. Senior Army Air Force officers approved awarding him the Medal of Honor so they could give it to him while he was still alive. But he survived. Gen Curtis LeMay himself presented the medal. Erwin went through 30 months of surgery and rehabilitation. He received a disability discharge as a master sergeant in 1947. He went on to work for 37 years for the Veterans Administration. He was the last enlisted man in the US Army Air Forces to receive the Medal of Honor. Erwin died in 2002 at age 80.

In 1997, the Air Force created the Henry E. Erwin Outstanding Enlisted Aircrew Member of the Year Award. It is given each year to an airman, noncommissioned officer, and senior noncommissioned officer in the active-duty or reserve forces. It is only the second Air Force award named for an enlisted person.
“To! To! To!” (Japanese code for “Charge! Charge! Charge!”). With that order, Japanese pilots plunged from the skies over Pearl Harbor in Hawaii at 7:55 a.m. on 7 December 1941. Fifty fighters and 140 bombers strafed and bombed the US base. Less than an hour later, 40 more Japanese fighters and 130 more bombers dropped their deadly loads.

The Americans were caught off guard. They weren’t prepared for an attack from the air. The Army and Navy thought any assault on Pearl Harbor would come by foot. Only a little more than a week before, they’d ordered all planes and ships grouped in clusters. They placed guards around the aircraft. The officers wanted to protect against sabotage—the destruction of property by enemy agents in time of war. This move proved disastrous for the American forces. For Japanese pilots, the clusters of planes must have looked like bull’s-eyes.

In all, the Japanese destroyed 96 Army planes and 92 Navy aircraft. They crippled 159 more. They sank three US battleships—the Arizona, California, and West Virginia. They capsized the battleship Oklahoma. They also damaged four other battleships, three cruisers, three destroyers, and a seaplane. The casualties—military persons lost through death, wounds, injury, imprisonment, or missing in action—were high. The Navy and Marine Corps lost 2,117 members. Another 960 were missing and 876 wounded. The Army and Army Air Forces suffered losses, too: 226 killed and 396 wounded.

PEARL HARBOR UNDER ATTACK
Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration
During the raid, the Army got just six fighters into the air. The Navy sent up 36 airplanes. But the Japanese lost only 28 planes and 64 men. The only real break for US forces was that the enemy did not touch a single aircraft carrier of the US Pacific fleet. All four ships were out on exercises.

The United States declared war on Japan on 8 December 1941. Three days later, on 11 December, the United States declared war on Japan’s allies, Germany and Italy. England and its allies had already been fighting Germany and Italy for two years. The British joined America in declaring war on Japan.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor is a fitting place to begin a discussion of America’s entry into World War II. In many ways, this attack was symbolic of this major war. Another name for World War II is the “air war.” For Americans, the air war began with the Japanese air attack on Pearl Harbor. The war ended in 1945, when American aircraft dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The air war began for Britain and Europe in 1939, when Germany invaded Poland.

There were two sides during World War II. The Allies included Britain, France, the United States, the Soviet Union, and China. (The Soviet Union was the new name for Russia after the Russian Revolution overthrew the czar in 1917.) The Axis Powers included Germany, Italy, and Japan. Many other countries contributed to the Allies’ effort, and a few others fought for the Axis Powers. In Chapter 2, Lesson 3, you read that during World War I, a slightly different group of countries referred to themselves as the Allies; they were Russia, France, Britain, the United States, and Italy. A country’s loyalties can shift as circumstances change.

The War’s Causes

World War II was the most horrific war in history. As the chart nearby shows, more than 50 million people died.

The roots of the war lay in the end of World War I. After that war, Japan was the biggest power in the Far East. But it had few of the natural resources, such as oil, that a modern economy needs. So it was looking for ways to expand. Germany was also hurting. Britain and France had forced it to pay huge sums of money for war damage, which hurt Germany’s economy.

In 1932 the Great Depression threw millions of workers out of work around the world. It hit Germany especially hard. The people wanted change. So Adolf Hitler’s National Socialist Party—the Nazis—won the 1933 elections. The Nazis preached a vicious brand of racism. They believed that other ethnic groups, such as Jews and Slavic peoples, were less human than Germans. They wanted to remove these groups—or even kill them—to make “living space” for a German master race. They wrongly blamed Jews for Europe’s economic problems. They imprisoned or murdered anyone who disagreed with their teachings. The Nazis were responsible for the Holocaust, or the mass murder of some six million Jews, mostly in death camps.
Meanwhile, in Italy, dictator Benito Mussolini led his country into a series of wars. This included taking over Ethiopia, in Africa. Mussolini was a Fascist. The Fascists held views like those of the Nazis.

In the Far East, Japan was fighting in China and elsewhere for control of other people's countries and resources.

The final major player was Joseph Stalin, the dictator who headed the Communist Party in the Soviet Union. The Communists believed that the state should own all the means of production. They permitted no private ownership of land, factories, or businesses. Like the Nazis, they imprisoned or murdered those who disagreed with them.

Most Europeans and Americans rejected the Communists' views. The Nazis and Fascists particularly hated them. This didn't stop Hitler and Stalin from signing a treaty that allowed Germany to conquer most of Poland. The Soviet Union got the rest. It also took over the Baltic countries of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.

But in 1941 Hitler double-crossed Stalin. He attacked the Soviet Union. Millions of Soviet civilians died in the fighting. In the siege of Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) alone, 900,000 people starved.

After the German invasion, the Soviet Union joined the Allies. With the United States and Britain, they helped defeat the Nazis.

### Estimated Military and Civilians Killed in World War II, by Country

**Allied Powers**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Casualties</th>
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<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
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<td>Britain</td>
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<td>Canada</td>
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<td>France</td>
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<td>India</td>
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<tr>
<td>U.S.S.R. (Russia)</td>
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**Axis Powers**

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<td>Romania</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL** 54,226,000

Compiled by Professor Joseph V. O’Brien, Department of History, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, New York, NY
Gen Carl A. Spaatz:  
First Chief of Staff, US Air Force

Gen Carl A. ("Tooey") Spaatz (1891–1974) flew in World War I. He was also commander of air forces in several regions during World War II. He remained in the military between the wars. During the Battle of Britain, he spent time in Britain, where he observed German tactics.

The West Point graduate served in every theater—a large geographic area in which military operations are coordinated—during World War II. He headed the Eighth Air Force in England. While the British conducted nighttime bombing raids over Germany, Spaatz had his pilots fly during the day. He was also responsible for the 12th Air Force in North Africa.

After the Allies defeated the Germans in Africa, Spaatz led the 12th and 15th Air Forces as well as the Royal Air Force in Italy. In 1944 he was put in charge of the US Strategic Air Forces in Europe. He oversaw air power there until Germany's collapse. In July 1945 he was sent to the Pacific. His pilots delivered the atomic bombs on Japan. Although he did not agree with using atomic weapons, he carried out his orders.

After the war, Spaatz served for about a year as the first chief of staff of the new US Air Force. He retired in 1948. He earned many awards, including the Distinguished Service Cross. Spaatz was one of the foremost military leaders of World War II.
The Strategic Role Air Power Played in World War II

Many decisive battles of World War II were fought in the air. After Germany surrendered in 1945, all its military commanders and civilian leaders who’d been held prisoner conceded that air power had won the war for the Allies.

Air power played a strategic role in determining the outcome of World War II at several points. As you read in the lesson on World War I, strategic means designed to strike at the sources of an enemy's military, economic, or political power.

Germany began World War II using its Luftwaffe—the German air force—in combination with ground troops. The Germans broke through Poland's borders on 1 September 1939. In less than a month, they crushed Poland’s army, which was the fifth largest in Europe. Poland surrendered in just 20 days. Germany then rolled over a number of other countries in short order. They included Norway, the Netherlands, France, and Belgium. All these countries faced German occupation—invasion, conquest, and control of a nation or territory by foreign armed forces.

But Germany’s good luck changed when it struck Britain. Britain’s air power put a stop to German air power. This clash, which began in August 1940, was called the Battle of Britain.

Britain was in a fight for its life. For a year, it stood alone against the Axis onslaught. But it had a few advantages over Germany. First, its Royal Navy was superior to Germany’s navy. Second, German aircraft weren’t equipped to fly the long distances needed to cross the English Channel and conduct missions in Britain. Even so, Germany continued to strike Britain from the air through much of the war. But its strategy and air power were never able bring the British to their knees. The British kept the Germans from grabbing their island nation.

On 20 June 1941, Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. The Japanese air strike on Pearl Harbor brought America into the war six months later. Pearl Harbor is a second example of the importance of air power in World War II. Following the attack, America declared war on Japan and on the other two Axis Powers, Germany and Italy.

Now Britain had two powerful new allies. Had Japan not attacked Pearl Harbor, it’s difficult to say how much longer the United States would have maintained its isolationist stance. An isolationist country is a nation that does not enter alliances with other countries.

The D-Day invasion on 6 June 1944 was a third punch delivered through air power. It prepared the Normandy beaches for the infantry—soldiers armed and trained to fight on foot. It helped drive the Germans back to their own country. While all the armed forces contributed to the D-Day mission, air power was an essential element in that battle.

Finally, the atomic bombs dropped on Japan in August 1945 ended the war in the Pacific. Those bombs, delivered by American aircraft, broke the will of the Japanese government and people.
The Role of Air Power in World War II Versus World War I

Air power had a much larger role in World War II than it did in World War I. During World War I, air power was still a novel concept. This was especially true in that war’s earliest years. All-metal planes were still new. Bombs were so light that pilots could carry them on their laps and drop them by hand. The pilots’ work was mainly to observe enemy locations and support ground troops.

But by the end of World War I, things were changing. All-metal planes were becoming the norm. Bombs weighed as much as 2,000 pounds. Pilots engaged in dogfights. Some 1,500 planes fought in the Battle of Saint Mihiel in France in 1918.

Even so, much of World War I took place in the trenches. Infantrymen died in huge numbers. No country wanted its Soldiers to suffer such losses ever again. That’s one reason the use of air power morphed so quickly between 1914 and 1918. It’s also why air power was used so heavily in World War II. During this second war, fought between 1939 and 1945, long-range bombers saw lots of action. These aircraft could fly over trenches and enter enemy territory. Not only could fighters protect bombers and transports, they could also drop bombs.

The Foresight of Gen Henry Arnold

Gen Henry (“Hap”) Arnold (1886–1950) served in both world wars. He learned how to fly from Orville Wright. Arnold was a West Point graduate. He first served in the infantry. In 1911 he transferred to the Aeronautical Division of the US Army Signal Corps.

Arnold thought air power was essential to the future of the military. When troubles began brewing in Europe in 1938, he asked Congress for more funding for the Army Air Corps. He was especially interested in developing aerospace technology to give the United States an edge in achieving air superiority. He fostered the development of jet aircraft, rockets, rocket-assisted takeoff, and supersonic flight.

During the war, Arnold had a couple of jobs. He was commanding general of the US Army Air Forces. He also was the air representative on the US Joint Chiefs of Staff. In 1944 the Army made Arnold a five-star general. He is the only air commander to achieve that rank.
The Allies and Axis Powers used their aircraft to destroy airfields, supply lines, and military posts. They also used aircraft to try to break the will of the people. In fact, during World War II, civilians were often targets. This strategy had been used throughout history. But in World War II it greatly widened the scope of destruction. German bombs killed more than 40,000 civilians in and around London, for instance. The United States firebombed Tokyo and dropped atomic weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, killing hundreds of thousands.

Victory in World War II relied on contributions from all forces—land, sea, and air. Each was indispensable. But for the first time in history, air power was the key to victory.

How Air Power Was Developed During World War II

Now that air power was more reliable, military leaders began to think ever more seriously about its prospects. Even in Brig Gen Billy Mitchell’s day, visionaries knew aircraft would some day serve in more than a supporting role. With World War II, that day arrived. Both the Allies and the Axis Powers soon developed new strategies for waging war in the air.

The Development of Strategic Air Warfare

When World War I ended, both sides signed a peace treaty. It was named the Treaty of Versailles. Among other points, this treaty stated that Germany could not build a military air force. It was free, however, to develop commercial aircraft.

Germany used the progress it made in commercial planes as a cover for the advances it was secretly making in military aircraft. It was also quietly training pilots in South America. By 1932 Germany’s military air force had three bomber squadrons, four fighter squadrons, eight observation squadrons, 1,500 trained pilots, and 3,000 pilots in training. A squadron is an air force unit consisting of two or more flights. A flight is a unit that has two or more elements.

In 1933 Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany. In 1935 Germany unveiled its Luftwaffe. In 1939 the German Army and Air Force invaded Poland. Germany was once again a power to be contended with.

Wanting to avoid getting bogged down in trench warfare as it had in World War I, Germany perfected a new strategy to invade and control Poland. The Germans called it Blitzkrieg, which in English means “lightning war.” A blitzkrieg is a war conducted with great speed and force. In a blitzkrieg, the offense attempts to overwhelm its enemy. Because the fighting is quick, it supposedly results in fewer deaths and less damage to the invaded country. A blitzkrieg uses combined arms, the coordinated efforts of different military branches, such as air and ground.
In a World War II blitzkrieg, the Luftwaffe would strike first. Its pilots would fly behind enemy lines to take out an enemy air force, often before it could even get in the air. Then the German Army, using tanks to get its infantry safely across trench lines, would blow up railroads and strike at enemy troops. Combined arms were used a bit at the end of World War I, when the tank was developed. But they came into their own during World War II.

**Tactical Operations: The Three-Point Plan**

German and Italian forces were also in North Africa. From this base, they attacked British positions in the Mediterranean and along the Suez Canal. The Axis Powers needed Middle Eastern oil. To get it, they had to gain control of the canal, through which oil was shipped. The fight between the Allies and the Axis Powers in North Africa began in 1941, when the Germans targeted the British on Malta, an island in the Mediterranean.

In Africa, the United States and Britain used the same air policy at first. When the Luftwaffe attacked an Allied air base, only the aircraft at that base would respond. Each base commander was in charge of his planes. He did not coordinate with any other base commander. As a result, very few Allied planes were going up. They were always outnumbered by German aircraft. It became clear that if the Allies didn’t change tactics, their huge losses would continue.

So Britain’s Royal Air Force (RAF) and then the US Army brought all their planes under centralized control. This way, if a base were attacked, all Allied bases could defend it or retaliate together.

It worked. By 1942 the German Afrika Korps under Field Marshal Erwin Rommel was crumbling. The Germans’ supplies were cut off. By 1943 the Allies controlled the skies. That meant the infantry could now control the ground. The Allies had won the battle of Africa. The US Air Force still uses this strategy of centralized control.

A new plan for tactical operations also grew out of the experience in Africa. Something that is **tactical** involves military operations that are smaller, closer to base, and of less long-term significance than strategic operations. The theory had three points:

1. **Air superiority**, achieved by destroying opposing airfields, aircraft, fuel tanks, and manufacturers of aircraft and spare parts

2. **Interdiction**, or the act of cutting or destroying an enemy’s advance through firepower. As part of interdiction, aircraft hit supply routes, railroads, bridges, highways, warehouses, troops, and means of communication

3. **Close ground support.** Aircraft bombed and strafed within enemy territory and provided an aerial shield for Allied infantry
Strategic Operations: Long-Range Bombing

One of the Allies’ air-warfare strategies was long-range bombing. The Allies used this strategy a great deal since they had more long-range bombers than Germany did. Germany’s manufacturers produced mostly short- and medium-range bombers. Hitler had figured most of his battles would be in continental Europe, and therefore close to Germany.

Long-range bombing was an Allied air strategy; the approach used in North Africa involved Allied air tactics. Tactical operations apply to a specific fight. Strategic operations encompass the entire philosophy of a military’s plan to win the war. The Allies relied heavily on long-range bombers to hit deep inside Germany and Japan and to destroy their ability to wage war.

Between the German blitzkrieg and Allied tactical and strategic plans, air power was taking shape. Both sides fine-tuned operations throughout the war. And that fine-tuning continues today.

Lt Gen Pete Quesada: An Advocate of Close Air Support

Lt Gen Pete Quesada (1904–1993) realized as early as the 1930s that “future war will require all sorts of arrangements between the air and the ground, and the two will have to work closer than a lot of people think or want.” As commander of the First Air Defense Wing in North Africa, he put close air support into practice. He refined his idea as commander of the 12th Fighter Command, also in North Africa, in 1943.

Close air support has three major features:
1. Making ground and air commanders equal
2. Using centralized control
3. Establishing air superiority before committing ground troops

Another name for close air support is “tactical operations.”

Quesada later commanded the Ninth Fighter Command, which saw action on D-Day in 1944. It provided close air support. Later, he was the first commander of the Tactical Air Command. He retired from the Air Force in 1951. In 1958 President Dwight Eisenhower named him the first director of the Federal Aviation Agency.
Neither the Army Air Corps nor the Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP) accepted African-Americans at first. It was Senator Harry S. Truman, a future US president, who got Congress to admit blacks into the CPTP. The Tuskegee Airmen were born. They flew fighters.

The men, all African-Americans, got basic flight training at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Those who passed went on for combat flight training at Tuskegee Army Air Field. Tuskegee pilots formed the 99th Fighter Squadron, which saw action in North Africa. Pilots also joined the 332nd Fighter Group. The 332nd and the 99th fought side by side in Italy later in the war.

By the end of the war, the Tuskegee program produced 992 black pilots. Of those, 150 lost their lives in training or combat.

When Truman became president, he vowed to push for more rights for blacks in all branches of the military. His overall goal was to end racial segregation in the armed forces. In July 1948 he signed Executive Order 9981. It said: “It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin.”

The Tuskegee Airmen’s service during World War II helped make this new order possible.
Gen Benjamin O. Davis Jr.: All in the Family

The military was in Benjamin Davis Jr.'s blood. His father was an Army general. The younger Davis (1912–2002) would become the first African-American brigadier general in the US Air Force.

Davis trained in the Tuskegee program. In 1941 he led the all-black 99th Pursuit Squadron. He saw action in 1943 in North Africa. He also commanded the all-black 332nd Fighter Group. This group fought in 15,000 air battles in Europe during World War II. It destroyed 260 enemy planes.

Davis flew 60 combat missions and logged 224 combat hours. He earned the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Silver Star, the Croix de Guerre, the Star of Africa, and more. In 1998, Davis became a four-star general.

Charles Hall: A First for the 99th Fighter Squadron

1st Lt Charles Hall was a fighter pilot with the all-black 99th Fighter Squadron. On 21 July 1943, he was flying a P-40 over Italy as part of the escort for a B-25 bomber. He saw two German Focke-Wulf 190s coming his way. He zipped this way and that, intent on stopping the enemy aircraft. Hall let off a spray of bullets. One of the German fighters went down. Hall was the first African-American to score a kill during the war. He had two more by war’s end. The US government awarded Hall the Distinguished Flying Cross.
The Combat Box Formation and Formation Pattern Bombing

It was 1943. Brig Gen Curtis LeMay's bombers were coming under heavy fire. US losses were staggering. During the US Eighth Air Force's first flight into Germany in July, the enemy shot down 92 American bombers. A month later it destroyed 60 more. In October antiaircraft fire and German fighters downed another 148 US bombers. Such losses could not continue.

Part of the problem was that the US bombers were flying into Germany unaccompanied. They had no protection. Normally fighters accompany bombers. But Allied fighters didn’t yet have the range that Allied bombers had. By the end of the war, at least one fighter, the P-51 Mustang, would be developed to escort bombers. In the meantime, bombers’ only defense was gunners all around the aircraft. But gunners weren’t as helpful as a protective flank of fighters.

Furthermore, US pilots were conducting their precision-bombing missions during daylight hours. The RAF had lost many planes trying this. So they switched to night bombing. Americans were responsible for daytime runs. They had the Norden bombsight, which helps them hit targets during the day.

LeMay knew he had to do something to cut losses. He came up with two tactics: the combat box formation and formation pattern bombing.

LeMay instructed his bombers to fly close together. He called it the combat box formation. By sticking together, the gunners on the aircraft could more effectively protect against enemy fighters. This tactic helped somewhat until long-range escort fighters became available later in the war.

Formation pattern bombing is what results when bombers fly in a combat box formation. Bombs dropped from aircraft flying close together will land closer together and can have a big impact in a small area.
The Development of Bombers, Fighters, and Transports

Between the end of World War I and the start of the second world war, both the United States and Britain cut defense spending drastically. The Axis Powers were doing just the opposite. So when Germany invaded Poland in 1939, the Axis nations were well prepared for war. The Allies were not.

In 1939 the US had 1,500 airplanes. At the time of the Pearl Harbor attack, it had 2,900 aircraft. Many weren’t fit for combat duty. Furthermore, in 1939 US manufacturers could build no more than 2,100 aircraft per year. By 1940 they increased that to 570 a month. And by 1941 they could build 1,900 airplanes a month. Requests from Britain and France, as well as the US military, spurred the factories to ramp up production.

Pilots flew three key kinds of aircraft in World War II: the bomber, the fighter, and the transport.

Gen Curtis E. LeMay and His Bombers

Gen Curtis E. LeMay (1906–1990) rose from flying cadet to many leadership positions. He worked with fighter planes. He moved to bombers in 1937. He charted routes to Africa and England before World War II.

In 1942 LeMay was in charge of the 305th Bombardment Group in the European theater. These pilots flew B-17s. It was with this group that he developed the combat box formation and formation pattern bombing. Later, when placed in charge of B-29s in the Pacific, he adapted those bombing theories to the new theater.

LeMay was a tough commander, but he was also tough on himself. He had a theory about war: “If you are going to use military force, then you ought to use overwhelming military force. Use too much and deliberately use too much. . . You’ll save lives, not only your own, but the enemy’s, too.” He applied this philosophy when his B-29s firebombed Tokyo in the most destructive air raid in history.

After the war, LeMay had a number of leadership roles. Among them was command of the US Air Force in Europe during the Berlin airlift, an operation in Germany that followed World War II. Back in the United States, he commanded the Strategic Air Command, which oversaw atomic-bomb operations.

In 1961 LeMay became the fifth chief of staff of the Air Force.