BLUF: During World War II, 16 million Americans served in the United States Armed Forces, with 405,399 killed in action and 671,278 wounded. Americans participated in every aspect of the war from November 1942 through September 1945. The U.S. fought alongside Great Britain and the Free French against the Axis Powers in the European Theater. After June 1942, the Soviet Union and the U.S. allied. While in the Pacific, the U.S., with members of the British Commonwealth of Nations, fought against the Japanese. World War II cost the U.S. an estimated $341 billion in 1945 dollars, equivalent to 74% of America’s GDP in 1945.

GENERAL STORY: The European Theater began with the American invasion of North Africa on 8 November 1942. In July 1943, the Allies invaded Sicily and Italy to weaken the Axis grip on Europe. On 6 June 1944, the invasion of Normandy marked the beginning of the end for Axis control of Europe. V-E Day was declared on 8 May 1945 when Nazi Germany surrendered to the Allied powers.

The advance on Japan began in June 1942 after the Battle of Midway. From August 1942, the American forces progressed from Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands north toward the Japanese main islands. By August 1945, the U.S. brought the Japanese to the surrender table using two atomic bombs. On 2 September 1945, known as V-J Day, the Japanese Empire surrendered to the Allied nations in Tokyo harbor aboard the USS Missouri.

When the war came to an end, an estimated 100 million people had died during the war. The U.S. was the only atomic power, though the Potsdam Agreement turned control of Eastern Europe over to the Communists led by the Soviet Union. For the next 50 years, the struggle between the Democratic and Communist nations would characterize the Cold War.

MARINE STORY: The bulk of the Marine Corps’ effort during World War II was spent in the Pacific Theater. Beginning in August 1942, the Marines fought the Japanese in eleven island-hopping engagements. During the war, the Marine Corps suffered over 20,000 deaths out of the 485,000 Marine participants. World War II produced the youngest Marine Corps Medal of Honor recipient, Jack Lucas, at age 17 on Iwo Jima.

QUESTIONS
1. Why was World War II divided into two theaters of operation for the Americans?
2. What was the final result for the U.S. coming out of World War II?
3. What was the role of the Marine Corps in the Pacific region during World War II?

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


