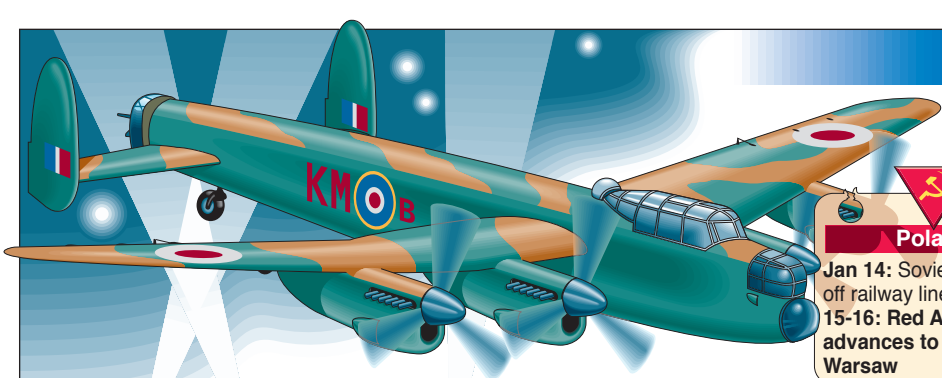


COUNTDOWN TO VICTORY IN EUROPE

On January 7, 1945, Stalin agreed to Churchill's call for a Soviet offensive to ease pressure on the Allies' drive towards Germany from the west. The Red Army campaign began on January 12 when 160 divisions attacked German positions in Poland and East Prussia – and the stage was set for the downfall of Nazi Germany



Poland

Jan 14: Soviet forces cut off railway line at Krakow
15-16: Red Army advances to encircle Warsaw

Berlin

Jan 16: Hitler returns to the Chancellery and is forced to take cover in his bunker as Allied bombers attack the city

Warsaw

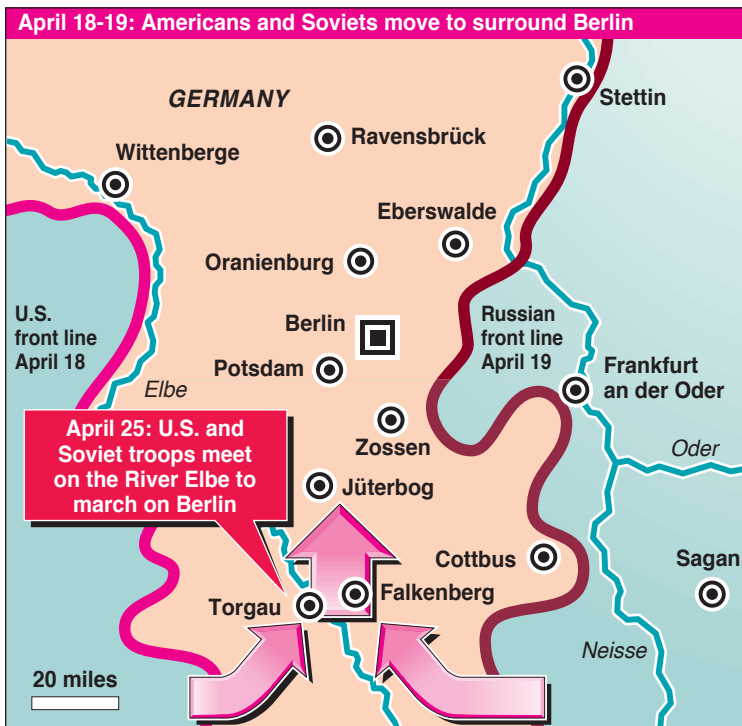
Jan 17: Polish capital liberated after five years of Nazi occupation
18: Soviet government established in Warsaw

Auschwitz

Jan 18: Germans order immediate evacuation of Auschwitz inmates to concentration camps in Germany

Germany

Jan 27: With the Soviets just 100 miles away, Berlin streets are cleared of refugees to make way for reinforcements



January 27: Horrified Russian troops enter Auschwitz – the Nazis' biggest death camp. The SS destroyed the crematoria and gas chambers before retreating, along with the bulk of the records detailing mass murder in the camp. Most of the few hundred inmates left are suffering from diphtheria, scarlet fever or typhus

January 31: Led by Marshal Zhukov, the Red Army crosses the German border into Pomerania – 95 miles from Berlin, cutting vital Nazi rail links with Danzig

February 3: U.S. bombers drop 3,000 tons of explosives on Berlin – setting alight five square miles of the city

February 8-9: RAF bombers continue attacks on key Nazi targets, including V2 rocket sites. Heavy artillery fire clears the way for British and Canadian forces to breach the Siegfried Line, reaching the River Rhine. U.S. forces attempt to capture the Roer dams to prevent the Germans flooding the river to hold up the Allied advance

February 14: More than 50,000 are killed as RAF Lancaster bombers drop 2,700 tons of high explosives and incendiaries on Dresden – American B-17s drop another 770 tons of bombs

February 19: Himmler makes initial overtures for peace talks with the Western Allies

February 21-22: RAF and U.S. bombers launch a series of raids on key transport links in Germany. 1,200 U.S. aircraft drop 400,000 incendiaries on Nuremberg during the raids

February 25: The American M26 Pershing tank enters combat for the first time as the 3rd Armoured Division crosses the Roer River

March 2: German troops begin to retreat from the Rhine. RAF bombs Cologne

6: U.S. tanks and infantry enter Cologne

7: Germans begin to evacuate Danzig. U.S. troops cross the Rhine at Remagen over the only bridge left intact by retreating German troops

14: RAF 'Dambusters' raid destroys the Bielefeld viaduct, using the biggest bomb yet to be dropped on Germany – the 22,000lb 'Grand Slam'

24: Allied forces flood across the Rhine as Russia prepares for the final assault on Berlin

April 5: Himmler's 'Schwarze Korps' magazine concedes that Germany is 'on the verge of absolute collapse'

6: Allies round up 100,000 surrendering German troops as the Nazi armies start to collapse

11: Piles of unburied corpses are discovered as U.S. troops liberate Buchenwald

April 12: U.S. President Roosevelt dies while sitting for a portrait. Vice-president Harry S. Truman is sworn into office

April 16: Hitler retreats to his bunker, giving orders to destroy all military and industrial installations to prevent the enemy from taking them

U.S. troops liberate some 19,000 PoWs from Colditz

The RAF sinks Hitler's last battleship, the Lutzow, in the Baltic.

2,500,000 Russian troops, supported by over 6,000 tanks and 7,500 aircraft, begin the final drive towards Berlin

April 15: British troops take control of Belsen, where 30,000 survivors are battling against epidemics of typhus and dysentery. An estimated 10,000 bodies are lying around the camp

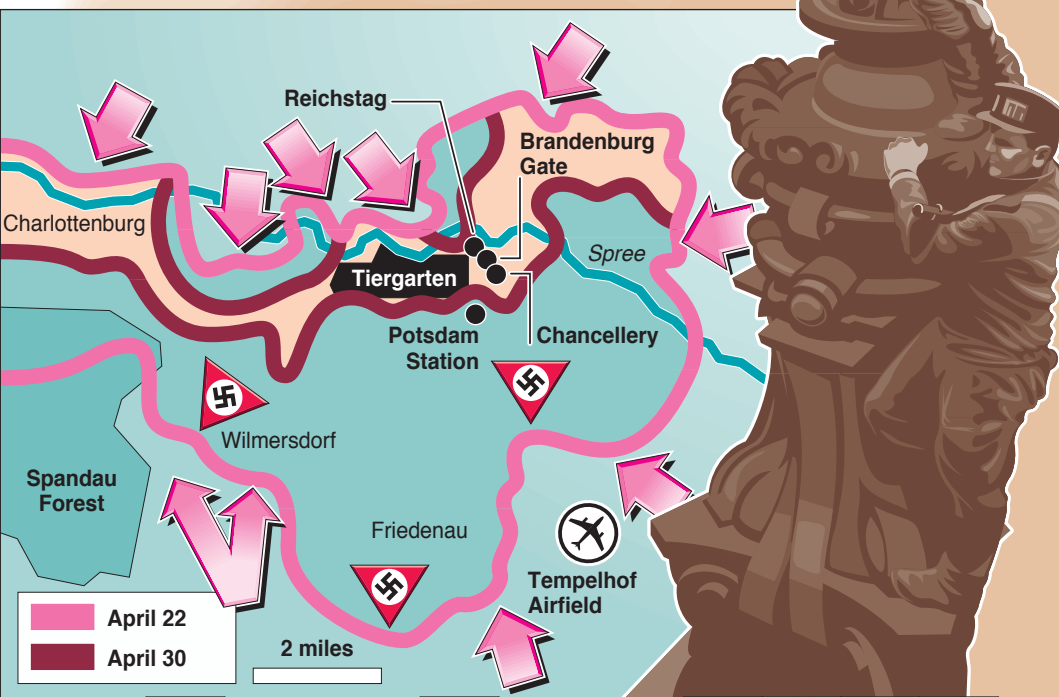
April 22: Himmler offers to surrender to Britain and America – but not to the Russians. On hearing the story seven days later in a BBC radio broadcast, Hitler orders Himmler's arrest and execution

April 27-30: Ravensbrück, Dachau and Sachsenhausen concentration camps liberated

April 28: Italian dictator, Benito Mussolini, executed by partisans

The final battle for Berlin

<p>Day 1 – April 22</p> <p>While Rokossovsky's troops prevent the 3rd Panzer Army from reaching Berlin, Zhukov's 47th Army and the 4th Guards' Tank Army, under Konev, move swiftly to encircle the city</p>	<p>Day 6 – April 27</p> <p>The 12th Army is halted 15 miles from Berlin while the Russians plunder the capital. Only a ten-by-three mile strip, running east to west across the city, remains under SS control</p>
<p>Day 2 – April 23</p> <p>Having broken into north, east and south Berlin, Russian artillery launches massive attacks on central and western Berlin. The shelling is backed with air strikes as SS resistance begins to crumble</p>	<p>Day 7 – April 28</p> <p>The German garrison has only enough food and ammunition left for two days. As the Red Army advances on the Reichstag, the Tiergarten remains the last SS stronghold</p>
<p>Day 3 – April 24</p> <p>RAF fighter bombers attack the German 12th Army, returning to Berlin from the western front. The entire eastern side of the city is on fire</p>	<p>Day 8 – April 29</p> <p>German resistance falters as small groups are forced to fight from flak towers and air-raid shelters. Many surrender, risking execution by SS squads, as the Tiergarten looks set to fall</p>
<p>Day 4 – April 25</p> <p>The Red Army completely surrounds Berlin, with tanks in the suburbs and Government buildings under fire from Russian field-guns</p>	<p>Day 9 – April 30</p> <p>The Reichstag falls in the early afternoon after repeated heavy shelling. Zhukov's 47th Army enters the building through holes in the walls to take control. The Red Flag is raised over the shattered building by Sergeants Yegorov and Kontary, signalling the end of the battle for Berlin</p>
<p>Day 5 – April 26</p> <p>Russian tanks cross the Spree and approach the Imperial Castle. The German 12th Army offers some hope to the Nazis, launching a counter-attack from the west</p>	



April 30: Berlin

In his private quarters, Adolf Hitler shoots himself. His wife of 36 hours, Eva Braun, is found next to him, killed by poison. The bodies, wrapped in blankets, are placed in a shell hole in the Chancellery garden, doused in petrol and burned

May 1: Berlin

Josef Goebbels kills his six children by lethal injection before instructing an SS orderly to shoot him and his wife in the back of the head

May 1: Germany

Hitler's successor, Grand Admiral Dönitz, orders troops to continue fighting. Himmler once more tries to negotiate a favourable surrender

May 2: Berlin / Italy

Marshal Zhukov accepts the German surrender in Berlin. War in Italy finally comes to an end as almost 500,000 German troops surrender

May 4: Germany

Montgomery accepts provisional surrender of all German forces in Holland, Denmark and NW Germany, effective from 08:00, May 5

May 7: Allied Supreme Command

At Eisenhower's HQ in Rheims, Germany signs unconditional surrender of "all forces on land, sea and in the air who are at this date under German control". Tuesday, May 8, is declared Victory-in-Europe Day

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