

Important Battles That Changed History

Battle	Where/When	Opponents
Zama	Zama, an ancient town in N. Africa southwest of Carthage / 202 B.C.	Romans/Carthaginians

This battle marked the downfall of Hannibal, one of history's most famous and daring generals. For more than 60 years, the Carthaginians and the Romans fought for world power. For 16 of those years Hannibal, the Carthaginian leader, was able to hold off the Romans—until the battle of Zama. Though the Carthaginians had 15,000 fewer warriors, Hannibal thought he had solved the problem. He had 80 elephants, which he would use to send the Roman army fleeing in terror and confusion. But when Hannibal set the elephants free in the Roman ranks, the animals took the easier route and ran the other way! Hannibal and his army lost 11 elephants, the battle, and the war.

Battle	Where/When	Opponents
Marathon	Greece / 490 b.c.	Persia / Greece

The battle of Marathon is famous, not only because the underdog won, but also because of a legend of courage and sacrifice. Darius, the leader of Persia, Egypt, Babylon, and India, decided to become the ruler of Greece as well. But the Greeks, armed only with javelins and swords, defeated the much larger and better armed Persian army. What we remember today is the story of the messenger who brought the good news to Athens, the capital of Greece. Upon completing his 26-mile run, legend says he delivered his message, collapsed, and died. Today, the word *marathon* means a footrace of exactly 26 miles, 385 yards.

Battle	Where/When	Opponents
Hastings	England / 1066	British / Normans (French from Normandy)

This battle resulted in the Norman conquest of England. Edward the Confessor, the king of England, had no sons and promised that when he died his throne would go to his cousin William, duke of Normandy. On his deathbed, however, the king chose Harold, the powerful earl of Wessex, as king. An enraged William rushed into battle to claim the English throne. At the battle's height, the Normans pretended to flee. When the

English ran after them, the Normans turned and attacked them again. Harold was shot in the face with an arrow and died on the battlefield, leaving the throne to William. To this day, the English royal family can be traced back to William the Conqueror.

Battle	Where/When	Opponents
Agincourt	France / 1415	England / France

This famous battle was part of the Hundred Years' War between the French and the English. English archers with their longbows were able to keep the French with their crossbows too far away to shoot. The French decided to charge. The ground was wet and muddy, causing the heavily armored troops to slip and fall. The French lost at least 5,000 men; another 1,000 were captured. The English losses totaled only 140.

The Hundred Years' War between England and France lasted from 1337 to 1453, more than 100 years. It ended when the English were driven out of France.

Battle	Where/When	Opponents
Lexington and Concord	Massachusetts / 1775	American colonists / British

This was the opening battle of the American Revolution. British troops led by General Thomas Gage were moving from Boston toward Lexington and Concord to capture the rebel leaders Samuel Adams and John Hancock and destroy their military supplies. The colonists were warned when Paul Revere made his famous midnight ride, shouting, "The British are coming!" At Lexington and Concord, armed colonists called Minutemen resisted the British. Ralph Waldo Emerson later wrote a poem describing this conflict as "the shot heard round the world." The fighting ended almost a year later, when the British evacuated Boston. On July 4, 1776, representatives from the 13 colonies signed the Declaration of Independence to gain their freedom from Great Britain.

Battle	Where/When	Opponents
Waterloo	Belgium / 1815	England & European allies / France

This battle ended not only Napoleon's Hundred Days' War but also 23 years of almost constant war between France and the rest of Europe. France and England had been enemies for hundreds of years. The battle of Waterloo was fought by the English forces and their allies, some 68,000 men under Arthur Wellesley (later the duke of Wellington), with 45,000 Prussians under Gebhard von Blücher against the French emperor Napoleon, with almost 72,000 men. Casualties of 25,000 men destroyed the French army. Soon after this crushing defeat, Napoleon was exiled on the island of Saint Helena, where he died six years later. Waterloo has since come to mean a disastrous defeat of any nature.

Battle	Where/When	Opponents
Gettysburg	Pennsylvania / 1863	Union / Confederacy

The greatest battle of the American Civil War, Gettysburg marked the northernmost advance of the Confederate forces and is considered the war's turning point. Three bloody days of fighting ended in the failure of the Confederate army, led by General Robert E. Lee, to invade the North. Though his army outnumbered the Union forces under Major General George G. Meade, the North expected the Confederates to charge and try to break the center of its line. Cut down by enemy fire, the Confederates were quickly overwhelmed; only 150 out of 15,000 Southerners reached the Union lines. This decisive victory for the North was the beginning of the end of the Confederacy.

Battle	Where/When	Opponents
Britain	Great Britain / 1940 Summer & Fall	Germany / England

The battle of Britain was a series of air battles fought between the German air force, or Luftwaffe, and the British Royal Air Force, or RAF. It was the first time during World War II that Adolf Hitler's Nazi forces were thwarted. Following the fall of France, only Great Britain held out against Germany. With ground forces stopped by the English Channel, Hitler launched a heavy air attack on England. When several daytime attacks proved unsuccessful, the Germans executed a nighttime *Blitzkrieg*, or "lightning war," on London, England. This attack, begun on September 7, continued for 57 nights. During this time an average of 200 planes each night blasted the city with high-explosive bombs. The relentless raids killed more than 43,000 British and wounded five times that number. Only the outstanding performance of the RAF kept the Germans from forcing Britain to surrender. As a result, Germany abandoned its plan for invasion.

Battle	Where/When	Opponents
Guadalcanal	SW Pacific / 1942-43	Japanese / U.S.

This World War II battle was unique in many ways. The U.S. victory meant that Japan experienced its first setback in the Pacific islands. Also for the first time during the war, America was on the offensive. The ferocious 6-month battle for control of this tiny island 1,000 miles off the coast of Australia was fought on land, on sea, and in the air. Although many bitter battles were still to be fought before the end of the war in August 1945, the battle of Guadalcanal opened the way for U.S. victory in the South Pacific.

Battle	Where/When	Opponents
Tet Offensive	S. Vietnam / 1968	Vietnam / U.S.

The Tet Offensive was the turning point in the Vietnam War. The North surprised the South Vietnamese and American forces in simultaneous attacks in many parts of Vietnam during the Vietnamese New Year, or Tet. Many of the attackers disguised themselves as Tet holiday celebrators. Although American troops weren't withdrawn from Vietnam until 1973, the Tet Offensive was the beginning of the end of the U.S. presence there. It was the first time the United States was

unable to gain victory in war (since the War of 1812).

Communist forces gained control of South Vietnam in 1975.