

## Key Dates: Australia and World War II, 1939–45

An animated visual timeline of Australia's involvement in the Second World War, sequencing twelve turning points from the declaration of war in September 1939 to Victory in the Pacific in August 1945 — including the Siege of Tobruk, the entry of Japan into the war, Curtin's turn to the United States, the fall of Singapore, the bombing of Darwin, the Coral Sea, the Kokoda Track and Milne Bay campaigns, and VE and VP Days. Designed as a study and revision aid for the Australia & World War II component of the unit, foregrounding the war's strategic turning point and the pivot from Britain to the United States.

Australia entered the Second World War in September 1939 as part of the British Empire, but the war's centre of gravity shifted decisively to the Pacific after Japan's entry in December 1941. The fall of Singapore and the bombing of Darwin in February 1942 brought the war to Australia's doorstep and confirmed Prime Minister John Curtin's pivot away from reliance on Britain and toward the United States — the single most important strategic realignment in the nation's wartime history.

**How to read this timeline.** The spine runs chronologically from the declaration of war (top) to Victory in the Pacific (bottom). Marker colours group events by theme — use the legend at the base of the figure. The 1942 cluster (Singapore, Darwin, Coral Sea, Kokoda, Milne Bay) is the turning point: trace how a run of defeats gives way to the first checks on Japanese expansion.

# Australia and World War II

1939 – 1945 · Key dates and turning points



Australia and the Second World War, 1939–45: twelve turning points from the declaration of war to Victory in the Pacific. The animation plays on screen; printed copies show the completed timeline.

### Recall checklist

■ Political ■ Middle East ■ Pacific theatre ■ Home front ■ Victory  
Cover the timeline and see whether you can place each event — and explain *why* it mattered, not just *when* it happened.

1. Why is 27 December 1941 (Curtin's New Year message) treated as a strategic turning point rather than just a rhetorical one?

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2. The fall of Singapore and the bombing of Darwin happened four days apart. Explain the combined effect on Australian public opinion and government policy.

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3. Milne Bay (Aug–Sep 1942) is often called the “first defeat of Japanese land forces”. Why was this significant for Allied morale, and how does it connect to the Kokoda campaign running at the same time?

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**The through-line.** 1939–41: a distant imperial war fought mainly in the Mediterranean and North Africa (Tobruk). December 1941: Japan's entry brings the war home. February 1942: Singapore and Darwin trigger the turn to the United States. Mid-1942: Coral Sea, Kokoda and Milne Bay halt the Japanese advance. 1945: VE then VP Day close the war. Tie every date back to this arc.