

The War Begins

On September 1, 1939 the Nazis invaded Poland. The German soldiers launch a new fighting style known as “blitzkrieg”, or lightning war. The Germans launched this attack using new weapons and technology that the Polish could not defend against. Within three weeks Poland surrenders to the Germans. Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand declare war on Germany on September 3.

The United States declared its neutrality. The First World War cost a fortune, and the US wanted to avoid involvement. Poland was decimated by the German blitzkrieg. True to their pact the Soviets invaded Poland and the two sides split Poland. The Russians now used this opportunity to attack Finland in late November. For attacking a neutral nation, the Soviet Union expelled from the League of Nations.

In April and May 1940 the Nazis invaded Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and France. Within months of the attacks all of the nations above surrender to the Germans. With the French defeated, the Nazis believed that Great Britain would crumble.

1. What is a blitzkrieg? Why was it successful?
2. Why did the US stay neutral?

Battle of Britain

In July 1940 the Battle of Britain began. The German Luftwaffe had 2,800 aircraft stationed in France, Belgium, Holland and Norway. However, the British had the advantage of being closer to their airfields. On the 12th August, 1940, the German Luftwaffe began its mass bomber attacks on British radar stations, aircraft factories and fighter airfields. This attack was followed by daily raids on Britain.

The climax of the Battle of Britain came on the 30th-31st August, 1940. The British lost 50 aircraft compared to the Germany's 41. The Royal Air Force were close to defeat but Adolf Hitler then changed his tactics and ordered the Luftwaffe to switch its attack from British airfields, factories and docks to civilian targets. This decision was the result of a bombing attack on Berlin. And this was the mistake that cost the Germans the Battle for Britain.

1. What was the German plan for Britain?
2. What cost the Germans the Battle for Britain?

The Pact of Steel

In mid-1940 the Italians finally joined WWII. The Pact of Steel that was signed between Germany and Italy was an agreement not to attack each other. Italy's main agenda was to create a large empire. They started this by annexing Albania, and attacked Egypt and then Greece.

Unlike the Germans, the Italian army was not very powerful. Italy was losing battles to the Greeks, and the Nazis turned their attention toward the Balkans and Greece. The Nazis defeated the entire area. Every country in the Balkans surrendered to the Nazis in early 1941. The Germans also had to send troops to Africa to help the Italians defeat hostile African countries. This alliance with Italy was proving to be more costly than they thought.

Germany now controlled almost all of Eastern and Central Europe. The one area they were controlling that caused a problem was the Balkans. The Nazi-Soviet pact gave the Balkans to the

Russians, but Germany occupied Greece. This made the Nazi-Soviet pact null and the Germans turned on the Russians, this attack was known as Operation Barbarossa.

1. What was the Pact of Steel?
2. Why was Italy's weakness a problem for the German army?

Japanese Involvement

In the Pacific, the Japanese army continued its expansion into China and then invaded Indochina. The U.S viewed this action as hostile and froze all Japanese assets. At the same time the Tripartite Pact was signed uniting the three Axis Powers Germany, Italy and Japan in the Rome-Tokyo-Berlin Axis.

The Japanese were also devising a plan to attack to United States. And they did; the Japanese attacked the U.S. on December 7, 1941. The Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. The first attack wave targets airfields and battleships. The casualty list includes 2,335 servicemen and 68 civilians killed, with 1,178 wounded.

The United States and Britain declare war on Japan with President Roosevelt calling December 7, "a date which will live in infamy..." Once the U.S declared war on Japan, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States. The European and Pacific wars now became a global conflict with the Axis powers; Japan, Germany and Italy, united against the U.S, Britain, France, and their Allies.

1. What was the Tripartite Pact?
2. Why did Roosevelt call December 7th, "a day that will live in infamy?"

Germany attacks the Russians

On June 22, 1941, Hitler's armies invaded the Soviet Union. They were advancing on three fronts, one toward Leningrad, one toward Moscow and one toward the Ukraine. Kiev, the capital of the Ukraine fell first to the Germans. It is also at this time in Germany where the hatred for the Jews turns toward extreme violence.

In July 1941, this (excerpt from a) letter that was sent from Goering to Heydrich, a SS captain:

To Heydrich:

Supplementing the task assigned to you by the decree of January 24, 1939, to solve the Jewish problem by means of emigration and evacuation in the best possible way according to present conditions, I hereby charge you to carry out preparations... for a total solution of the Jewish question in all the territories of Europe under German occupation.

Goering

The Germans were still very interested in destroying the Jews and it was this letter that began the development of the final solution. But the war was being lost; by 1943 two-thirds of the land that the Germans conquered went back to Russia.

1. What does this excerpt clearly state?

The United States

It took a while for the U.S and Great Britain to coordinate but the U.S was working on the Manhattan Project, or the development of an atomic bomb. By 1943, the Allies were ready to launch an offensive against the Axis Powers.

The Allies launched their first attack on Italy. The Allies bombed Rome and began to recapture Italian lands for the Allies. Italy was forced to surrender to the Allied forces. The Germans storm into Italy to rescue Mussolini and occupy the Italian capital.

In June 1944 with the help of British and Canadian forces, the U.S stormed the beaches of Normandy. This was also known as D-Day. This was also the battle that would send the Germans to an eventual defeat. Once the Allies landed in France they began to push the Germans back toward Germany and out of France. Coupled with Russian soldiers forcing the Germans out, it was only a matter of time before Germany would surrender.

Once the U.S joined the war the German army was slowly being defeated. Allied soldiers began to liberate concentration camps all around Europe. Once this began the end was near. On April 30, 1945 Hitler committed suicide with his wife in his bunker. A week later on May 7, 1945 the German Army authorized an unconditional surrender to the allied forces.

The war in the Pacific continued. The American forces were beating Japan but they refused to surrender. The U.S used a new weapon to end the war. President Truman of the U.S ordered the dropping of an atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. Over 100,000 people were killed or injured and city was destroyed for miles. Japan did not surrender. The U.S then launched a second bomb on Nagasaki, and with this bomb the Japanese surrendered and World War II was over.

1. Why was D-day so important to the Allies?
2. Why did Truman drop the atomic bombs on Japan?