

The Second World War

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Section 1: The Origins of the War

Government Changes in Europe. During the 1920's and the 1930's, the people of Europe looked for ways to end the problems caused by war and a major depression. Many people lost confidence in their governments. Some turned to new political parties that demanded major changes in the government.

In Italy, the Fascist party gained many members after World War I. Benito Mussolini as the party's leader. He promised the Italian people that the Fascists would bring glory and wealth to Italy. In 1922, Mussolini became the head of the Italian government. He guarded his powers by outlawing all other parties. Mussolini became a *dictator*—a leader who holds total power within a country. In a dictatorship, schools, newspapers, businesses, and even social clubs fall under the control of the dictator.

During the 1930's, Adolf Hitler became the dictator of Germany. Hitler was the head of the National Socialist German Worker's party. This group was also known as the Nazi party. Hitler was a powerful speaker. In his speeches, he told the people of Germany that they had been wronged by many enemies. Hitler promised that he would make Germany a world power.

In their rise to power, both Hitler and Mussolini promised to make their nations rich and strong. They promised jobs for the unemployed. They also promised to rid their countries of people who they said would harm their nation. In working toward these goals, these leaders showed no regard for the rights of individuals.

Other European countries were also under the hold of dictators during the 1930's. Joseph Stalin held all power in the Soviet Union. And, in 1936, General Francisco Franco led a rebellion against the government of Spain. Like Hitler and Mussolini, Franco did not believe in democracy. Circumstances led Franco into an alliance with these dictators. These two leaders aided Franco in this civil war against the government of Spain. As a result, Franco gained full control of Spain in 1939.

Building Armies for Conquests. Both Hitler and Mussolini built strong armies for their countries. As these leaders rebuilt their military forces, they created jobs and also helped many businesses within Italy and Germany. These military forces were to be used to conquer other lands. Hitler and Mussolini claimed that their nations had to expand to get the resources they needed. They declared that such conquests would bring pride and glory to their countries.

Mussolini began to build what he called the Second Roman Empire in 1935. Italian forces attacked Ethiopia—an African nation. The Ethiopian soldiers had poor equipment and little training. They could not stop the Italian invasion. No other country helped Ethiopia defend itself against Italy.

Hitler had violated the Treaty of Versailles by building up the German army. Then, in 1936, Germany went against the treaty again when its soldiers marched into the Rhineland. This was a part of Germany that bordered on France. According to the Treaty of Versailles, no German troops were to enter this area. No action was taken by France or any other country to force Hitler to remove these soldiers from the Rhineland. With this move, Hitler and the Nazis had begun working toward their goal of a German empire.

The Holocaust. Hitler and the Nazi party believed that all enemies of the state and other "undesirables" should be removed from Germany. These undesirables included persons who held opposing political ideas as well as members of minority religious and ethnic groups. Jews, in particular, were singled out for persecution. The Nazis blamed the Jews for many of Germany's problems.

During their early years in power, the Nazis made laws that stripped Jews of their rights. It soon became difficult for Jews to earn a living in Germany. Yet, it was also difficult for most of them to move to other countries. In part this was because most countries, including the United States, had laws that limited immigration.

As the years passed, Nazi treatment of Jews and other groups worsened. After war broke out in 1939, the Nazis began to kill these people. This *holocaust*—mass murder—was carried out in concentration camps built for this purpose. Over 6 million Jews were killed by the Nazis before 1945. Unknown numbers of religious leaders, gypsies, and other people were also put to death.

Forming the Axis. In 1937, Japan, Italy, and Germany signed an agreement. The pact between them became known as the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis. Each member of the Axis had plans to extend its power over other lands. In doing so, the Axis powers would go against the rights of other nations and threaten world peace.

While the Axis powers planned their future conquests, other countries were working out ways to avoid wars. In the United States, Congress passed laws aimed at keeping the United States out of foreign wars.

From Neutrality to Involvement. Between 1935 and 1937, Congress passed several neutrality laws. These laws cut off the sale of American weapons to all countries at war. Within a few years, however, aggression from the Axis countries led the United States to change its neutral stand.

In March 1938 Austria was joined to Germany. Hitler announced that Germany and Austria would be unified under his rule. Later that year, Hitler turned his attention to Czechoslovakia. Over 3 million German-speaking people lived in the western part of Czechoslovakia. Hitler demanded that this land—known as the Sudetenland—be joined with Germany. Hitler promised that this would be the last demand for land that he would make. The leaders of Great Britain and France met with Hitler in September 1938. Their desire to avoid war with Germany led them to accept Hitler's demand for the Sudetenland.

By the spring of 1939 it was clear that Hitler had plans for taking over more countries. In March the Germans took control of Czechoslovakia. At the same time, Mussolini's army invaded Albania. Hitler then made demands on Poland. Great Britain and France stated that they would back Poland against Germany. Thus, when Germany attacked Poland on the morning of September 1, 1939, Great Britain and France declared war on Germany. World War II had begun.

Germany's powerful army easily overpowered other countries. By late April 1940, Germany controlled Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. German troops were in northern France, and it appeared that all of France would soon fall to the Germans. At the same time, the Soviet Union—then a German ally—took over Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. Italy moved into Eastern Europe and North Africa.

When the war in Europe began, the American Congress changed the neutrality laws. First, Congress made it possible for Britain and France to buy American arms on a cash-and-carry basis. After Germany

defeated France in June 1940, President Roosevelt made it even easier for Great Britain to receive American war materials.

While still hoping to avoid war, the American public backed President Roosevelt in his decision to aid Great Britain. President Roosevelt ran for reelection in 1940. By defeating his Republican opponent, Wendell Willkie, Roosevelt became the first President to be elected to a third term.

The United States and Japan. As war raged in Europe, Japan continued to take over more lands in Asia. At this time, several European countries held colonies in Asia. The war with Germany, however, made it difficult for these colonial powers to guard their overseas holdings. The United States wanted to stop Japan from taking over these resource-rich lands.

The United States had been aiding China in its struggle against Japan since 1938. In 1940, the United States blocked Japan's aggressions by cutting off the sale of war materials to Japan. Other countries followed and cut their trade with Japan. By June 1941, for example, Japan was cut off from almost all sources of oil. Without oil for energy, the Japanese could not carry out their plans for expansion.

Communications between the United States and Japan showed that each country stood firm with its demands. The United States would not reopen trade with Japan until Japan withdrew from the lands it occupied. Japan maintained that it could not accept these terms.

At the same time, the United States was moving closer to war with Germany. American ships were assisting the British fleet in the Atlantic. Also, the United States was sending war goods to the Soviet Union after Germany invaded that country in June 1941. These events caused growing tension between the United States and Germany.

President Roosevelt hoped that the United States and Japan could settle their differences without war. Thus, on December 6, 1941, President Roosevelt sent a message to the emperor of Japan. He asked Emperor Hirohito to withdraw Japanese troops from Indochina.

Section 2: The United States at War

The emperor of Japan did not reply to President Roosevelt's message of December 6, 1941. Instead, the Japanese carried out a surprise attack on the American military base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. This drew the United States into war. The war affected all Americans in some way.

The Attack on Pearl Harbor. Early in the morning of December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked the United States with an air raid on Pearl Harbor. Pearl Harbor was the site of a major American naval and air base in Hawaii. Unprepared for an attack, the United States suffered heavy losses. More than 2,000 members of the military were killed as well as 68 Hawaiian civilians. Over 1,000 people were injured.

The Japanese goal was to cripple America's power in the Pacific. This would make it possible for Japan to continue its expansion in Asia without American interference. In the Pearl Harbor attack, the Japanese destroyed about 170 American planes. In addition, 18 American ships were either sunk or badly damaged.

Americans were shocked by the attack. On the following day, Congress declared war against Japan. Great Britain joined the United States and declared war on Japan. Then, on December 11, 1941, Germany and Italy entered the war against the United States. Thus, the United States was involved in a war that was being carried out in Asia, Europe, and Africa.

The Japanese followed their raid on Pearl Harbor with attacks on other bases in the Pacific. Japanese conquests of Guam, Wake Island, Hong Kong, and the Philippine Islands gave the Axis powers the upper hand in the Pacific Ocean. At the same time the Axis was taking a greater hold of Europe. The United States and the other anti-Axis countries—together called the *Allies*—met to plan their military strategy. Together they decided to first put their major efforts into defeating the Axis in Europe.

America's Armed Forces. The United States had begun to build up its military forces before the attack on Pearl Harbor. In September 1940, the threat of war had led the Congress to pass the first peacetime draft law in American history. Because of this, about 1.6 million Americans were in the army when the United States entered the war. Thereafter, the size of America's armed forces grew quickly.

Americans from all groups and backgrounds made up the 15 million who served in the armed forces before the war ended. American women began to play a larger part in the country's defense with the formation of several all-women military corps. Limited to noncombat jobs, women served as mechanics, drivers, pilots, clerks, cooks, and medical experts.

Early in the war the military followed strict segregation practices. Black Americans, Mexican Americans, and Japanese Americans were put into separate military units. About 1 million black Americans entered the military during the war. Most of these recruits were limited to certain jobs and kept out of advanced training programs. As the war progressed, however, segregation was slightly eased.

War Production. Millions of Americans worked on the home front to contribute to the total war effort. Workers in industry, agriculture, and science produced the goods needed for war. American farmers, for example, had to increase their farm output. The greater use of machines made it possible to produce more food even though the number of farm workers declined.

America's industries were rapidly converted to meet the needs of wartime. Unemployment had been dropping since the war began in Europe in 1939. The Great Depression ended when the United States had begun to supply goods to warring countries. At the same time, the United States was building up its own military supplies. After the United States entered the war, the need for workers became even greater. Labor shortages developed. In many cases, the need for workers broke down the barriers that had kept blacks, women, and other Americans from certain jobs.

Most wartime industries were located in cities in the North and West. Blacks from the South and Mexican Americans from the Southwest moved to these cities to fill jobs. This often caused overcrowding, which led to disagreements among residents. Riots broke out in several cities during the war.

Government Controls. During the war, the government put greater controls on the everyday lives of all Americans. Most of these actions were taken to mobilize the country's resources behind the war effort. To prevent problems that might be caused by shortages, the government undertook a program of

rationing—limiting the purchase of certain products. Many foodstuffs—including coffee, butter, sugar, tea, and meats—were rationed.

Automobile driving was cut back greatly because gasoline was rationed. Furthermore, no new automobiles for civilian use were built during the war. This was because materials and production facilities were needed for the war effort.

Other nonrationed goods came into short supply during the war. This happened because workers were earning high wages and could therefore afford more luxury goods. To prevent prices from rising as shortages occurred, the government set price limits on many goods. In this way the government hoped to curb *inflation*—ever-rising prices. Congress also gave the President the power to fight inflation by freezing wages, salaries, and rents. The government also used its taxing power to check inflation.

Civil Rights Denied. The rights of one group of Americans were severely limited by the government during World War II. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Japanese Americans were distrusted by many other Americans. In part, this was because some Americans feared that Japan might attack America's West Coast. Some people believed that enemy agents might be hiding among the Japanese Americans who lived on the West Coast.

This fear led to a widespread mistreatment of Japanese Americans. In February and March of 1942 the federal government carried out the forced relocation of over 100,000 Japanese Americans. The government claimed it was a military necessity to move these people inland. They were housed in camps. In most cases, these camps were overcrowded. There was little privacy or recreation for the residents. Furthermore, relocation caused these people to lose their jobs and their property.

Despite this poor treatment, Japanese Americans remained loyal to the American government. For example, the all-Japanese American 442nd Regimental Combat Team became one of the most highly decorated combat units in World War II.

After the war, in 1948, the federal government took steps to compensate Japanese Americans for the property losses they suffered because of the wartime relocation. The money set aside for this purpose was very small in comparison to the actual losses. Thus, the Japanese Americans never regained all their property.

Section 3: Victory for the Allies

By early 1942, the Axis powers controlled large parts of the globe. However, in late 1942, the Allies won some important victories. The increased production of war goods in the United States gave the Allies an advantage over the Axis. After years of fighting, the Allies were victorious in Europe and in the Pacific.

Allied War Aims. The United States and its allies worked together to defeat the Axis powers. Just two weeks after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, leaders from several countries met in Washington, D.C. There they agreed on common war plans and goals. The result of the meeting was the *Declaration of the United Nations*. Representatives from 26 countries at war against the Axis powers signed this statement.

They pledged full cooperation in the war effort. They also agreed not to make a separate peace with the Axis and to work for lasting world peace once the war ended.

England, the Soviet Union, and the United States were called the *Big Three* among the Allied powers. The Big Three were the largest suppliers of goods and troops to the Allied war effort. Leaders from the Big Three met a number of times during the war. They played a major part in making military plans. They also worked out plans for dealing with the problems that would follow the war.

The War in Europe. The Allies decided that they had to take control of North Africa before undertaking the war in Europe. German troops had conquered much of North Africa by 1942. These troops were led by Field Marshall Erwin Rommel. The German goal was to capture Egypt and the Suez Canal—a vital waterway.

In late October 1942 the British, led by Field Marshall Bernard Law Montgomery, stopped Rommel's advance. Troops from other Allied countries, including American General George S. Patton's troops, joined in this struggle to clear the Axis from North Africa. In early May 1943, the Germans and Italians in North Africa were forced to surrender. This victory opened the Mediterranean Sea to the Allies. The next step was the Allied invasion of Sicily and Italy.

The Italian armies were quickly defeated by the Allies. Faced with defeat, Mussolini, **the** Italian dictator, was forced to resign. The new government of Italy surrendered to the Allies in early September 1943. Fighting in Italy continued, however. German armies moved into Italy and carried on the war against the Allies.

As Allied forces fought the German army in Italy, Soviet soldiers battled the Germans on the eastern front. Germany had invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941. The Germans had inflicted great damage and suffering in the Soviet Union. However, in August 1942, the five-month battle of Stalingrad began. The Soviet victory in this battle marked a turning point in the fighting between these two armies. The Soviets ended the German advance and forced the German army into a steady retreat.

In 1943 the British and Americans began working on plans for an invasion of German occupied France. This invasion—known as Operation Overlord—would aid the Soviet army in the east by opening a second front against the Germans. It was planned that on D-day—the day set for the invasion—the Allies would land on the beaches of Normandy in France. In preparation for D-day, Allied bombers dropped tons of bombs on Germany and on German-occupied lands. In these raids, as in others throughout the war, the American air force played an important part in weakening the Axis.

D-day took place on June 6, 1944. General Dwight D. Eisenhower served as supreme commander of the Allied forces in Europe. The invasion force was followed by hundreds of thousands of additional Allied troops.

The Allies pushed the German army eastward toward Germany. In December 1944, the Germans staged their last major strike with the *Battle of the Bulge*. The Allied victory in this battle forced the Germans to retreat into Germany.

The Soviet army forced the Germans out of eastern Europe by early 1945. The Soviet army then

prepared to invade Germany from the east. In the spring of 1945, the Soviets carried on this advance while the other Allies invaded Germany from the west. Hitler, the German dictator, took his own life as the Soviets pressed toward Berlin. Finally, Germany surrendered on May 7, 1945. The war in Europe was over.

The War in the Pacific. By early 1942, Japan had made many important conquests in the Pacific and in Asia. The Japanese had taken control of many vital resources including oil and rubber. In mid-1942, however, the Allies were able to stop Japan's advance. In June 1942, the United States won an important naval battle near Midway Island. For the first time, Japan was put on the defensive.

The Allies then began to retake important Pacific islands from the Japanese. This was very difficult because the Japanese soldiers usually refused to surrender. The Allies, however, carried through with their plans **for** *island hopping*. This meant that they would attack only key islands and skip over less important islands. This method succeeded in cutting off supplies and communications **to** the Japanese soldiers on the smaller islands.

America's industrial power was very important in gaining the upper hand in the war against Japan. Increased production of aircraft carriers and airplanes gave America the advantage in the air and on the sea. For example, in 1939 the United States had built only 5,856 airplanes. In 1943, Americans produced 85,898 airplanes.

By the spring of 1945, the Allies had made great progress in the Pacific. Americans had retaken the Philippines after more than two years of Japanese occupation. Moreover, the Americans took Iwo Jima and Okinawa from the Japanese. The Allies then made final plans to invade the main islands of Japan.

The Atomic Bomb. President Truman had been in office for only a few months when he had to make major decisions concerning the war against Japan. Truman had become President after Franklin Roosevelt's sudden death in April 1945. In July 1945, President Truman met with the leaders of the Soviet Union and England in Potsdam, Germany. At this time, the Allies held the upper hand in the war against Japan. From Potsdam, the Allied leaders gave the Japanese a final warning to surrender. The Japanese rejected this warning.

President Truman then decided to use a new weapon—the atom bomb—against Japan. The President believed that the bomb was so destructive that it would force the Japanese to surrender. In this way, the Americans would be spared the further loss of life that would be suffered in an invasion of the Japanese islands.

On August 6, 1945, an atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, a Japanese city. More than 90,000 people were killed or missing after the blast. Despite these heavy losses the Japanese did not surrender. Thus, on August 9, 1945, a second bomb was dropped on a Japanese city. It fell on Nagasaki, killing about 40,000 people. Faced with total destruction, the Japanese government asked the Allies for peace. On September 2, 1945, the Allies accepted Japan's formal surrender. World War II was over.

The Aftermath of War. The war caused changes and problems that affected all nations long after the fighting ended. It is estimated that about 50 million people died because of the war. About 400,000

Americans had been killed in the war. And more than 600,000 Americans were wounded.

The United States emerged from the war as a world leader. Americans began to make major decisions about the future of countries all over the globe. The American military, for example, remained posted in several countries throughout the world.

Even before the war was over, the United States had joined with other countries in forming the United Nations (UN). After the war, the UN faced many important tasks. Cities and farmlands in many countries had been destroyed in the war. Many governments had fallen, leaving a need for leadership and direction. The UN began programs to help the millions of people who were left in need by the war. The United States played a large part in these and other programs to rebuild war-damaged countries.

Chapter Summary

September 1, 1939, marked the beginning of World War II in Europe. The United States hoped to remain neutral in the war. But the Axis powers—Germany, Italy, and Japan—invaded lands in several parts of the globe. This led the United States to aid those countries that were fighting against the Axis powers.

The United States was drawn into the war when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Jobs and daily living habits were changed as industry changed over from peacetime needs to war production. The government increased its controls over citizens' everyday activities.

The Allied powers first gave their attention to ending the Axis hold on Europe. Victory in North Africa brought about the Allied landing in Italy in 1943. This then led to the Allied invasion of western Europe on D day—June 6, 1944. The Allies landed in France and began to push the Germans eastward. Germany was forced to surrender in May 1945. The war in the Pacific ended in August 1945 after America dropped two atomic bombs on Japan.