

WORLD WAR II 1933-1945

The United States had cooperated with other nations in many ways in the 1920s and 1930s, but because of the economic situation, the United States was unwilling to take steps strong enough to stop the rise of the aggressor nations of Germany and Japan. When war broke out, Roosevelt led the nation as strongly as he dared to in a policy of intervention on the side of the Allies.

AGGRESSION IN ASIA

The Japanese began aggressive war in 1931 with the invasion of Manchuria. This action violated the Open Door policy and defied the League of Nations. When the Japanese set up a puppet government of Manchucko, Secretary of State Stimson notified Japan and China in 1932 that the United States would not recognize territorial changes made by force or in violation of the Open Door. The League of Nations condemned the Japanese attack, but did not do anything about it. In response, the Japanese withdrew its membership from the league.

In 1937 Japan invaded China in an undeclared war. The United States with other nations condemned Japan's aggression and disrespect for its treaty agreements. Japan soon occupied most of China's seacoast; the United States sold and transported war material to China over the Burma Road in 1938. Loans were extended to China. In 1937 the Japanese challenged the United States deliberately by bombing the American gunboat *Panay* in China. Japan apologized but had demonstrated that she could get away with the attack. In 1938 Japan informed the United States it would no longer abide by the Open Door Policy and all of the China's resources would be used for Japan's needs.

In response, in July 1939, the United States gave the required notice of termination of the trade treaty between the United States and Japan. The Japanese imports of gasoline and scrap iron decreased as they came under more severe control. American consumers boycotted Japanese goods, and contributions were made for the relief of Chinese war sufferers. Japan soon became desperate as imports of American war material steadily dwindled, which made it harder for Japan to maintain its military empire.

THREATS OF AGGRESSION IN EUROPE

Germany had always chafed under the severe terms of the Treaty of Versailles. When the worldwide depression hit Germany, dissatisfied elements began supporting the Nazi Party under the leadership of Adolph Hitler; he promised to overthrow the treaty and reassert German power. In 1933, the Nazi Party won a majority in the popularly elected Reichstag, which then named Hitler chancellor, and then supreme ruler. Hitler immediately began rearmament.

The response in the United States was to take steps to avoid entanglement in any war in Europe and to discourage aggression. The Nye Committee in 1934 investigated the munitions industry as a factor in American involvement in WWI. The committee showed that United States munitions makers had reaped enormous profits and hinted that pressure from financiers and arms manufacturers had led America into the war. The committee's effect was to promote isolationism.

The Johnson Act, sponsored by Senator Hiram Johnson, and passed in 1934, forbade the purchase of the securities of any government that had defaulted on its war debt owed to the United States. This act prevented all European nations, except Finland, from raising loans in the United States to finance war.

AMERICAN NEUTRALITY LEGISLATION

The determination of the United States to avoid war, because mainly of the depression, caused Congress to pass the three neutrality laws of 1936, 1937 and 1938. Their provisions 1) prohibited the sale of war materials to belligerents, 2) forbade the use of American ships to transport war material to belligerents, and 3) banned travel of Americans on belligerent ships. In this legislation Congress gave up the rights America had fought for in the War of 1812 and in WWI. Americans in the thirties believed the nation should fix the problems at home before spending billions of dollars to solve another European problem.

ROOSEVELT'S POLICY

President Roosevelt repeatedly advocated preparedness. In 1934 Roosevelt asked Congress to increase the navy as far as treaty agreements would permit. It was 1938 before Congress authorized any large appropriation for naval construction, but this was because of the increasing threat of attack from Japan.

Roosevelt delivered his "Quarantine Speech" in Chicago in the fall of 1937. He condemned the aggressor nations and asked for an international "quarantine" against them. Isolationists interpreted any positive action as a step toward war and protested. But Roosevelt had put himself on record as favoring collective security by cooperation with the "democracies of the World," which was meant to mean Britain and France.

BACKGROUND OF WWII IN EUROPE

In 1933 Hitler withdrew Germany from the League of Nations. In 1935 Germany legally annexed the Saar Basin by plebiscite, but in 1936 defied the League by the reoccupation of the Rhineland. In 1938 Austria was occupied and annexed by Germany. After this success and no repercussions from the other nations of Europe, Hitler began agitation for the return of the German inhabited Sudetenland border of Czechoslovakia. At Munich Prime Minister Chamberlain of Britain and Premier Daladier of France met Hitler and Mussolini in policy of appeasement and asked Czechoslovakia to vacate the border lands to Germany. In return Hitler and Mussolini promised not to invade Czechoslovakia. In March 1939, Hitler, in spite of promise at Munich, took most of the remainder of Czechoslovakia with action taken by the French or the British.

Hitler next began a propaganda campaign demanding the return of much of Poland and in August 1939, Hitler entered into a nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union. However, the British and French governments promised all possible aid for Poland.

Italy under Mussolini defied the League of Nations in 1935 and invaded Ethiopia with no action taken by Britain or France. In 1936 Italy joined Germany in a military and trade alliance known as the Rome-Berlin axis. When Spain entered a civil war in 1938, Hitler and Mussolini sent aid to Francisco Franco. Mussolini also occupied Albania about the same time Hitler took Czechoslovakia. This also occurred without intervention from Britain and France.

THE OUTBREAK OF WAR IN EUROPE AND THE AMERICAN POLICY

WWII officially began on September 1, 1939 when Hitler invaded Poland. The Soviet Union occupied eastern Poland and then annexed the Baltic countries and made war on Finland at the same time. Taking the threat of Germany as more serious than the threat of the Soviet Union, Britain and France declared war on Germany on September 3.

In the United States public opinion favored the isolationists who organized the influential America First Committee. The internationalists led by the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies favored all possible aid "short of war." Roosevelt took the side of the interventionists. He called Congress into special session and secured modification of the neutrality laws. Congress replaced the arms embargo with the "cash and carry" provision that permitted sales to the belligerents but by its nature would help the allies only.

PREPAREDNESS MEASURES IN THE UNITED STATES

The successes of the Nazis in Europe brought preparedness measures in America in the summer of 1940. Congress appropriated large sums to strengthen the military services. In September a Selective Service Act provided for the registration of men from 21 to 35 years of age. An Office of Production Management was created to begin outlining the mobilization of industry for a war effort. Roosevelt appointed to Republicans to his cabinet to help create a bi-partisan policy. In September Roosevelt also leased eight naval and air bases from Great Britain in the western Atlantic. For these he transferred to Britain 50 destroyers left over from WWI.

The United States was preparing for war in Europe. However, it was forgetting about its most immediate threat, Japan in the Pacific.

AXIS SUCCESSES IN EUROPE

After the speedy occupation of Poland (4 weeks), the war in Europe settled into a stalemate, called the "sitzkrieg," along the Western front during the winter of 1939-1940. In April 1940, the war became active when Germany occupied Norway and Denmark. Immediately thereafter Hitler's troops quickly overran Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg and France (the French invasion lasted six weeks). At the Battle of Dunkirk the British managed to escape out of France and across the English Channel. Mussolini started the invasion of the Balkans. By June 1941 the Axis Powers controlled the main continent of Europe. Hitler then proceeded to finish his plan. He launched a massive invasion of the Soviet Union and began the nightly air bombings of the British Isles.

AID TO THE ALLIES

Although a majority of Americans hoped to avoid war, they hoped the Democratic Allies would win. The President announced that America would be the "arsenal of democracy," and the country now abandoned economic neutrality. Vast amounts of goods began flowing to the aid of Britain. By agreement with Denmark, the United States occupied Greenland in April 1941 and in July 1941 occupied Iceland to protect routes to England. When Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, Roosevelt extended lend-lease aid to her.

THE ATLANTIC CHARTER

Roosevelt and the British war leader, Prime Minister Winston Churchill, met in August 1941, and issued a joint generalized statement of their war aims called the Atlantic Charter. The leading statements made were that 1) neither nation sought territorial gain, 2) they would seek to give all nations access to trade and raw materials over the world, 3) all peoples had the right to choose their own forms of government, and 4) the Allies would support international cooperation to secure improvements of labor standards and social security. 5) Both supported complete freedom of the seas and 6) both sought disarmament of the aggressor countries. 7) They would seek to promote "freedom from fear and want" throughout the world. Also, the two men decided that Germany was the biggest threat in the world to the promotion of democracy.

BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

German submarines sought to prevent American aid from reaching England by attacking freighters under British convoy in the Atlantic. President Roosevelt ordered sea and air patrols in the North Atlantic; positions of German submarines were reported to the British forces. In October 1941, the American destroyer *Reuben James* was sunk by a German submarine attack. Roosevelt then ordered the navy to shoot on sight. In November, Congress provided for the arming of merchant ships.

Meanwhile, the United States was further losing sight of a serious threat of attack in the Pacific,

THE ATTACK IN THE PACIFIC

The demands of Japan and the United States were diametrically opposed in relation to the status of China in 1941. For Japan the economic boycott was hurting the industry of the country. Repeated pleas were made to the United States to drop the boycott, but the United States refused to answer the pleas until the Japanese left China. General Tojo became premier of Japan in October 1941 with the promise of bringing the "imperial pigs of America" to the negotiating table or fight war. When the negotiations broke down in December 1941, Tojo ordered the attack on the United States at Pearl Harbor. At the same time Japanese forces began attacks at Guam, the Philippines, Hong Kong, and in the Malay Peninsula. Congress declared war on December 8 against Japan. Japan's imperial allies, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States three days later.

JAPANESE VICTORIES

Sweeping Japanese victories in the Pacific followed the crippling of the American fleet. The Allied forces were defeated and the Japanese occupied Hong Kong, Guam, Wake Island, Singapore, and the Netherland East Indies and later Burma. Allied warships in the area were sunk. The Americans in the Philippines carried out a delaying action on Bataan Peninsula and at Corregidor in order to get military personnel off the island, but were forced to surrender in early May 1942. The Japanese moved on into nearly all of New Guinea and into the Bismarck and Solomon Islands. The Japanese extension advanced into the Aleutian islands of Attu and Kiska. The goal of this advance for the Japanese was to seek out materials it needed and had been deprived of since the American boycott and/or the resumption of negotiations with the Americans.

THE HOME FRONT

WWII was won by industrial production as well as by manpower and strategy. America enjoyed a great advantage in her resources of raw materials and manufacturing capacity.

PRODUCTION FOR WAR

Soon the vast industrial capacity and labor of the United States were directed into the production of materials to win the war. The War Production Board under Donald Nelson directed industry. This Board allocated materials into the most essential war production and prepared factories for the production of tanks, airplanes, and shipbuilding. The War Labor Board tried to fix wages and managed labor relations without much loss of production from labor disputes. Wage earnings almost doubled, partly because labor put in more overtime. The Office of Price Administration fixed prices on consumer goods and rationed certain items so that the needs of the military could be satisfied.

The farmers produced bumper crops in spite of a lack of labor and machinery. The enormous need for foodstuffs was adequately met for the American forces and the Allies. A War Manpower Commission directed men and women into work where they were needed the most. The railroads performed their jobs so efficiently that the government had no need to take them over as had been done in WWI. The Office of Defense Transportation directed the construction of merchant shipping to overcome the heavy losses from submarine attacks.

WAR FINANCING

War financing increased the national debt to \$250,000,000 in 1945. Bonds of all kinds were sold to the public in seven large drives. The government paid a larger proportion of the war cost by current levies of taxes than in any previous war. Tax rates were increased to new highs. A pay-as-you-go system of income taxes was put in effect by withholdings from individual wages and salaries. Taxes took the form of higher individual and corporate income levies, the excess profit tax on corporations, and luxury taxes on consumer goods. Lend-lease provided billions in aid to the Allies without leaving an irritating war debt problem.

FIRST DEFEATS OF THE JAPANESE

Japanese expansion in the Pacific Ocean continued until June 1942 when the Americans were successful in halting the advancing Japanese in the naval battles of the Coral Sea off Australia and at Midway Island.

The American began the counterattack against Japan at Tulagai and Guadalcanal Islands in the Solomon group. Allied forced (British and French) forces supported the Americans in the various battles in the Pacific.

AMERICAN FORCES AGAINST THE AXIS IN EUROPE

Stalin, leader of the Soviet Union, pleaded with the Allies to attack in Europe and draw off part of the devastating German forces that had reached as far as Stalingrad. Even a year after the war began, the Americans were not prepared to launch an offensive of sufficient force directly against Europe. The attack was made in North Africa instead.

THE WAR IN NORTH AFRICA

Axis forces in North Africa under General Rommel had been threatening for some time to push eastward beyond Cairo to take the Suez Canal and force all British shipping around the Cape of Good Hope, Africa. Victory in North Africa was needed to help protect shipping in the Mediterranean.

In November 1942 a huge British-American fleet under the leadership of General George Patton occupied French Morocco and Algeria. A large German force in Tunisia was surrounded and driven out of North Africa. The Germans surrendered in North Africa in May 1943.

INVASION OF ITALY

In July 1943 the forces in Africa now under General Dwight Eisenhower moved into Sicily. During this invasion Mussolini was overthrown by an Italian revolt and Italy surrendered, but the Germans stationed in Italy took control and continued to resist the Allied advance. The whole Allied effort in Italy proceeded slowly and proved costly, which meant the forces would not be able to conquer Germany from this route.

THE EARLY WAR AGAINST GERMANY

Air bombings of Germany by Britain and the United States from English bases grew steadily from the beginning of the war until the Allies had won air supremacy. American flying fortresses bombed industrial centers in western Germany. The larger cities in Germany suffered enormous damage. The armies of the Soviet Union made large gains against German invaders during the winter campaigns in 1943-1944. By the summer of 1944 the Soviet Union had re-won its territory and other large areas of the eastern front. The battle in the Atlantic against the German submarines was won in 1943. After this time forces were built up rapidly in Britain to open the second front and invade France.

THE BATTLE FOR FRANCE

This large campaign began with the "D-Day" invasion of June 6, 1944, by American and British forces in Normandy. Supreme Commander Dwight Eisenhower directed the invasion forces. Two million American troops were transported into France during the summer invasion. Air and naval bombardment of the landing area to open the beachheads for the landings preceded the landings. Paris was liberated August 25. Just before this, landings were made on the Mediterranean coast in southern France. By October the Germans were completely expelled from France.

The last major offensive of the Germans occurred in December 1944, in the area of Belgium and Luxembourg, the Battle of the Bulge. This last desperate, surprise offensive threw the Allied troops off balance, but the German bulge was pressed back by the end of January 1945.

THE BATTLE FOR PACIFIC SUPREMACY

After Guadalcanal and Midway the Japanese were pushed out of the various widely scattered islands in the Central Pacific where Admiral Chester Nimitz was in command. In the Southwest Pacific General Douglas MacArthur commanded the combined forces from Australia. Everywhere "leapfrog" tactics were used to bypass and leave concentrations of Japanese forced stranded as the Allied forces moved toward the north and west to force the Japanese back. The Allies in Saipan in the Marianas, Guam and Iwo Jima captured important bases from the Japanese.

The Allied forces were greatly helped by the Chinese. In 1942 when the Japanese overran Burma all the way to the border of India, they disrupted the flow of supplies from the United States along the Burma Road. The Chinese under Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek managed to keep up resistance against Japan. The Ledo Road from India and the airlift over the Himalayas brought further supplies to the Chinese. Allied forces in Burma made some headway against the Japanese. When the Chinese joined the Allies in regaining Burma, the Japanese were forced to send more troops to help defend the area.

THE ELECTION OF 1944

In spite of the serious illness of President Roosevelt, he was nominated and won his fourth term. The vice-presidency was contested between Wallace and Truman. Truman won the nomination on the second ballot when he received Roosevelt's support. The Republicans chose a middle-of-the-road candidate, the efficient Thomas Dewey of New York. There was no real disagreement between the candidates on foreign or domestic policy. The Democrats claimed a need to continue the wartime leadership to secure peace. The people agreed and voted 432 Electoral College votes for Roosevelt to 99 for Dewey.

REOCCUPATION OF THE PHILIPPINES

In October 1944 General MacArthur's forces landed in the Philippines at Leyte Island. Admiral William Halsey commanded American naval forces in the Philippines campaign. The naval Battle of Leyte Gulf was actually three battles; the whole action combined was the greatest naval battle of all history. In January 1945 the battle was moved to the largest of the Philippine Islands, Luzon. By the end of February the United States and the Allied powers had recaptured the Philippines.

THE GERMAN SURRENDER

The Russians mounted an offensive with five armies in January 1945. On March 7 the Allied troops crossed the Remagen Bridge across the Rhine southeast of Cologne. In six weeks the American and Soviet troops made contact on the Elbe River. The advance of the Allied armies broke the German defensive. Much of April was spent fighting broken parts of the German army. In the middle of April, the Nazi leaders started fleeing from Germany. On April 20, 1945 Adolph Hitler committed suicide in his bomb shelter. In order to keep the body from being put on display after the war, Hitler had commanded his people to burn his body, which they did. Roosevelt's goal of defeating Hitler was realized. However, he was not alive to see it, he had died eight days earlier of a cerebral hemorrhage. On May 7 a German official made the "unconditional surrender" and May 8 was proclaimed V-E Day. Allied forces were now free to concentrate for the final victory over Japan.

DEFEAT OF THE JAPANESE

In June 1945 Okinawa, on the outskirts of Japan, was captured by American forces. The fighting was fierce and deadly, but the taking of these advanced bases gave the Americans airstrips for bombing Japanese bases and the homeland cities and industries of Japan. Roosevelt's successor, Harry Truman of Missouri, ordered a daily air bombing campaign of the Japanese Islands in order to weaken their resolve in the coming invasion of Japan to secure the unconditional surrender the Americans had demanded. Truman pleaded for Soviet assistance in the planned invasion, however, Stalin was slow in responding and organizing the Soviet troops toward Japan.

Military experts estimated the American loss of life in the invasion without Soviet assistance to be close to 1,000,000 soldiers. It is also at this time the President was informed of the United States' research into developing a new weapon of mass destruction, the atomic bomb. After a successful test, Truman decided to use the bomb to get the surrender instead of American invasion. After warning the Japanese, through the Soviet Ambassador to Japan, to "surrender or else," Truman ordered the first bomb to be dropped on the industrial city of Hiroshima on, August 6. After hearing of the great weapon the United States had used, on August 7 the Soviet Union declared war on Japan. Truman waited for communication from Japan indicating their intent to surrender. On August 9, after Truman still had not received a surrender communication from Japan, he ordered the second atomic bomb to be dropped on another important Japanese industrial city, Nagasaki. After this second bomb, and 200,000 Japanese civilians dead, the Japanese got word to Truman indicating their willingness to surrender to the United States on the American's terms. The Japanese formally surrendered on September 2, 1945, when they signed the articles of surrender aboard the battleship *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay. WWII was now completely over and the United States had proved themselves to be the new power in the world militarily, as well as economically.