World War II – The Axis Offensive

The Axis Offensives
- Invasion of Poland
  - September 1st, 1939
    - Great Britain and France declare war September 3rd
    - Official start of World War II in Europe
  - Excuse/Lie
    - Poles “Attacked” German fortifications on the border
  - Blitzkrieg
    - War strategy of the Germans
    - “Lightening War”
    - Every force hits at the same time
      - 1.7 million soldiers
      - Highly coordinated with air force
  - Poland fights bravely
    - Army falls apart after a couple days
    - Britain and France wait
      - Do not come to aid of Poland

- The Winter War
  - Russia offensive
    - Winter 1939
  - Stalin attacks Baltic
    - Estonia
    - Latvia
    - Lithuania
    - Finland
  - Wanting to gain back old territories
    - USSR kicked out of League of Nations
    - No military action from allies

- The Phony War
  - War in the west
    - Six months and nothing happened
    - “Sitzkrieg”
  - April 1940
    - Hitler attacks Denmark and Norway
      - Denmark falls immediately
      - Norway fights back
        - Survives less than a month
        - Failure to defend Norway leads to resignation of Chamberlin
          - Winston Churchill takes over
  - Hitler attacks western Benelux
    - Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg
    - All fall very quickly
      - Belgium lasts 18 days
      - Netherlands last only 5 days
  - Attack on France
    - May 10, 1940
    - Germans attack through Ardennes Forest
      - Went around Maginot Line
Uses the Blitz
- Surrounds British forces at Dunkirk
  - British people come to aid of army
    - All available boats cross channel to pick up army
    - 350,000 troops rescues
      - Equipment left behind

- France falls
  - June 22, 1940
    - Defeatist psychology
  - Germany occupies Northern France
  - Southern France established as Vichy France
    - Set up by the Germans
      - “Puppet state”
    - Led by Marshall Petain
    - Viewed as traitors
  - Northern France
    - Germans had to occupy throughout the war
      - Established resistance to German occupation
        - French patriots
        - The “French Underground”
          - Spies inside France
  - Free French
    - French Patriots
      - Led by Charles de Gaulle
    - Left to England
    - Wanted to overthrow the Nazis
      - Worked with British to come up with a strategy

- Battle of Britain
  - Codenamed “Operation Sealion”
    - Did not have a real plan
      - Thought it would take longer to capture continent
    - Hitler knows he must neutralize Britain’s Navy
      - Cannot do that until Royal Air Force is neutralized
  - Bombing campaign
    - Germans bomb Britain 57 days in a row
      - Major cities
      - Industrial centers
      - Airfields
    - No effect on British spirit
      - Moral raised
      - Angry at Germans
    - British withstand
      - Radar
      - Deciphered German Air Force code
      - Royal Air Force
        - Very well trained
        - “never in the course of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few”
        - Ranks built up with Free French, Polish, Commonwealth, Irish, Belgians, Czech, Americans
- **Winston Churchill**
  - Prime Minister
  - Great Leadership
    - Sent troops to North Africa
      - Drew Germans away from Britain
  - Hitler’s blunder
    - Switched from attacking military targets to London
      - Trying to break British spirit
      - “Keep Calm and Carry On”
    - Invaded Russia
      - Sea Lion called off

**German Occupation**
- Hitler’s Reich in 1941
  - Bleakest year for Allies
  - Germany’s peak
    - Controlled Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Denmark, Norway, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Greece
  - Different areas were treated differently based on their race
    - Ex. Denmark was not treated badly
      - Germanic peoples
    - Killed all educated people and leaders
      - Hitler killed all the Polish priests right away
- Economic exploitation
  - Forced labor
    - Forced Polish to do manual labor
    - 4 million Russians were forced to work as well
- Resistance movements
  - Ukraine and the Baltic initially welcomed the Germans as liberators
    - Did not like Communists
    - Endured horrible, inhumane treatment from Germans
  - Tito- Yugoslavia
    - 250,000 partisans who fought guerilla style against the Germans
      - Including 100,000 women
        - Assassins and spies
  - After the invasion, Communists often led resistance to Germans
    - Some conflict with anti-Communists
      - Afraid of Communist domination later
  - Very limited resistance in Germany
    - **White Rose**
      - Opposed Hitler because he was immoral
      - Printed pamphlets to arouse people against the Germans
      - Problem: there were only 8 people involved in the White Rose
        - All 8 killed
    - July plot
      - 1944
      - Colonel Count von Staffenberg
      - Only plot that came close to succeeding
      - Planted a bomb in Hitler’s headquarters that exploded
        - Injured but did not kill Hitler
The War Expands

- Russia
  - June 22, 1941
  - Reason
    - Germany wants “Lebensraum”
      - Living space
    - Need resources
      - Food
      - Oil
  - Operation Barbarossa
    - Surprise attack
      - Breaks Non-Aggression pact
      - Stalin becomes physically ill from grief
    - Forces two front war
      - Blitz still going on against Britain
    - Use of Blitzkrieg
      - Russians rapidly fall back
        - Russians totally unprepared
      - Lack of discipline
        - Officer corps depleted by purge
  - Operation Typhoon
    - October, 1941
    - German plan to capture Moscow
      - Cultural heart of Russia
    - Attack stalled
      - Within sight of Kremlin
      - Stiff Russian defense
      - Stiffer Russian winter
  - Siege of Leningrad
    - Germans opt to siege instead of direct assault
      - **900 day siege**
        - Sept 1, 1941 – Jan 27, 1944
    - Extreme conditions
      - Estimated 1,000,000 casualties
        - Disease, hunger, shelling, cold
      - Resupplied by rail and over lake Lagoda
        - Rail when possible
        - Lake Lagoda when frozen
  - Attack resumes in Spring of 1942
    - Germans push on Stalingrad
      - Want access to Caspian oil fields
    - **Battle of Stalingrad**
      - August 22, 1942
        - Battle lasted for two months
        - Russians refused to surrender
          - Stalin would not allow it
          - Became personal between him and Hitler
          - Defense led by Marshall Georgi Zhukov
    - Operation Uranus
      - Russian encirclement of German 6th Army
• Hitler would not allow General Friedrich Paulus to surrender
  o Promoted him to Field Marshall, reminds him no German Field Marshall has ever surrendered
• Resupply by air
  o German soldiers without proper clothing
• Paulus surrenders
  o January 31st, 1942
  o Half of his soldiers dead or dying
    ▪ 91,000 taken prisoner
  o Turning point of Russian campaign
    ▪ Russians go on offensive

- Battle of the North Atlantic
  o American convoys heading to Britain and Russia with supplies
  o German surface ships a non-factor
    ▪ Graf Spee
      o Attempted to disrupt shipping in south Atlantic route
        ▪ Scuttled in Montevideo in 1939
          ▪ British intelligence fooled Germans into sinking ship
    ▪ Bismarck
      o Attempted to break into North Atlantic to disrupt shipping
        ▪ Sank HMS Hood
          ▪ Pride of British fleet
        ▪ Sank off the coast of France
          ▪ May 1941
    ▪ Tirpitz
      o Stationed in Norway
        ▪ Prevent Soviet Baltic fleet from breaking out
        ▪ Attack convoys heading to USSR
      o Thorn in the side of Britain
        ▪ Could not be ignored
        ▪ Finally sank in Norway in 1944
          ▪ After many, many attempts
  o German Wolf-pack
    ▪ Unrestricted submarine warfare
    ▪ German submarines attacking anything heading to Britain
      ▪ Americans know the risk
  o Convoy system
    ▪ Merchant ships surrounded by destroyers

- The Pacific
  o Japanese expansion
    ▪ French Indochina
      ▪ 1940
    ▪ Join Axis powers in 1940
      ▪ Allied with Italy and Germany
    ▪ Started spreading influence in Asia
  o American Neutrality
    ▪ Isolationism
      ▪ Not participating in fighting
    ▪ Sympathetic to Allies
      ▪ Became more concerned when Nazis started winning
- **Lend-Lease Act**
  - March 1941
  - Assistance to Allies
    - Supplies, materials
    - Destroyers for bases
  - Only Britain and Soviet Union remain
  - "Arsenal of Democracy"
    - United States view of itself
    - Supplying weapons

- **Atlantic Charter**
  - Meeting off the coast of Newfoundland
    - Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt
  - Plan for future
    - Optimistic Americans would be able to help British

  - **Pearl Harbor**
    - US objected to Japanese imperialism
    - Stopped trade with Japan
    - Economic sanctions
    - Japan sent envoy to Washington
      - To negotiate a trade settlement
  - **Surprise attack**
    - Wanted to cripple US Pacific fleet
    - Hawaii
    - December 7th, 1941
      - The day of "infamy"
    - **US declares war on Japan December 8th**
      - Italy and Germany declare war on US December 11th

  - **Japanese conquer**
    - Guam
    - Wake Island
    - Hong Kong
    - Malaya
    - Singapore
      - British give up without much of a fight
      - Disgraced British empire
    - Dutch East Indies
    - Burma
    - Philippines
      - Baatan death march

  - **"Asia for the Asians"**
    - Kicking out imperialists powers and colonial leaders
    - Asian countries welcome Japanese at first
      - Free from western control
      - Later despised Japanese
      - Especially Chinese or those of Chinese descent

  - **US hits back**
    - Industrial might
      - Quickly rebuilds navy and air force
    - Island Hopping
• General Douglas MacArthur
  ▪ Head of Allied forces in Pacific
  ▪ Europe does not play a major part in Pacific
  ▪ Russians and British occupied by Germany
• Battle of Coral Sea
  ▪ May 1942
  ▪ Off the coast of Australia
  ▪ Japan forced to call off invasion of Australia
    ▪ First setback for Japanese
    ▪ First naval battle where two navies never saw each other
      • Carrier battle

- Africa
  o Italian offensive
    ▪ Goes very poorly
      • Supply problems
      • Command problems
      • British forces pushing Italians back
  o German offensive
    ▪ Forced to help disheveled Italians
    ▪ Erwin Rommel
      • Literally wrote the book on tank warfare
      • “Desert Fox”
        ▪ Very crafty and hard to contain
      • “Afrika Korps”
        ▪ Job was to hold the line
        • Instead starts advancing
    ▪ British have no answer to deal with Rommel
      • Archibald Wavell
      • Claude Auchinleck
        ▪ Responsible for losing battle of El Alamein
      • Harold Alexander given overall command
        ▪ Forced to put Bernard Montgomery in charge of British 8th Army
          ▪ Lt. General William Gott killed before he could
        ▪ Montgomery finally gets decisive victory at Second Battle of El Alamein
          ▪ Rommel was out of supplies
            ▪ All were being funneled to Russia