

# World War II – The Axis Offensive

## The Axis Offensives

### - Invasion of Poland

- September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1939
  - Great Britain and France declare war September 3<sup>rd</sup>
  - 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 rescued
      - 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 6<sup>th</sup> Army



- Hitler would not allow General Friedrich Paulus to surrender
    - Promoted him to Field Marshall, reminds him no German Field Marshall has ever surrendered
  - Resupply by air
    - German soldiers without proper clothing
  - Paulus surrenders
    - January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1942
    - Half of his soldiers dead or dying
      - 91,000 taken prisoner
    - **Turning point of Russian campaign**
      - Russians go on offensive
- **Battle of the North Atlantic**
  - American convoys heading to Britain and Russia with supplies
  - German surface ships a non-factor
    - *Graf Spee*
      - Attempted to disrupt shipping in south Atlantic route
        - Scuttled in Montevideo in 1939
          - British intelligence fooled Germans into sinking ship
    - *Bismarck*
      - 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*
      - Stationed in Norway
        - Prevent Soviet Baltic fleet from breaking out
        - Attack convoys heading to USSR
      - Thorn in the side of Britain
        - Could not be ignored
        - Finally sank in Norway in 1944
          - After many, many attempts
  - **German Wolf-packs**
    - Unrestricted submarine warfare
    - German submarines attacking anything heading to Britain
      - Americans know the risk
  - Convoy system
    - Merchant ships surrounded by destroyers
- **The Pacific**
  - Japanese expansion
    - French Indochina
      - 1940
    - Join Axis powers in 1940
      - Allied with Italy and Germany
    - Started spreading influence in Asia
  - 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 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941
      - The day of “infamy”
  - US declares war on Japan December 8<sup>th</sup>
    - **Italy and Germany declare war on US December 11<sup>th</sup>**
- 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**

- Italian offensive
  - Goes very poorly
    - Supply problems
    - Command problems
    - British forces pushing Italians back
- 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 8<sup>th</sup> 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

