

## The United States and World War II

### Rising Tensions Lead to War in Europe

During the 1930s, countries around the world struggled through the Great Depression. Nations and people worked to cope with and get through the economic hard times. At the same time, dictators and military leaders in Germany, Italy, and Japan made a series of aggressive moves. These escalating actions climaxed in the outbreak of World War II in 1939.

- First, Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931 and took it over from China.
- Next, Germany began to rearm itself in 1935.
- Then, in 1936, Adolf Hitler, Germany's ruler, sent German troops into an area of Germany called the Rhineland, next to France. This violated World War I peace treaty provisions.
- Italy, ruled by Benito Mussolini, invaded the African nation of Ethiopia in 1935 and made it part of Italy in 1936.
- In 1937, Japan invaded more parts of China.
- German troops marched into Austria and took that nation over in 1938.
- In 1938 and 1939, Hitler's armies took over most of Czechoslovakia.

The League of Nations did little to try to stop all these aggressions. Great Britain and France also did very little, other than making a few protests. On September 1, 1939, the German army marched into Poland. Britain and France finally decided they had to act. On September 3, 1939, they declared war on Germany. World War II had begun.

#### Allies\*

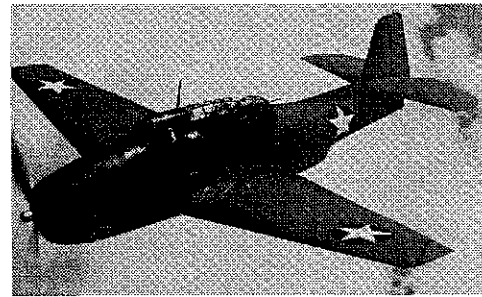
Great Britain  
France  
Soviet Union

fought against

#### Axis

Germany  
Italy  
Japan

\* The U.S. joined the Allies later in the war.



TBF Avenger

### The United States: Involvement or Isolation?

As had happened in World War I, the United States chose to remain out of the war at first. Most Americans favored the Allied nations of France and Britain. But many Americans were also strong **isolationists**. That is, they wanted the United States to stay uninvolved in European affairs. President Franklin Roosevelt, though, wanted to help the Allies resist Axis aggression. This became especially important after Germany defeated France and began bombing Britain heavily in 1940.

Roosevelt persuaded Congress to make some changes in the U.S. neutrality laws.

- In 1939, Congress allowed the sale of arms on a cash-and-carry basis.
- In 1940, Roosevelt swapped 50 old destroyers for British naval bases.

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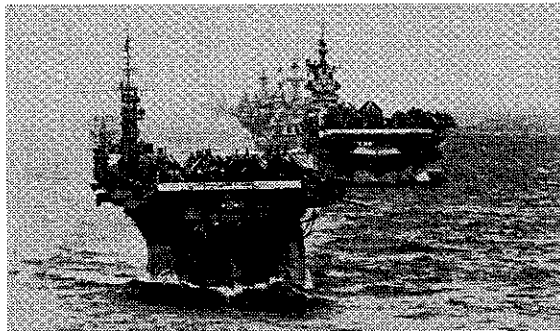
## The United States and World War II *(continued)*

- In 1941, Congress approved the lend-lease program. This allowed Roosevelt to supply Britain with military goods on credit.
- The U.S. Navy then started protecting ships carrying these supplies from attacks by German submarines.

The United States and Germany were now unofficially at war in the Atlantic.

Meanwhile, Japan was making conquests in the Pacific area. It became an ally of Germany and Italy in 1940. France and the Netherlands had fallen to Germany. So Japan now took over French Indochina and the Netherlands East Indies. Japanese troops continued to hold large areas of China.

Japan's moves in Asia did not please the United States. It stopped shipments of war-related raw materials to Japan. Late in 1941, officials from Japan and the U.S. met in Washington, D.C. They talked about possible changes in Japanese policy. While these talks were going on, Japanese warplanes suddenly bombed the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The American forces were caught completely off guard. U.S. ships sank in the harbor, and thousands of American sailors died.



War ships in the Philippines

The date was December 7, 1941. President Roosevelt called it "a date that will live in

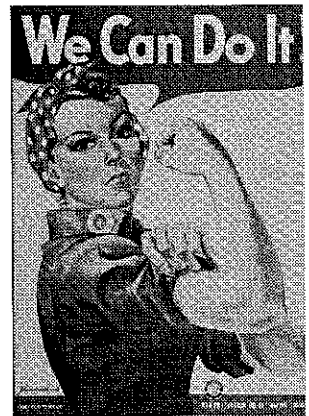
infamy." On December 8, the United States and Great Britain declared war on Japan. Several days after that, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States.

### Wartime in the United States

The United States faced a huge job in getting its people and economy geared for war.

Millions of men and women joined the armed services.
Raw materials and food were rationed. Many consumer goods were no longer made.
The government regulated wages and prices.
Farms produced 20 percent more crops.
Manufacturing doubled.
War plants and army camps made population centers out of formerly quiet rural areas.

As had happened in World War I, women and minorities flocked to jobs in World War II war industries. For many women, it was their first chance to work outside the home, even if they did get paid less than men for the same work. Both women war workers and homemakers whose husbands were in the military developed a new independent spirit.



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Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Unit 1**

**STUDENT BACKGROUND SHEET**

## The United States and World War II *(continued)*

Blacks in the military were treated more fairly in this war than in the last one. However, the armed services remained segregated. The war also raised awareness of U.S. racism. U.S. armies were fighting against Hitler's brand of "Aryan" racism. This caused many Americans to question laws and customs at home that treated blacks as second-class citizens. Black civilians and military personnel clearly saw the contradiction. They became increasingly vocal in demanding equality in all areas of their lives.

One group that was treated with shocking discrimination during the war was Japanese Americans. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, anti-Japanese hysteria swept the western United States. Japanese Americans who lived along the West Coast were rounded up and sent to bleak internment camps in interior states. Most of these people were native-born American citizens. They had to sell almost all their possessions before they left, usually for a small fraction of what it all was worth. They were guilty of nothing other than having Japanese ancestry. Even so, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the internment policy.

### **The War in Europe and the Pacific**

In 1942, the Axis Powers controlled almost all of Europe and North Africa. By the time U.S. forces got to Europe in significant numbers in 1943, the tide had begun to turn. Allied forces drove the Axis out of North Africa. Soviet troops began to drive the invading German army back toward eastern Europe. Allied ships and aircraft had contained the German submarine threat to Atlantic shipping. The Allies invaded Italy in mid-1943. On D-Day—June 6, 1944—the Allies invaded France. Early in 1945, Allied forces moved into Germany on the west

while Soviet troops moved into Germany on the east. The German army surrendered on May 8, 1945, or V-E Day—Victory in Europe Day.

Japan's tide of victory also faltered in 1942. The turning points in the Pacific were two naval battles in May and June of that year.

The Battle of the Coral Sea stopped a Japanese naval fleet from attacking Australia.

The Battle of Midway kept Hawaii safe from a Japanese invasion.

U.S. and Japanese forces then fought a series of fierce battles over small, strategic islands. Each one that the U.S. captured was a stepping-stone west across the Pacific toward Japan itself. Meanwhile, U.S., Australian, and New Zealand forces fought their way northwest through the larger islands of the Pacific. Soon the Americans held island bases from which they bombed the home islands of Japan itself.



Submarine officer at periscope

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