

Earl WWII Events Activity

1. Underlying Causes of WWII

- 1. Totalitarianism-** Japan = ruled by military
 - Germany and Italy = fascist
- 2. Militarization** in Axis nations (Japan, Italy, and Germany). All building up their military forces.
- 3. Axis Nationalism-** They considered themselves to be superior to other nationalities and had the right to take them over.
- 4. Axis Imperialism-** Japan expanded into China in 1937. Italy began bombing Ethiopia and took it over. Germany annexed Austria and Czechoslovakia.
- 5. Failure of appeasement-** Britain and France attempted to avoid war by appeasing Hitler by giving him territory he desired (see Munich Conference on next sheet).
- 6. Treaty of Versailles**
 - The Treaty of Versailles was harsh on Germany: placing all of the blame on them for WWI, forcing them to demilitarize, lost all of their colonies, lost territory (Polish Corridor, Alsace Lorraine,...), high cost of war reparations.
- 7. Failure of Collective Security-** None of the democratic nations (France, Britain, U.S.) worked together to stop the axis nations from taking over territory (such as Austria, Ethiopia, China).
- 8. America was neutral**
 - The U.S. prohibited loans and the sale of war materials to both sides (including those that were the victims of the Axis nations—such as Ethiopia).
 - This enabled the Axis nations to conquer their victims with little difficulty.

2. Characteristics of Fascism

Fascism

Fascism is a political movement that promotes an extreme form of nationalism and militarism. It also includes a denial of individual rights and dictatorial one-party rule.

Nazism was the Fascist movement that developed in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s. It included a belief in the racial superiority of the German people. The Fascists in Italy were led by Benito Mussolini, shown in the chart at right.



3. Events leading up to WWII

Hitler Defies Versailles Treaty

Hitler had long pledged to undo the Versailles Treaty. Among its provisions, the treaty limited the size of Germany's army. In March 1935, the Führer announced that Germany would not obey these restrictions. In fact, Germany had already begun rebuilding its armed forces. The League issued only a mild condemnation.

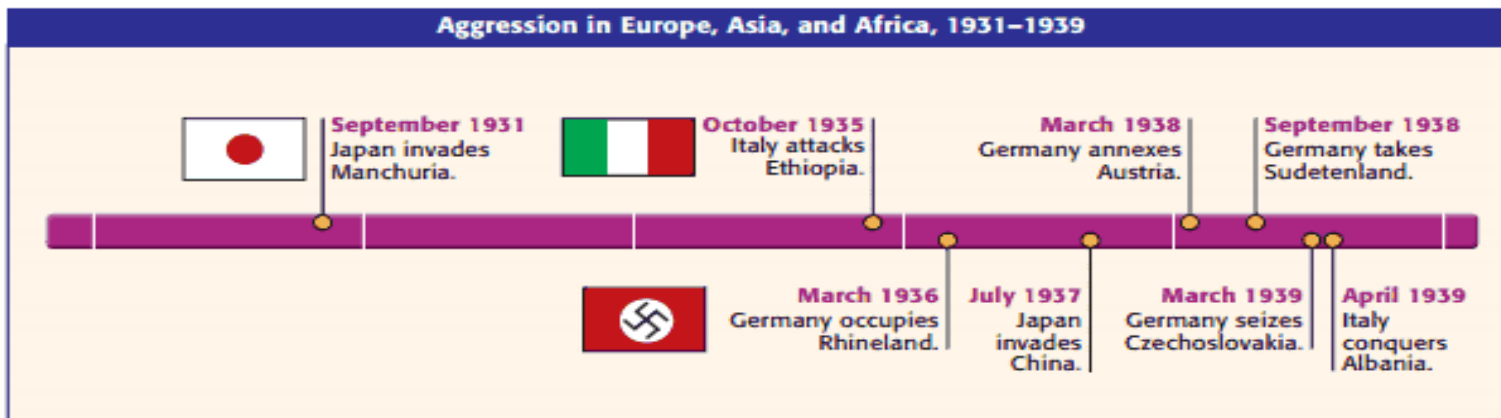
On November 5, 1937, Hitler announced to his advisers his plans to absorb Austria and Czechoslovakia into the German Empire. The Germans would then expand into Poland and Russia. Hitler's first target was Austria. The Treaty of Versailles prohibited Anschluss, or a union between Austria and Germany. However, many Austrians supported unity with Germany. In March 1938, Hitler sent his army into Austria and annexed it. France and Britain ignored their pledge to protect Austrian independence.

Munich Conference

The Munich Conference was held on September 29, 1938. The Czechs were not invited. British prime minister Neville Chamberlain believed that he could preserve peace by giving in to Hitler's demand. Britain and France agreed that Hitler could take the Sudetenland, a German-speaking portion of Czechoslovakia. In exchange, Hitler pledged to respect Czechoslovakia's new borders. Yet, in 1939 Hitler took over all of Czechoslovakia.

Stalin-Hitler Nonaggression Pact

The two dictators Stalin and Hitler reached an agreement. Once bitter enemies, Fascist Germany and Communist Russia now publicly pledged never to attack one another. On August 23, 1939, their leaders signed a nonaggression pact. A secret portion of the pact said that the two nations would split up Poland between them once Germany conquered it.



4. Early WWII Events

WWII Begins...

Hitler's surprise attack on Poland took place at dawn on September 1, 1939. This event marks the beginning of WWII in Europe. German tanks and troop trucks rumbled across the Polish border. At the same time, German aircraft and artillery began a merciless bombing of Poland's capital, Warsaw. France and Great Britain declared war on Germany on September 3. But Poland fell some time before those nations could make any military response.

After his victory, Hitler annexed the western half of Poland. That region had a large German population. The German invasion of Poland was the first test of Germany's newest military strategy—the blitzkrieg, or “lightning war.” It involved using fast-moving airplanes and tanks, followed by massive infantry forces, to take enemy defenders by surprise and quickly overwhelm them. In the case of Poland, the strategy worked.

The Phony War

After they declared war on Germany, the French and British had mobilized their armies. They stationed their troops along the Maginot Line, a system of fortifications along France's border with Germany. There they waited for the Germans to attack—but nothing happened.

With little to do, the bored Allied soldiers stared eastward toward the enemy. Equally bored, German soldiers stared back from their Siegfried Line a few miles away. Germans jokingly called it the sitzkrieg, or “sitting war.” Some newspapers referred to it simply as “the phony war.”

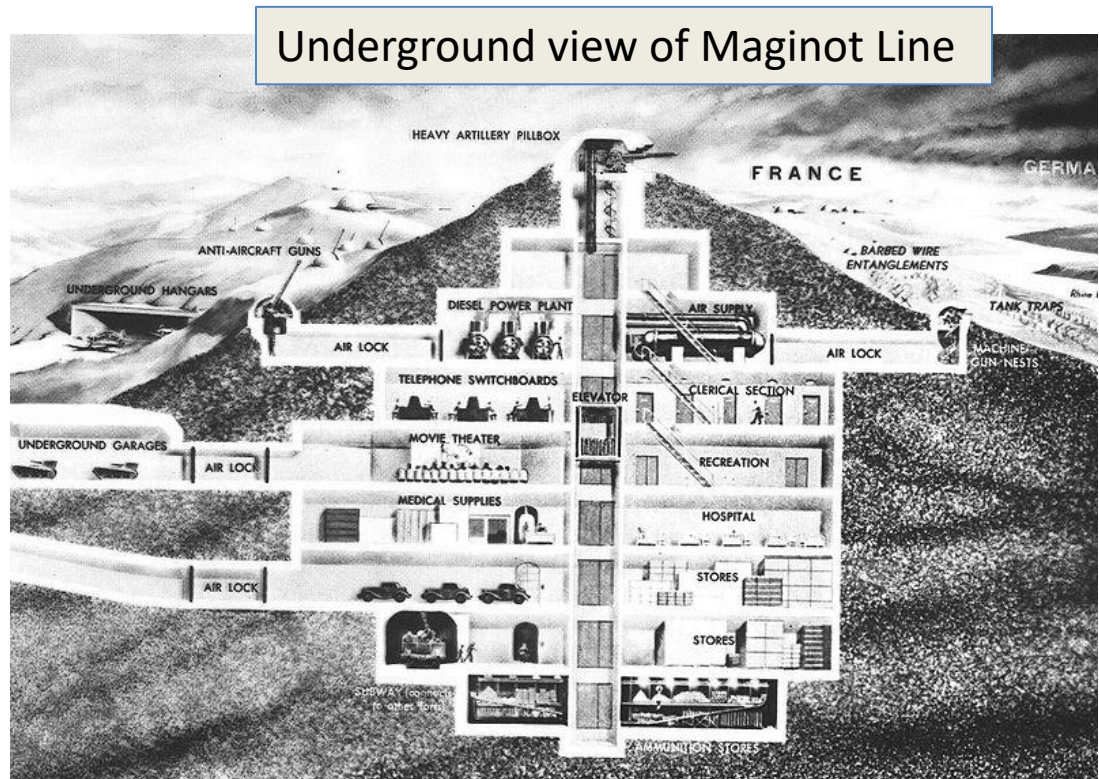
Suddenly, on April 9, 1940, the calm ended. Hitler launched a surprise invasion of Denmark and Norway. In just four hours after the attack, Denmark fell. Two months later, Norway surrendered as well. The Germans then began to build bases along the Norwegian and Danish coasts from which they could launch strikes on Great Britain.

When Denmark and Norway fell, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain stepped down. On May 10, 1940, Winston Churchill was appointed Britain's new prime minister and remained in power throughout most of the war.

5. France Falls

In May of 1940, Hitler began a dramatic sweep through the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg. This was part of a strategy to strike at France. Keeping the Allies' attention on those countries, Hitler then sent an even larger force of tanks and troops to slice through the Ardennes. This was a heavily wooded area in northern France, Luxembourg, and Belgium. Moving through the forest, the Germans "squeezed between" the Maginot Line (built in 1928, it was a very elaborate line of military built on the eastern border of France to defend France against an attack from Germany). From there, they moved across France and reached the country's northern coast in ten days.

Resistance in France began to crumble. By June 14, the Germans had taken Paris. Accepting the inevitable, French leaders surrendered on June 22, 1940. The Germans took control of the northern part of the country. After France fell, Charles de Gaulle, a French general, set up a government-in-exile in London. He committed all his energy to reconquering France.



6. Battle of Britain

With the fall of France, Great Britain stood alone against the Nazis. Prime Minister Winston Churchill had already declared that his nation would never give in. In a rousing speech, he proclaimed, “We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets . . . we shall never surrender.”

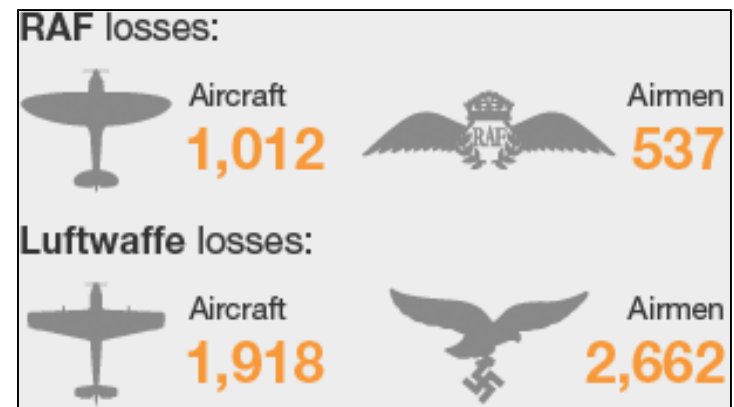
Hitler now turned his mind to an invasion of Great Britain. His plan was first to knock out the Royal Air Force (RAF) and then to land more than 250,000 soldiers on England’s shores. In the summer of 1940, the Luftwaffe, Germany’s air force, began bombing Great Britain. At first, the Germans targeted British airfields and aircraft factories. Then, on September 7, 1940, they began focusing on the cities, especially London, to break

British morale.

Despite the destruction and loss of life, the British did not waver. The RAF, although badly outnumbered, began to hit back hard. Two technological devices helped turn the tide in the RAF’s favor. One was an electronic tracking system known as radar. Developed in the late 1930s, radar could tell the number, speed, and direction of incoming warplanes. The other device was a German code-making machine named Enigma. A complete Enigma machine had been smuggled into Great Britain in the late 1930s. Enigma enabled the British to decode German secret messages. With information gathered by these devices, RAF fliers could quickly launch attacks on the enemy.

To avoid the RAF’s attacks, the Germans gave up daylight raids in October 1940 in favor of night bombing. At sunset, the wail of sirens filled the air as Londoners flocked to the subways, which served as air-raid shelters. Some rode out the bombing raids at home in smaller air-raid shelters or basements. This Battle of Britain continued until May 10, 1941. Stunned by British resistance, Hitler decided to call off his attacks. The Battle of Britain taught the Allies a crucial lesson. Hitler’s attacks could be blocked.

Beck, Roger B. *World History: Patterns of Interaction*. Evanston, IL: McDougal Littell, 2005. Print.



7. Primary Sources

Document 1

After Italy attacked Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, emperor of Ethiopia, asked the League of Nations for help in stopping the invasion. He asked for military sanctions but the League of Nations' response was ineffective. Haile Selassie used these words to the League of Nations:

“God and history will remember your judgment. . . . It is us today. It will be you tomorrow.”

Document 2

As German aggression continued in 1938, Britain, France, and Italy met with Hitler to discuss his demands for the Sudetenland, a section of Czechoslovakia (Munich Conference). This radio broadcast by William Shirer describes what happened at this meeting.

William Shirer:

It took the Big Four just five hours and twenty-five minutes here in Munich today to dispel the clouds of war and come to an agreement over the partition of Czechoslovakia. There is to be no European war . . . the price of that peace is . . . the ceding by Czechoslovakia of the Sudeten territory to Herr Hitler's Germany. The German Fuhrer gets what he wanted. . . .His waiting ten short days has saved Europe from a world war . . . most of the peoples of Europe are happy that they won't have to go marching off to war. . . . Probably only the Czechs . . . are not too happy. But there seems very little that they can do about it in face of all the might and power represented here.

Document 3

“What General Weygand called the Battle of France is over. [France had just fallen to Germany]

I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization. Upon it depends our own British life, and the long continuity of our institutions and our Empire. The whole fury and might of the enemy must very soon be turned on us.

Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this Island or lose the war. If we can stand up to him, all Europe may be free and the life of the world may move forward into broad, sunlit uplands.

But if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science.

Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, ‘This was their finest hour.’”

Winston Churchill, “This was their finest hour” speech, June 18, 1940

8. Political Cartoons

1

1938, Soviet poster about Munich agreement



2



3

