

Title:

Quick History of World War Two - European Theater

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Summary:

A quick overview of the second world war in the European theater, also looking at the causes and origins and what Germany needed to do to win the war.

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Article Body:

The War's beginning?

Some would say that World War Two began with Germany's Invasion of Poland on the 1st September 1939 and the ultimatum of Britain that without a German withdrawal a State of War would exist. Needless to say there was no German withdrawal and WWII began, Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand declaring war on the 3rd of September 1939

Others would argue that world war two was simply the second round of world war one. Although the major powers had yet to realise it the continuance of the war between the Axis and Allies would result in the end of European dominance of the world and the destruction of their colonial empires. By renewing the fight they only ensured their own demise no matter who won the outcome.

Some have claimed that the Treaty of Versailles was 'harsh and unreasonable' and therefore was the seed which guaranteed the second world war. Germany would seek to redress this wrong. In truth the Treaty of Versailles was no harsher than the very terms that the Germans had sought to impose on the Russians in 1917/18 with Russia forced to secede large tracts of territory and pay large indemnities in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

In truth the greater cause of the second world war was the belief by many Germans that they had never lost the first world war. German territory had not been invaded, the troops felt they had never lost. In reality the army had to return to Germany to preserve the state from social meltdown, as Germany was in greater danger from internal enemies than the threat posed by the allies. Hence

the belief that Germany had only lost the war due to a stab in the back at home. This breakdown however was the result of a state put under immense pressure and succumbing to economic pressure and political failure, in order to win a modern war, victory in the field is no longer enough, victory must be obtained over the whole system of the other nation. (i.e. destroy its will to fight). Germany had lost the strategic battle, its system had collapsed and hence it lost the war. The British Navy had succeeded in its blockade of the Germany economy and had thus brought about its ruin and defeat, (even if the Navy hadn't proven itself in open battle).

Germany had lost its allies, Turkey and Austria, and had failed in production with less airplanes, few tanks and had run out of manpower. Although Germany had not lost the battle, it had lost the war.

Nevertheless this myth of not having been really defeated led to resentment at being labelled the losers. Soon every problem in Germany was related to past wrongs. The great depression was the final straw. Mass unemployment and hyperinflation left a perfect environment for an extremist political party to gain enough support to take centre stage. In this case the Nazi's with a combination of nationalism, racism, authoritarianism, and the promise of better times gained enough political power to begin the takeover and change a democracy into dictatorship. Careful staged events such as the burning of the Reichstag and downright bully boy tactics led to complete dictatorship. In order to continue to deliver on promises Hitler who was the embodiment of the state had to continue to expand, first via appeasement and then outright war.

The killer blow was the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact signed on the 23rd of August 1939, in which Hitler was free to carve up Poland with the acquiescence of the USSR.

Thanks to the Blitzkrieg tactics and superior ordnance the German army quickly overcame Poland. With France and Britain disgracing themselves by doing nothing on the Western front.

Once Poland was over Germany cemented its position by invading Denmark and Norway on the 9th of April 1940, guaranteeing its access to Swedish iron ore and opening up the North Atlantic. The invasion of France began on the 10th of May 1940, it also included a co-ordinated invasion of the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Belgium with careful German planning producing brilliant results, France failed before it had even begun. A lack of will only quickened the defeat. The beginning of Germany's ultimate defeat though had already been sown with the failure to destroy the British at Dunkirk (which began to evacuate on the 26th May 1940), and by failing to seize the French Navy. This combined with

oppressive occupations produced stiffening resolve. Victory had gained Italy as a partner, but it was to prove a fatal marriage with Italy being more of a hindrance than a help. However for now the third Reich rejoiced at France's demise and the French signed the armistice on the 22nd June 1940. In less than two months since beginning its offensive Germany had defeated all its enemies bar the British Empire.

Turning East:-

It has become clear from historical records that Germany did not have the capability to invade Britain nor did Hitler have the patience to take the time necessary to allow his current superior position to pay dividends to secure the situation and to build up the necessary naval superiority and required landing craft to invade Britain. Nor build the heavy bombers required to seriously bomb Britain into oblivion. This lack of patience and overconfidence from what had already been achieved lead to the fateful decision to turn east and invade Russia.

This plan was further doomed by the unnecessary invasion of Yugoslavia and Greece on the 6th April 1941, brought about by Italy's failure and Germany's rescue to later be repeated in North Africa. The delay to Operation Babarossa would be costly.

Operation Babarossa began on 22 June 1941. Three German army groups, an Axis force of over four million men lay in wait to invade Russia and Comrade Stalin was 'asleep at the wheel' having ignore British intelligence about Hitler's invasion plans.

German success was doomed within sight of the Kremlin with the onset of winter and the confirmation to Stalin that Japan had no intention to invade, thus freeing up the Siberian Army to be transferred to the defence of Moscow and the winter offensive in which the Russians began a counterattack on the 5th of December 1941. The unprepared German army froze to death.

Russians Counter Attack at Moscow

Stupidly on the 11th day of December 1941 Germany declared war on the USA (After Pearl Harbour 7th December 1941). Unofficially the nations had already been at war with the USA supplying arms to Britain and USSR and US destroyers battling U-Boats in the Atlantic. However for Hitler to formalise it with a declaration of war was stupidity personified.

A second throw of the dice.

After the failure to succeed at Moscow or to take Leningrad and link up with the Finns Hitler had a throw at Stalingrad and the oil fields of the Caucasus on the 22nd August 1942. At first once again Blitzkrieg tactics reigned supreme with the Germans reaching Stalingrad on the 8th of September. Once again Hitler failed by allowing his army to get into an urban fire fight for which they were unsuited, allowing the Russians to spring a giant trap and destroyed an entire army (surrendering on 31st January 1943), this combined with the Allied success in North Africa which resulted in the destruction another German army lead to the irreversible change in the course of the war with Germany doomed to destruction.

The Allies fight back.

With growing success in the battle of the Atlantic, and the victory at El Alamein on the 4th of November 1942 the allies began to swing into the offensive, with operation Torch begun on the 8th of November 1942, the allies began to squeeze the Germans out of North Africa. Next they invaded Italy, starting with the invasion of Sicily on the 10th of July 1943. They continued onto the boot of Italy however this proved to be a costly exercise due to terrain favouring the defender, Rome not being liberated until 4th June 1944.

The real end game began with the invasion of Normandy on the 6th June 1944 (D-Day). With the success of the invasion and breakout of the bocage. Success at the Falaise pocket and Kursk confirmed Germany's fates.

The End Game

Despite Hitler's gamble at the Battle of the Bulge (Dec. 1944) the end was already on the way with the Allies laying waste to Germany from the air and the Russians laying waste with massed artillery and troops. The destruction of Berlin and the death of Hitler (30th April 1945) confirmed to the die hards it was over, V-E day being 8th May, the Germans having surrendered the day before.

Why Germany lost the War.

It failed the Diplomatic battle - it failed to convince Spain another fascist nation to join in the cause. It failed to turn occupied countries into allies. It failed to have a unified plan with its allies. Imagine if Japan had been convinced to invade Russia instead of bombing Pearl Harbour. Imagine if the USA had been encouraged to stay out of the war for another year. In other words Germany failed to win hearts and minds, by the oppressive actions of the SS and others in Poland and Russia, instead of winning over many who would have gladly

joined in the overthrow of Stalinism and helped guarantee German victory. Nazism with its German nationalist roots and outright racism just didn't offer anything to non-Germans.

It failed the Technological battle - although Germany produced new amazing technological advances in rockets and the like, it either failed to produce the really important technology early enough, i.e. radar, nuclear weapons, or failed to recognise and exploit to their full potential advances that really made a difference i.e. Jet power.

It failed to adopt Total War. Until late in the war when Albert Speer took over the economy German hadn't fully exploited available resources. The Nazi philosophy regarding women had prevented full labour and military use. Whilst the Russians had no such qualms with females even serving in active front line units. In slaughtering the Jews and others deemed unwanted the Nazi's wasted valuable military resources and valuable human resources which could have been applied in more useful purposes. German relied on slave labour to make up the gap, whilst Britain and the USA had an army of willing labourers in "Rosie the Riveter." German further wasted resources in futile projects such as the Atlantic wall (which didn't even succeed in stopping the Allies for one day) and anti-aircraft guns which absorbed thousands of guns would have been more useful on the front as anti-tank batteries and the men in manpower it took to operate them. It also diverted resources to unnecessary battles such as Greece and North Africa. It believed its own propaganda and thus made Fatal mistakes. Some of these fatal mistakes included failing to realise that the enigma machine had been compromised. The Nazi's believed it was "unbreakable", thus would not realise how intell was leaking. Further fatal mistakes including failing to succeed in the intellegience war, apart a notable success in compromising the Dutch resistance most German intellegience activities paled into insignificance when compared to British Intell. That's not to say British intell was perfect but Churchill summed it up best with "in war the truth is so precious it must be wrapped in a tissue of lies". Hitler was sold on the Pas de Calais being the true invasion point. Further by centering all its confidence in the Fuhrer it lead to the disaster of Stalingrad, etc. Hitler may have thought he was a Military Genius, but after the conclusion of the invasion of France he made few successful contributions. One might asked what would have happened if the German Generals had been allowed to run the show?

I believe if the German economy had been fully geared up for the war from the beginning and if it had addressed some of these factors above there would have been every likely hood that they would have succeeded. We should not think that the outcome of World War II was guarantee, it was only with much sacrifice by the allies that final victory was achieved.

This article is dedicated to all those who fought in destroying the evils of Nazism. In particular to my Great Uncle Ivan HARRIS who died on Wednesday 22nd July 1942 fighting in North Africa fighting for New Zealand.