**Beginning of World War II Summary**

On **September 1, 1939** the **German army invaded Poland**, officially beginning WWII. Germany used terribly fast attacks called ***blitzkrieg***. Blitzkrieg is German for “lighting war”, it means that you attack the enemy with amazing speed and efficiency using many methods of attack. The purpose is to destroy the enemy before an effective defensive can be mounted. This is very different to the way World War I was fought where armies dug into trenches.

Even though the German army was smaller than the Polish army, the blitzkrieg attack turned out to be devastating. The German Air Force destroyed much of the Polish Air Force before they were even able to get off the ground. Then German bombers attack Polish roads, railways, factories as well as civilians living in the cities. Next, German dive-bombers attacked the Polish troops that were marching toward the front lines wiping out many of them. Civilian refugees were also sprayed with machine gun fire as they tried to flee the German troops. Rumors began to spread about the treatment Germans gave to Polish citizens. Germans murdered hundreds of mentally and physically disabled people. They began rounding up Jews in Poland by the thousands, carrying out mass murders.

Great Britain and France both had pacts or alliances with Poland and on September 3rd declared war on Germany. Even though the two countries had declared war, they were not able to offer Poland much help. Soon the Soviet Union also invaded Poland and by early October the Germans and the Soviets had defeated Poland and divided the country up between themselves. The significance of this event was that it marks the beginning of World War II. It also introduced the world to a new type of warfare, one where civilians would be considered targets.

German military leaders soon came up with a plan to defeat the French Army. On May 10th, 1940 the **Battle of France** began. Moving through the dense forests, rolling hills, and rapid rivers of the Ardennes, an area that the French thought could not be traveled by tanks, the German army invaded France. With support from Italy, which invaded southern France, the Axis Powers captured Paris. It was a sudden and humiliating defeat. The world helplessly looked on as Hitler marched his troops pass the Eiffel Tower. This battle was significant because once France surrendered Great Britain was left alone to face Hitler and his allies.

In the summer of 1940, Germany turned its sights on Great Britain and bombed the city of London. The **Battle of Britain** began on July 10th, 1940. It was an attempt by Germany to gain control of British airspace and destroy the Royal Air Force. They also hoped to destroy aircraft production and intimidate the nation into surrender or neutrality.

The Battle of Britain was the first major battle to be fought entirely in the air and the largest and longest bombing campaign ever attempted. The battle was fought in the air because Great Britain is an island. German forces could not rapidly send in tanks and troops because Great Britain was protected by water. Bold daylight bombing raids over the city of London resulted in the deaths of thousands of civilians. Encouraged by their courageous Prime Minister, **Winston Churchill**, the British people suffered through unspeakable bombing raids by the Germans. In many cases British citizens had to sleep in the subways because it was the only place that provided safety. The Germans bombed Great Britain for 57 days straight, however the British bravely refused to surrender. In the long run, the Royal Air Force (RAF) maintained its strength over the German Luftwaffe, and the resulting British victory marked the first failure of Germany’s war machine.

Once it became clear to Hitler that his air force could not defeat the British Royal Air Force he turned his attention towards Eastern Europe. Although Hitler and the leader of the Soviet Union, **Joseph Stalin**, were both Axis Powers, Hitler believed he had to attack the Soviet Union for the land and oil reserves. In a stunning move Hitler began the invasion of the Soviet Union (which at the time was his ally), causing Stalin to join the Allied Powers in the fight against Hitler.

As the rest of the world rushed toward war, the United States was reluctant to become involved in another European conflict. Following World War I, the United States had refused to join the League of Nations and had adopted a policy of **isolationism**. Many Americans believed that the country should stay out of other countries’ problems. The Great Depression strengthened this belief. Americans found themselves more worried about their next paycheck than some madmen half a world away.

The German Army stormed across Europe conquering countries such as Belgium, Denmark, Norway, and France. Great Britain fought on but was increasingly threatened by the German advance. With the future of its Allies at stake, the United States began to offer economic aid. Roosevelt acted quickly to push the **Lend-Lease Act** through Congress. This legislation gave the president the authority to sell, trade, lease, or transfer $50,000,000,000 worth of military equipment to help any country defend itself against the Axis Powers.

Unable to maintain a policy of isolationism, the United States was drawn into direct involvement in the war. In Asia, Japan became more and more aggressive with neighboring countries. Its growing industries depended on supplies of iron, rubber, and oil. As a result, Japanese military forces began occupying neighboring countries in Southeast Asia and the Pacific to meet this demand. In response, President Roosevelt called for an international embargo to cut off all foreign oil supplies to Japan. He hoped that this would cause Japan to retreat to its own soil. The Japanese government had other ideas. On the morning of December 7, 1941, the Japanese naval and naval air forces launched a surprise attack on the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The Japanese military dropped bombs that killed over 2,400 U.S. military men, destroyed over 140 planes, and sank or badly damaged eight battleships. America could no longer maintain neutrality. Calling Pearl Harbor “a day that shall live in infamy,” President Roosevelt addressed Congress on December 8, 1941 to ask for a declaration of war against Japan. Within a few days, Germany responded by declaring war on the United States.

**Beginning of WWII Summary Questions** **Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

1. Use your summary to fill in the chart below.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Battle** | **Date Battle Began** | **Key Events and Details of the Battles** |
| **Invasion of**  **Poland** |  |  |
|  | **May 10th, 1940** |  |
| **The Battle of Britain** |  |  |

2. What event was the official beginning of World War II?

3. Explain the strategy used by Germany to attack other countries.

4. What was significant about the Battle of France?

5. Why did the Soviet Union join the Allied Powers?

6. Fill-in the following chart to describe how American foreign policy evolved during World War II

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ attacks

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causing the U.S. to enter the war.

The U.S. provides support to Great Britain with the

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following WWI and the Great Depression

7. Describe the relationship between Japan and America before the attack on Pearl Harbor.