

Conflict in Europe 1935 - 1945

Growth of European Tensions, including:

- **The collapse of collective security, Abyssinia, the Spanish Civil War**
- **Britain, France and the policy of Appeasement**
- **Significance of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact**

Abyssinia:

- 3rd October 1935, Italy invaded Abyssinia
- Created a division in Britain, France and Italy, who initially united against Hitler's foreign policy in an agreement known as *Stresa Front*
- League of Nations condemned Mussolini, but no country was willing to go to war to defend Abyssinia
- Economic sanctions were imposed (did not include oil supplies)
- It was a savage campaign which had widespread civilian deaths and the use of mustard gas
 - Abyssinians used guerrilla warfare
- The League was proven to be useless in the face aggression and unwilling to fight for the rights of invaded countries

Reoccupation of the Rhineland:

- Hitler sent troops to the Rhine on the 7th of March 1936
- 30 000 with additional police units
- French ruled out resisting when the British refused to support them
- Allies were unwilling to resist claiming its pre-war territory
- Fuhrer's control over foreign policy was effective

The Spanish Civil War

- Began in 1936 with General Francisco Franco revolting against the elected gov
- Hitler declared support of nationalists in the coup
 - Also declared that Germany would resist communism
 - Actually, Hitler wanted to make an alliance with Italy
- By November 1936, the Axis forces recognised Franco as leader of Spain
 - Supplies weaponry and men, mobilising the *Condor Legion* from the Luftwaffe
- Stalin supplied communist forces in Spain
- Britain and France abstained from taking sides
- Heaviest involvement in the war was the Luftwaffe
 - Bombed enemy cities such as Guernica
- Civil war was brutal with hundreds of thousands of deaths and innumerable atrocities committed
- League of Nations did nothing
- Italy and Germany acquired Spanish military bases and seaports
 - Vital for future campaigns in the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea

- Montgomery controlled Allied forces in re-capture of France
- Rommel assisted in planning of D Day, but lost trust with Hitler
 - Commits suicide

Significance of the African Campaign:

- Only a small percentage of the Wehrmacht fought in the African War
 - Approx. 4 and half divisions
- Over 130 divisions attacked France in May 1940
 - Indicates that the African campaign had a smaller scope
- Like the Battle of Britain, El Alamein indicated what the British could achieve
- Historian Richard Overy described El Alamein as a defensive triumph
- El Alamein had significant impacts
 - Prevented Germans from accessing the Suez Canal
 - First instance of American engagement in war
 - Important preparation for conflict to come in Europe
 - Allowed the eventual removal of Germans from Africa
 - Established a southern Front by which to attack Italy

Civilians at war including:

- **Social and economic effects of the war in Britain, Germany and the Soviet Union**
- **The nature and effects of the Holocaust in the Nazi-occupied territories**

The Holocaust:

Persecution of Jews:

- In 1941, the Nazi Party settled on a plan to eradicate Jews
- Jewish population in Germany was already reduced to 214 000
- Jewish property was confiscated
 - Especially those in concentration camps after Kristallnacht (1938)
- In September 1941, Jews over the age of 6 were forced to wear the yellow Star of David
- By 1943, Jews were entirely removed from the protections of German law

Concentration camps and death camps:

- With the success of the Wehrmacht in acquiring territory, more Jews fell under German control
 - Transported to concentration camps controlled by Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich
- Mass deportations were organised under Adolf Eichmann
 - 100 000 Jews from Polish territory were deported in the winter of 1939-40
 - Approx. 42 000 were deported from Austria and Czechoslovakia to ghettos in Lodz and Warsaw in 1941
 - Later moved to concentration camps
 - Jews who were deported to Belarus were shot by the SS upon arrival

- As the Red Army moved through Poland and Germany, barbaric nature of forces caused an exodus of civilians from east to west
- Final Soviet attack leading to the fall of Berlin began on the 16th April 1945
 - Germans resisted – conscripted Hitler Youth members to fight
 - German resistance was ineffective
 - Hitler dictated his last will and testament, married Eva Braun and committed suicide on 30th April 1945

The Death of Hitler:

- Goebbels was appointed chancellor, but committed suicide
- Recent historical research indicated that Martin Bormann dies while attempting to flee Berlin
- Speer and Goring were arrested and tried at Nuremberg
- Heinrich Himmler was arrested but committed suicide
- Berlin only surrendered on the 2nd of May
 - It was only on the 7th of May that an unconditional surrender was offered by Grand Admiral Karl Donitz in Rheims, France
- Although the war in Europe had ended, there was still conflict in the Pacific
 - US bomb of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

Reasons for the Allied Victory:

1. Allied Air Power:

- After the Germans removed Britain from the war and defeated the USSR with Operation Barbarossa, the Luftwaffe entered a period of decline
 - Production was slowed from 1944
 - Loss of aircraft and pilots
- Allowed the Allies to gain control of the skies
- Air superiority working with infantry and tank divisions provided the means for the Allied victory
- Allied bombing campaigns played a controversial role in ending WWII
 - From 1944, tactical bombing depleted German production
 - However, Germany did not surrender until after Hitler's death
 - Indicates that the bombing did not destroy morale

2. Resources:

- Although Hitler pursued Autarky, resources were not enough
 - Germany needed to capture oil reserves in the Caucasus
- Allies had access to greater resources and manpower
 - US resources aided Allies