
LESSON 10

THE 20TH CENTURY: THE AGE OF TOTAL WAR (II)-- THE CHARACTER OF WORLD WAR II

I ordered the entire male population of the place to be evacuated...up to today, midday, a further 3,600 have been executed, so that the total of executions carried by the Reit Brigade up to now amounts to 7,819. Thus the figure of executions in my area now exceeds the 30,000 mark.

Decoded message sent by a German police chief recounting events that took place after fire on German army units had been received from the town of Pazyc on the Russian front. This message was decoded on 7 August 1941 at the British Government Code and Cypher School (a then-classified installation) at Bletchley Park, a country estate 50 miles from London. These events were reported in an article titled, "Nazi Police Competed Over Execution 'Score'" in *The [London] Times*, 20 May 1997.

...Klaus von Bismarck said that he and most other members of the 4th Infantry Regiment in which he rose to command, lived on an "island of self-deception" believing they could "remain upright soldiers in a war that had criminal ends."

Obituary of Klaus von Bismarck, great-great-nephew of the Iron Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, *The [London] Daily Telegraph*, 27 May 1997.

Introduction

Purpose

This lesson helps you understand the

- Causes, character, and outcome of the World War II
 - Immediate and continuing impact the war had on Western society and the world political order.
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Why Study World War II?

The World War II had, and continues to have, an enormous impact on the contemporary era. As Marine officers, you must understand World War II in its historical context and realize how many of today's complex political issues can be traced to World War II.

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Introduction, Continued

**Relationship to
Other
Instruction**

This lesson

- Focuses on the relationship of World War II to the evolution of modern warfare in the 20th century.
- Sets the stage for the remainder of the *Theory and Nature of War* (8801) course, especially lesson 12, "Modern Theorists (III): Revolutionary War."

You must understand the issues associated with World War II to comprehend the *Strategic Level of War* (8802) and *Operational Level of War* (8803) courses and related instruction in *Warfighting From the Sea* (8804 through 8808).

Study Time

This lesson, including the issues for consideration, will require about 4 hours of study.

Educational Objectives

Causes, Character, and Outcome Discuss the causes, character, and outcome of World War II. [JPME Areas 3d, 3e, and 5a]

Historical Perspective Place World War II in a larger historical context so that you can evaluate the war's place in the evolution of warfare. [JPME Areas 1b, 3d, 3e, and 5a]

Impact of World Wars Understand the immediate and continuing impact of World Wars I and II on Western society and the world political order. [JPME Areas 3d and 3e]

**JPME Areas/
Objectives/Hours
(accounting data)** 1/b/0.5
3/d/1.5
3/e/0.5
5/a/0.5

Historical Background

Impact of Treaty of Versailles The Treaty of Versailles, which ended the First World War, called for sweeping changes to the political, social, and economic map of the European continent. Further, despite President Wilson's best efforts to the contrary, the treaty imposed crushing economic demands - in the form of war reparations - upon the defeated Central Powers. Specifically, the Treaty of Versailles dismantled the Ottoman Empire in its entirety, leaving its rulers to exert power only in Turkey. On the European continent itself, the treaty carved up the Austro-Hungarian Empire, establishing new nation-states--Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and others--throughout Eastern Europe. Other lands were taken from both Germany and Russia to form other nations, most notably Poland, Finland, and the Baltic Republics.

Rise of the Axis Powers It was hoped that these newly-established states would be modeled on the liberal democracies of Western Europe. As it turned out, many of the democratic governments in Central and Eastern Europe were short-lived affairs that were soon replaced by a number of military-based dictators of varying ideological roots; of these, the most prominent were Adolph Hitler (National Socialism in Germany) and Benito Mussolini (Fascism in Italy). These two nations would join with a militaristic Japan to form the principal Axis powers that would drag the world into its second global conflict of the century.

Hitler's Policies Hitler and his National Socialists came to power in 1933, intent on making Germany the preeminent power on the European continent. To achieve this goal, Hitler often had to establish policies--reestablishing a German Navy, building up German land forces, reoccupying the Rhineland (1935)--that would put Germany in direct conflict with the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. More ominous to European stability was Hitler's goal of establishing a proper "living space" (*lebensraum*) in Eastern Europe; within the expanded territories of this "Greater Germany," both German culture and the German people could expand and flourish. Hitler's demand (and receipt) in 1938 of Czechoslovakia's German-speaking Sudetenland was a part of Germany's expansionist plans.

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Historical Background, Continued

Japan

In Asia, Japan was also involved in a long-term policy of conquest and expansion of its imperial domain. During the 1930's, much of Japan's aggression (and subsequent expansion) was directed at China. With the advent of World War II, Japan's further expansion came through its conquest of European (and American) colonial possessions. Japan's militarism was based on a unique blend of Eastern ideology and culture with European modernism.

World War II: Character

Noncombatant Deaths

World War II made less distinction between combatants and noncombatants. Noncombatants were directly attacked, both by strategic bombing and, in occupied Europe, by secret police and extermination troops.

Governmental Controls

Governmental controls on all aspects of society continued to increase. One example of this was the marshaling of the mass entertainment media in support of the American war effort--from popular commercial films (still seen often on cable television in this country) to Frank Capra's *Why We Fight*, to USO tours and canteens for soldiers.

Genocidal Policies

Genocidal policies in Europe, based on theories of racial and ethnic superiority, represented a big change during World War II, one recognized by the Nuremberg War Crimes trials. In the Pacific, Japanese troops also committed numerous atrocities against other Asian peoples and POWs, based (like the Nazis) on theories of racial and ethnic superiority.

Geographic Range of the War

Unlike the First World War, World War II was truly global in character and scope. Although World War I had seen fighting outside of Europe (in the Middle East and parts of Africa), the armies in the World War II battled throughout Europe, Russia, North Africa, the Far East, and the islands of the Pacific, with naval and air forces fighting over an even larger geographic area.

Results of the War

World War II resulted in

- The division of Europe into a Communist Eastern Europe dominated by the Soviet Union and a democratic West protected by the U.S. and its NATO allies.
 - A shift of power from Europe to the U.S. and Soviet Union
 - European powers losing their overseas empires.
 - U.S. not returning to a policy of isolationism, permanently stationing troops in Europe and Asia.
 - International relations governed largely by Cold War considerations.
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Required Readings

***Theory and
Nature of War
Readings***

Biddiss, Michael. "Victor's Justice? The Nuremberg Tribunal," *History Today*, May 1995. *Theory and Nature of War Readings*, Annex D pp. D-3 to D-11. This article is a detailed examination of how the victorious Allies dealt with the prosecution of genocide and mass murder atrocities by the Nazi leadership. It illustrates some of the weaknesses and strengths of the proceedings and also raises the question of how little the world community has built upon the positive aspects of this great event.

***Makers of
Modern Strategy***

Clayton, James D. "American and Japanese Strategies in the Pacific War," *Makers of Modern Strategy From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, edited by Peter Paret. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986, pp. 703 to 732. This chapter analyzes the national and military strategies of Japan and America not only during the war years, but also during the four decades preceding them.

***European Armies
and the Conduct
of War***

Strachan, Hew. *European Armies and the Conduct of War*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1983, pp. 150 to 187

- Chapter 10, "Blitzkrieg" This is a chronological account of how military strategies and capabilities developed from World War I through World War II with emphasis on examples of general failure to plan in depth and of the specific failure of Germany, relying on "Blitzkrieg," to face its practical limitations in a long war.
 - Chapter 11, "Total War" This chapter expands upon Germany's failure to plan strategically and logistically for World War II. These pages include two full page maps.
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For Further Study

Supplemental Readings

The readings listed are **not** required. They are provided as recommended sources of additional information about topics in this lesson that may interest you. They will increase your knowledge and augment your understanding of this lesson.

- Bartov, Omer. "The Conduct of War: Soldiers and the Barbarization of Warfare," *The Journal of Modern History*, Supplement, December 1992, pp. S32 to S45.
 - Kissinger, Henry. *Diplomacy*. New York: Touchstone, 1994. Read the following (pp. 288 to 422):
 - Chapter 12. "The End of Illusion: Hitler and the Destruction of Versailles," (pp. 288 to 331)
 - Chapter 13, "Stalin's Bazaar," (pp. 332 to 349)
 - Chapter 14, "The Nazi-Soviet Pact," (pp. 350 to 368)
 - Chapter 15, "America Re-enters the Arena: Franklin Delano Roosevelt," (pp. 369 to 393)
 - Chapter 16, "Three Approaches to Peace: Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill in World War II," (pp. 394 to 422)
 - Matloff, Maurice. "Allied Strategy in Europe, 1939-1945," *Makers of Modern Strategy From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, edited by Peter Paret. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986, pp. 677 to 702.
 - Spector, Ron. *Eagle Against the Sun: The American War Against Japan*. New York: The Free Press, 1985.
 - Weinberg, Gerhard L. *The World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
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Issues for Consideration

World Wars I and II

Some claim that World War II was just a repeat of World War I, separated by a 20-year armistice. Is this true? Or, did this conflict reveal something fundamentally different? If so, what had changed?

Character of World War II

What was the character of World War II? What were the goals of the powers involved? How were operations basically conducted? How did the character differ from World War I and previous wars?

Axis Successes and Defeat

Why were Germany and Japan so successful initially? Why did they ultimately fail?