

World War II

What started World War II?

After Germany lost World War I, they felt weak. Adolf Hitler was elected their chancellor (leader of the National Socialist German Workers' Party – Nazi for short) in 1933 and he promised to make Germany strong again. He blamed certain groups of people for Germany's problems, particularly Jewish people. He started to introduce laws that removed their rights. He wanted more land to show his country was strong, so he invaded Poland in 1939. Britain and France had promised to protect Poland, so they told Germany to leave. Germany refused, so Britain and France declared war.

Propaganda



Britain produced propaganda posters to encourage people to do all they could to help with the war effort.

The Battle of Britain

The Battle of Britain was the first ever battle that only used planes. The German air force (the Luftwaffe) attacked Britain by dropping bombs from planes. Their attempt to invade failed because the Royal Air Force (Britain's air force) defeated them.



The Blitz

The Blitz was a sustained bombing campaign by the German air force (The Luftwaffe), where many bombs were dropped on cities in the UK. London was targeted because of the docks and the many important buildings in the capital city. Many people were killed. Bethnal Green was badly damaged. Air raid sirens were sounded to warn people that bombing was about to start. People sheltered underground, often in tube stations.



People sheltered in Bethnal Green Underground station during bombing raids



Evacuation

Children who lived in cities were often evacuated and sent to live with strangers in the countryside, to keep them safe from the bombing. Some children were very happy, but others were not well looked after. Families found it hard to be apart.



Rationing

Because the Germans were sinking supply ships, the government introduced rationing. This meant that everyone was given a fair share of essential items, like butter, meat, sugar and clothes. People were encouraged to grow their own vegetables. People were given ration books with coupons that they could swap for goods.

Vocabulary

Propaganda – information (often posters or stories) used to persuade people to think or act in a certain way.

Evacuation – moving children away from a dangerous place to a safer one.

Air Raid – an attack from planes

Air Raid Siren – a very loud alarm used to warn people about enemy planes flying overhead.

Air Raid Shelter – a strong, safe place to protect people from bombs.

Allies – countries that worked together to defeat Germany (main allies – UK, USA, Russia).

Axis Powers – the countries who fought against the allies (Germany, Italy, Japan).

D-Day – the day that the allies landed on beaches in France and starting freeing Europe from the Nazis.

The Home Front – how the war affected everyday life and what people did to help the war effort.

Blackout – people had to cover their windows or turn out lights at night, so the bomber planes couldn't see towns and cities from the air.

Gas Mask – a rubber mask given to everyone to protect their faces and lungs from poisonous gases that might be dropped from the sky during air raids.

1st September 1939
Germany invades Poland

3rd September 1939
Great Britain, France and their Allies declare war on Germany

July 1940 – October 1940
The Battle of Britain. It is the first battle to ever take place entirely in the air.

September 1940 – June 1941
The Blitz causes great damage to London and other cities

7th December 1940
The USA declares war on Italy, Japan and Germany, after Japan bombs Pearl Harbour.

6th June 1944
British, Canadian and USA troops land in Normandy, France

8th May 1945
Victory in Europe Day (VE Day)

1st September 1945
Japan surrenders. World War II ends.