

America Joins the Fight

It was inevitable that the United States and Germany would clash in the North Atlantic's shipping lanes. German U-boats attempted to blockade Great Britain at the same time American ships carried weapons of war and other supplies to the allied powers.

The merchant ship, *Robin Moor*, was the first American vessel to be sunk by Germany on May 21, 1941. After a battle between the USS *Greer* and a German U-boat (in which neither vessel was sunk), President Roosevelt issued a "shoot on sight" order to American ships.

In October, 1941, the USS *Kearny* was torpedoed and two weeks later, the U.S. destroyer *Reuben James*, was sunk. Some Americans demanded an immediate declaration of war on Nazi Germany, but isolationist thought was still strong and the President refrained from taking any action.

As 1941 came to a close, the Japanese believed the United States was the main obstacle in their plans for a Pacific empire. Early on the morning of December 7, following the example of their German and Italian partners, Japanese fighter planes, without warning, attacked the American fleet at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, as well as the Philippines, Malaya, Hong Kong, Wake Island, Midway, and Guam.

The United States, followed by Great Britain, declared war on the empire of Japan on December 8. In support of their Axis partner, both Germany and Italy honored the Tripartite Pact by declaring war on the United States on December 11.

Now faced with a war in Europe and the Pacific, Roosevelt and Churchill decided that the defeat of Germany would be their nations' top priority. In Europe, the U.S. Eighth Air Force joined the RAF in bombing missions over occupied France and later over Germany itself. The first important Allied victory came in October, 1942 when Britain's 8th Army under General Bernard Montgomery drove German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps out of El Alamein in Egypt. It was a major defeat for Germany.

The following month (November, 1942) brought the successful Allied invasion of North Africa under American General Dwight D. Eisenhower, in which 85,000 American and 23,000 British troops landed in French Morocco and Algeria. It was not until May of 1943, after six months of hard desert warfare, that the Germans and Italians were finally driven out of Africa.

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union, with the help of Allied supplies, managed to hold off the Germans in 1942 but at the price of widespread death and destruction in their homeland. After rapidly advancing deep into Soviet territory, the Germans were finally stalled by the combination of the severe Russian winter and the desperate fighting of the Russian troops. Finally, in the summer of '42, the German armies and panzer divisions were ordered by Hitler to begin a major offensive against the city of Stalingrad.

The battle of Stalingrad was the turning point of the war in Europe and among the bloodiest ever fought. The Soviets were determined to hold the city at all costs. It was a fierce and brutal struggle often resulting in hand-to-hand combat from house-to-house and street-to-street.

The battle for Stalingrad lasted eighty days, allowing the Soviets time to gather reserve forces and encircle the German Sixth Army. The Germans finally surrendered on January 31, 1943, giving the Russians their first victory of the war. More than a million Soviet and German troops were killed in the battle and Stalingrad lay in ruins.

Along with the British victory at El Alamein, the outcome at Stalingrad convinced the Allies that Nazi Germany would eventually be defeated. The remainder of the war was dominated by a U.S. arsenal which produced countless weapons of war to supply Allied troops throughout the world.

The following excerpts focus on the effect of America's entry into the war, the Allied offensive in North Africa, the air war in Europe, and the battle of Stalingrad.

Memoirs of the Second World War

by Winston S. Churchill

(from Churchill, *op cit.*, pages 506-507.)

No American will think it wrong of me if I proclaim that to have the United States at our side was to me the greatest joy. I could not foretell the course of events. I do not pretend to have measured accurately the martial might of Japan, but now at this very moment I knew the United States was in the war, up to the neck and in to the death. So we had won after all! Yes, after Dunkirk; after the fall of France...after the threat of invasion, when, apart from the Air and the Navy, we were an almost unarmed people; after the deadly struggle of the U-boat war...after seventeen months of lonely fighting and nineteen months of my responsibility in dire stress. We had won the war. England would live....We should not be wiped out. Our history would not come to an end....No doubt it would take a long time. I expected terrible forfeits in the East; but all this would be merely a passing phase. United we could subdue everybody else in the world. Many disasters, immeasurable cost and tribulation lay ahead, but there was no more doubt about the end.

Silly people, and there were many, not only in enemy countries, might discount the force of the United States. Some said they were soft, others that they would never be united. They would fool around at a distance. They would never come to grips. They would never stand bloodletting. Their democracy and system of recurrent elections would paralyze their war effort. They would be just a vague blur on the horizon to friend or foe. Now we should see the weakness of this numerous but remote, wealthy, and talkative people. But I had studied the American Civil War, fought out to the last desperate inch. American blood flowed in my veins. I thought of a remark which Edward Grey had made to me more than thirty years before — that the United States is like “a gigantic boiler. Once the fire is lighted under it there is no limit to the power it can generate....”



World War II: The European Theatre

America Joins the Fight & *Memoirs of the Second World War by Winston Churchill*

1. When did the United States officially enter World War II? What event caused them to enter the war and who did they declare war against?
2. Although we have yet to study it, after reading *America Joins the Fight* what do you think the Tripartite Pact was? What is the pact's significance in relation to the United States entering the war?
3. What did President Roosevelt and Winston Churchill decide the top priority for their nations would be in World War II?
4. Who was the commanding general for the Allies in Africa? What major events took place that led to Allied victory in Africa?
5. What happened in Stalingrad? What is the significance of the outcome of the event that happened at Stalingrad?
6. What was Winston Churchill's reaction to the United States entering WWII?

7. What did Winston Churchill discuss regarding other countries feelings on the United States military?
8. What does Winston Churchill believe the United States military, combined with the strength of England's military, is capable of?
9. Winston Churchill quoted Edward Grey as saying the United States is like "a gigantic boiler. Once the fire is lighted under it there is no limit to the power it can generate..." What do *you* think Edward Grey is trying to say through this statement?