

New Bedford Public Schools
Division of Adult & Continuing Education

New Bedford High School Evening Extension

2019 – 2020 School Year
Trimester III

Learning Packet #3
for
U.S. History II

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Military Changes Leading to World War II

Introduction

Coldly and with malice aforethought, the powers that history would term the **Axis** (Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan, and fascist Italy) prepared for war, while the democracies pursued idle dreams. Yet even the German military could not perceive the magnitude of the war their leader would unleash in 1939. When the war began, even the Germans discovered weaknesses in their preparations. Their opponents, the **Western powers** (Britain and France), were less well-prepared, partially due to the constraints placed on **rearmament** by political leaders.

World War I had seen the invention of Modern War. A commander on the Western Front in 1918 would have understood the concept of combined arms- the coordinated use of infantry, tanks, artillery, and aircraft. Reflecting on their societies, most officers could not imagine reliving the horror through which they had so recently passed. Most looked elsewhere for answers and sought to return to **old war tactics**. In a democracy, the political leaders made clear they would not tolerate a replication of the last war. The pain and losses their nations had suffered were too great and the people too weary. The interwar period saw strides in the conceptualization of tactics and operations, but progress was uneven, and planners could not really predict what would work in the next war and what would not.

On the Ground

Germany

German leaders drastically reduced the number of men in their officer corps due to the Treaty of Versailles. By doing so, they were able to choose new leadership from the best men of the general staff, with ruthless tactics and no care for general rules. The resulting emphasis on the serious study of military profession ensured that new officers would not repeat the errors of the last war. By 1933, the Germans possessed the military doctrine of **combined arms** that fully took into account the lessons of the last war. The new German approach to combined arms would emphasize surprise, judgment, speed, and exploitation of an enemy's momentary weaknesses.

Although tanks were first used in World War I, it was during World War II that tanks became a major military force. Hitler utilized tanks in his fast-moving **Panzer** divisions. They enabled him to quickly take over much of Europe using a tactic called **Blitzkrieg**, meaning "lightning war." Some of the most famous tanks from World War II include Germany's Tiger tank, the Soviet Union's T-34 tank, and the United States' Sherman tank.

Britain

The British army was not nearly so modern in its outlook, owing to a number of political blocks to developing ground forces for the next war. First, the politicians and voters wholeheartedly rejected any idea of training an army for the purpose of fighting on the continent. A wave of **anti-war literature** heightened the public's bitter disillusionment with the sacrifices of World War I.

Nonetheless, the British carried out a series of innovative experiments with **armor** that suggested paths for future development. Unfortunately, these efforts occurred in isolation from the rest of the army. Ironically, the Germans may have learned more in the long run from these experiments than the British, since they watched the exercises with great interest.

United States

The experience of World War I shaped the land forces of the United States to a greater degree than it did the British Army. US army officers who saw the face of battle in France knew that another war between the industrialized states would require far greater mobility and firepower, if land forces were to influence the outcome.

The United States also needed to lay the foundation of a mass citizen Army in peacetime without **conscription** (the draft). For more than a decade after World War I, the Department of War had supported all the US Army's components. This consisted of a regular force, the reserves, the National Guard, and the Army Air corps. But the depression of 1929 ended that approach. Concerned about Japanese aggressiveness, two Army Chiefs of Staff, **Douglas MacArthur** and **Malin Craig**, shifted investment to the portions of the army they thought could be brought to readiness for immediate war.

All of the Department of War's plans, however, underwent dramatic re-evaluation after Germany invaded Poland in 1939. In the summer of 1941, the War Department's general staff completed an analysis of the Army's needs. The plans of 1941 set the conditions for the greatest problems the United States Army would face in World War II: what was the appropriate balance between ground and Air Forces, and how much logistical support would two separate American armies- one in Europe and the other in the Pacific- require?

In the Air

The air force became one of the most important parts of the military during World War II. Whoever had control of the air, often won the battle on the ground. Different types of planes were developed for specific tasks. There were small, fast fighter planes designed for air-to-air combat, large bombers that could drop huge bombs on enemy targets, planes designed to land and take off from aircraft carriers, and large transport planes used to deliver supplies and soldiers. Other important advances in aircraft included the first military helicopters and the first jet-powered fighter planes.

Britain

Although Britain's **Royal Air Force** (RAF) had evidence from both World War I and the interwar period that aircrafts had difficulty pinpointing and hitting targets, RAF leaders clearly believed that enemy populations and cities would be vulnerable to attack, and that only a few raids would bring the enemy to his knees. There was little progress in an offensive Air Force, but there were large developments in the nation's air defenses. It's during this time period we see research and development efforts towards **radar** as well as more experimental aircrafts.

United States

Development of air power in the United States followed a similar path in many respects to Britain. As with the British, American airpower advocates proclaimed the need for an independent Air Force that would render the Army and Navy redundant. Air Force officials believe that the enemies Air Force itself must be the first target any air campaign before attacking any targets on the ground.

Unlike the British, the Americans did not plan to target civilians; any approach would have drawn heavy fire from Congress. Instead, American planners argued that targeting **modern economies** would have catastrophic consequences. For example, they singled out oil, electricity, transportation, and other industries necessary for the successful functioning of a modern war economy.

Germany

Germany's Air Force was known as the **Luftwaffe**, a service uninterested in air missions. Despite the fact that the **Treaty of Versailles** forced the Germans to disband their air units, German commanders kept a substantial number of Air officers buried within the Army command structure. The Luftwaffe's main missions would be establishing and maintaining **air superiority**, close support for the Army and Navy, interdiction of the battlefield, and bombing attacks on the enemy's industrial power. Even in its strategic bombing capabilities, the Luftwaffe was better prepared than its counterparts in the RAF and the United States Army Air corps. The Germans never assumed that bombers would get through to their targets without fighter support or be able to find and hit targets at night or in bad weather. The Luftwaffe's balanced set of capabilities would contribute significantly to the German victories of the first war years.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Military Changes Leading to World War II Questions

Part 1: Jigsaw

Germany	Britain	US

Similarities

Given what you know about each country, who do you think had the most powerful overall military? (2-3 sentences)

Part 2: Questions-FULL SENTENCES

1. Why did the German army drastically reduce their number of men?
2. What was Germany's military doctrine of combined arms?
3. What does *Blitzkrieg* mean?
4. Anti-war literature in Britain is similar to what US policy?
5. Why is it difficult to build a citizen army without conscription?
6. What issues did the US face after Germany invaded Poland in 1939?
7. If you had control of the air, what did you typically win?

8. What was an invention in aircrafts during this time period?

9. What did the US Air Force target instead of civilians?

10. Why was Germany's Luftwaffe superior to the RAF and US Air Force?