

Research History

Research the lessons in history. "Study the past if you would define the future." Confucius

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World War II: Before the War

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The years leading up to the declaration of war between the Axis and Allied powers in 1939 were tumultuous times for people across the globe. The Great Depression had started a decade before, leaving much of the world unemployed and desperate. Nationalism was sweeping through Germany, and it chafed against the punitive measures of the Versailles Treaty that had ended World War I. China and the Empire of Japan had been at war since Japanese troops invaded Manchuria in 1931. Germany, Italy, and Japan were testing the newly founded League of Nations with multiple invasions and occupations of nearby countries, and felt emboldened when they encountered no meaningful consequences. The Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, becoming a rehearsal of sorts for the upcoming World War — Germany and Italy supported the nationalist rebels led by General Francisco Franco, and some 40,000 foreign nationals traveled to Spain to fight in what they saw as the larger war against fascism. In the last few pre-war years, Nazi Germany blazed the path to conflict — rearming, signing a non-aggression treaty with the USSR, annexing Austria, and invading Czechoslovakia. Meanwhile, the United States passed several Neutrality Acts, trying to avoid foreign entanglements as it reeled from the Depression and the Dust Bowl years. Below is a glimpse of just some of these events leading up to World War II. (This entry is **Part 1** of a weekly 20-part retrospective of World War II) [45 photos]



Hitler

Adolf Hitler, age 35, on his release from Landesberg Prison, on December 20, 1924. Hitler had been convicted of treason for his role in an attempted coup in 1923 called the Beer Hall Putsch. This photograph was taken shortly after he finished dictating "Mein Kampf" to deputy Rudolf Hess. Eight years later, Hitler would be sworn in as Chancellor of Germany, in 1933. (Library of Congress) 📷



Wall of China

2

A Japanese soldier stands guard over part of the captured Great Wall of China in 1937, during the Second Sino-Japanese War. The Empire of Japan and the Republic of China had been at war intermittently since 1931, but the conflict escalated in 1937. (LOC) # 📷



3

Japanese aircraft carry out a bombing run over targets in China in 1937. (LOC) # 📷



4

Japanese soldiers involved in street fighting in Shanghai, China in 1937. The battle of Shanghai lasted from August through November of 1937, eventually involving nearly one million troops. In the end, Shanghai fell to the Japanese, after over 150,000 casualties combined.(LOC) # 📷



5

First pictures of the Japanese occupation of Peiping (Beijing) in China, on August 13, 1937. Under the banner of the rising sun, Japanese troops are shown passing from the Chinese City of Peiping into the Tartar City through Chenmen, the main gate leading onward to the palaces in the Forbidden City. Just a stone's throw away is the American Embassy, where American residents of Peiping flocked when Sino-Japanese hostilities were at their worst. (AP Photo) # 📷

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