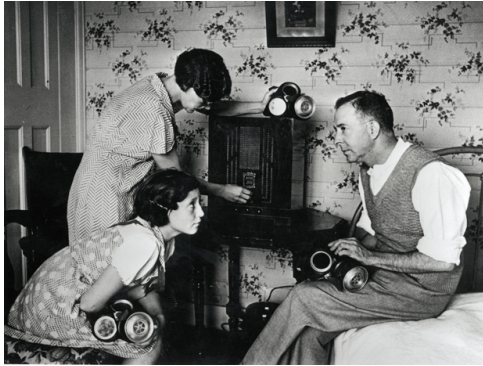


World War II: The Home Front



The British Home Front

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill was convinced that the war could only be won through the complete mobilization of Britain's civilian population. In May of 1940, Secretary of State for War Anthony Eden made a call for 'men of all ages who wish to do something for the defence of their country' to join the Home Guard; 1.5 million men rushed to join.



Throughout June and July of 1940 British civilians were convinced that a German invasion was on its way. Their preparations for the expected onslaught included the collection of scrap iron to make armaments and the construction of concrete pillboxes in suburban parks.

The British Home Front

British women played a crucial role on the home front, fighting a daily battle of rationing, recycling, reusing, and cultivating food. Women were also called upon to work as mechanics, engineers, munitions workers, air raid wardens, and fire engine drivers. More than 80,000 women joined the Women's Land Army, enduring tough conditions and long hours in isolated rural outposts in order to prevent Britain from being 'starved out.' In cities, the Women's Voluntary Service prided itself on doing 'whatever was needed.'



Rationing was another unwelcome yet necessary fact of life. Before the war, Britain had imported 55 million tons of food each year; by October 1939, this figure had fallen to just 12 million. Not just food, but also clothing, furniture and gas were rationed, helping to create a booming black market, which traded items such as gas coupons, eggs, nylon stockings and cigarettes. Rationing would continue until 1954, when limits on the purchase of meat and bacon were lifted.

Bombing in Britain

Bombing was used in World War II against military targets, enemy troops, and civilian populations.



From September 1940, the Blitz - what the British called the sustained bombing of Britain by Nazi Germany - hit many towns and cities across the country. The first bombing of London began in September of 1940 and went on for 57 consecutive nights, lasting until May of 1941. More than 43,000 civilians were killed by bombing and over a million houses were destroyed or damaged in London alone.

Aldwych tube station being used as a bomb shelter in 1940.

While the Blitz spread fear, it also engendered a strong feeling of community and collective stoicism, as gas masks, air raid sirens, and blackouts became part of daily life for many Britons. The Blitz then became a national experience as it was carried to many other British cities and towns. The ability of Londoners to maintain their morale set the standard for the rest of the British population. The theory that the bombing of civilians would force peace was proved wrong.



The German Home Front

Blitzkrieg gave the Germans quick victories and enabled them to plunder food and raw materials from conquered countries. Because of this, Hitler was able to continue the production of consumer goods during the first two years of the war.

Early in 1942, Hitler finally ordered a massive increase in armaments production and the size of the army.

A total mobilization of the economy was put into effect in July 1944 and schools, theaters, and cafés were closed.

The number of German women working in industry, agriculture, commerce, and domestic service increased only slightly: 14.6 million women were employed in 1939; that only increased to 14.9 million by 1944.

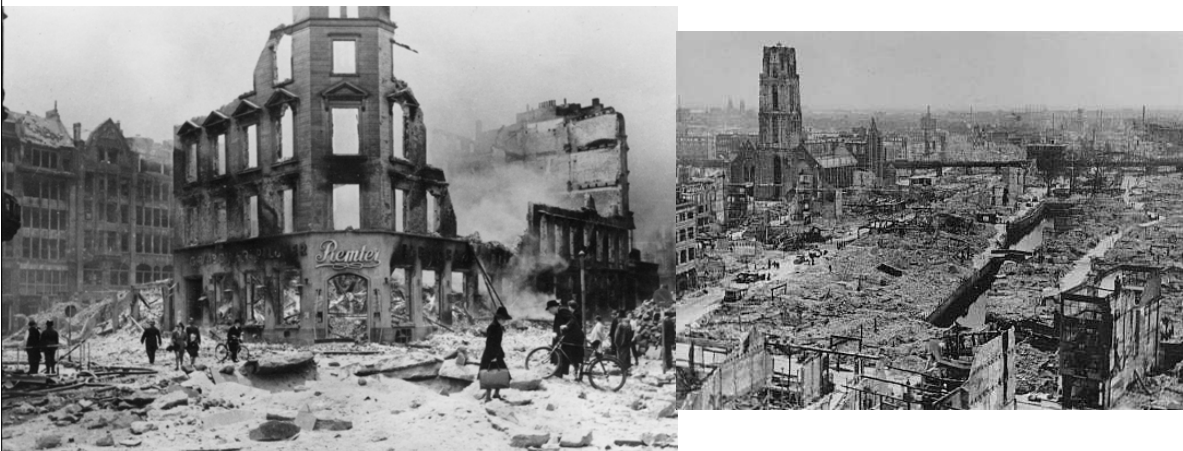


Teenage girls in agricultural work in the occupied territories, one of the possible duties assigned by the Bund Deutscher Mädel (League of Young German Women), the female version of the Hitler Youth, with compulsory membership for girls. The caption in Das Deutsche Mädel, in its May 1942 issue, states: "bringing all the enthusiasm and life force of their youth, our young daughters of the Work Service make their contribution in the German territories regained in the East"

Bombing in Germany

Major British bombing raids on German cities began in 1942. Bombing raids added an element of terror to the dire circumstances caused by growing shortages of food, clothing, and fuel.

Especially fearful to the Germans were the incendiary bombs, which created firestorms that swept through cities. The ferocious bombing of Dresden from February 13 to 15, 1945, created a firestorm that may have killed as many as 35,000 inhabitants and refugees. Germany suffered enormously from the Allied bombing raids. Millions of buildings were destroyed; half a million civilians died. The widespread destruction of transportation systems and fuel supplies made it extremely difficult for new materials to reach the German military.



The Soviet Home Front

the Soviets called the German-Soviet war the “Great Patriotic War”

Leningrad experienced 900 days of siege
people became so desperate for food they ate dogs, cats, and mice
approximately 1.5 million people died



Soviet workers dismantled and shipped whole factories in the west to the interior

“the battle of machines”
what Stalin called the widespread military and industrial mobilization of the nation

Soviets produced 78,000 tanks and 98,000 artillery pieces

by 1943, 55% of Soviet national income went toward war materials
(was 15% in 1940)

almost 60% of Soviet women worked in industries such as mines and railroads
they also served in the Soviet military as snipers and in aircrews of bomber squadrons

French Resistance

The French Resistance was developed to provide the Allies with intelligence, disrupt the German supply and communication lines, attack the Germans, and assist the escape of Allied airmen. The Resistance played a vital part in aiding the Allies - especially leading up to D-Day in June of 1944.



When WWII began, French citizens had been assured that the French army was more than strong enough to resist a German attack, so they were shocked by the speed and severity of the German Blitzkrieg. The French surrender to Germany in June 1940 was a major blow to French pride, as was the German takeover and occupation of Paris.

French military leader and vice premier Philippe Pétain negotiated an armistice with Germany that gave the Germans control over the north and west of France, leaving the remainder of France to him. Appointed Vichy France’s ‘chief of state,’ Pétain’s regime was officially neutral, but in reality it collaborated closely with Germany. The Vichy government’s anti-semitism was a major cause of resentment and many joined the resistance as a means of fighting against a policy that the vast majority found abhorrent.

By 1944, it is estimated that there were 100,000 members of the various resistance movements that existed in France. The intelligence they gathered prior to D-Day was vital. In May 1944 alone, they sent 3,000 written reports to the Allies and 700 wireless reports. Between April and May, the resistance destroyed 1,800 railway engines.

The Japanese Home Front



To guarantee its control over all national resources, the government of wartime Japan created a planning board to control prices, wages, labor, and resources.

Female employment during the war increased only in areas such as the textile industry and farming, in which women had traditionally worked. Instead of using Japanese women to meet labor shortages, the Japanese government brought in Korean and Chinese laborers.

General Hideki Tōjō, prime minister from 1941 to 1944, opposed female employment, arguing in October 1943 that

The weakening of the family system would be the weakening of the nation... We are able to do our duties ... only because we have wives and mothers at home.
~ quoted in Valley of Darkness: The Japanese People and World War Two



Bombing in Japan



Japan was open to air raids toward the end of the war because its air force had almost been destroyed. Moreover, its crowded cities were built of flimsy materials that were especially vulnerable to fire.

Attacks on Japanese cities by the new U.S. B-29 Superfortresses, the biggest bombers of the war, had begun on November 24, 1944. By the summer of 1945, many of Japan's industries had been destroyed, along with one-fourth of its dwellings. To add to the strength of its regular army, the Japanese government decreed the mobilization of all people between the ages of 13 and 60 into a People's Volunteer Corps.

In Japan, the bombing of civilians reached a new level with the use of the first atomic bomb. Fearing high U.S. casualties in a land invasion of Japan, President Truman and his advisers decided to drop atomic bombs in August 1945. The result was the deaths of thousands of Japanese civilians.

The American Home Front

the US became the arsenal of the Allied Powers
by November 1943, the US was building 6 ships a day and 96,000 planes per year



new factories were needed = thousands of workers mass in
one area
created a shortage of houses and schools

more than a million African Americans moved to the cities
looking for industrial jobs
led to racial tensions and sometimes riots

one million African Americans joined the military but served
in segregated units

on the West Coast, 110,000 Japanese Americans were
removed to internment camps
suspected of supplying information to the enemy (Japan)

