

## 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

Women were 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, an organization created that recruited women to work on farms producing food.

Civilians played a crucial role on the home front, fighting a daily battle of cultivating food, recycling, and reusing.



Rationing was another unwelcome yet necessary fact of life.

Food, clothing, furniture, gas, and many other products were rationed.

This created a booming black market which traded items such as gas coupons, eggs, nylon stockings and cigarettes.

## Bombing in Britain

Bombing was used in WW II against military targets and troops, but also against civilian populations.



The Blitz hit England 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.*

Gas masks, sirens, blackouts, and hiding in air raid shelters became part of daily life for many Britons.

While the Blitz spread fear, it also engendered a strong feeling of community and collective stoicism.

The Britons' ability to maintain their morale disproved the theory that the bombing of civilians would force peace.



## The German Home Front

Blitzkrieg gave the Germans quick victories and enabled them to plunder food and raw materials from conquered countries.

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

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.

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



*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 13-15, 1945, created a firestorm that killed approximately 35,000 people.

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

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

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

## The Italian Home Front



Italy had a largely agricultural economy -  
did not have the industrial capacity to equip a  
military

in May, 1939 Italy and Germany signed the  
“Pact of Steel”  
created a military alliance for a  
“joint war against France and Britain”  
both countries promised to NOT go to war  
without the other before 1943

after Germany invaded Poland in September of 1939 Britain imposed a naval blockade against Germany and blockaded coal shipments to Italy

Italy entered World War II on the Axis side on June 10, 1940

Italian agriculture was not significantly mechanized, so drafting millions of soldiers greatly affected the agricultural work force

agricultural production fell, creating severe food shortages

rationing was instituted and the black market was often the only way to obtain needed food in the cities

## 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.



When WWII began, French citizens had been assured that the French army was 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 which gave the Germans control over the north and west of France.

Pétain was appointed 'chief of state' to rule over the remainder of France, known as Vichy France.

Pétain's regime was officially neutral, but in reality 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.

It is estimated that by 1944 there were 100,000 members in various French resistance movements. The intelligence they gathered prior to D-Day was vital.

## The Japanese Home Front



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)

