

WORLD WAR II: THE AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE

RESEARCH: EVENTS, SIEGES AND BATTLES

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The European Front

The end of World War I with the signing of the Versailles Treaty brought limited stability to the continent. Germany was suffering from economic and political instability as well as resentment towards the allied powers and the harsh terms imposed on Germany by the Versailles Treaty. This combination of uncertainty, instability and resentment fuelled the rise of Adolf Hitler in German politics who became the Fuhrer or supreme leader in 1934. Hitler was of the firm belief that war was the only way to gain enough space for the German race to expand and gain superiority.

By the end of August in 1939, Germany occupied Austria, Lithuania, and Czechoslovakia. On September 1st, 1939 Germany invaded Poland from the West which resulted in France and Britain declaring war on Germany and the official commencement of World War II in Europe. Australia officially entered the war on September 3rd, 1939 with Australian Defence Force units deployed from 1940.

Germany was quick to advance across Western Europe, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Northern Africa. In June 1941, Germany declared war on the Soviet Union.

The Pacific Front

In the late 19th Century and early 20th Century, Japan had been gradually increasing its imperial empire. During the 1930's, Japan was focused on expanding its empire and influence throughout Asia and the Pacific region which led to the formation of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. This was an imperialistic concept which was distributed to Asian populations who were under western colonial oppression. By 1939, Japanese occupation included: Taiwan, the Korean Peninsula, Manchuria (North China) and the border into the Soviet Union, Inner Mongolia, Parts of Eastern China near the Yellow Sea, the Island of Hainan and Hong Kong.

With Great Britain and France occupied with the European War, the Japanese saw an opportunity to advance into areas of Asia that were under colonial rule by European powers. In 1941, Japan advanced into Indo China which provoked the United States to freeze overseas assets held by as well as to impose sanctions regarding the distribution of oil and oil products to Japan.



Australian Soldiers hoisting the flag at Kokoda



The Pacific Front- Continued

Japan on the quest to expand their empire and to gain greater access to resources such as oil, developed a plan for war with the United States. On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbour a US Naval base on the Island of Oahu, Hawaii. This surprise aerial attack decimated the US Navy's Pacific Fleet and forced the entry of the United States into World War II. With the Japanese also attacking Malaya, the Philippines and Thailand on the same day, Australia declared war on Japan on 9th December 1941.

SETTING THE SCENE

Australians were involved in two fronts throughout World War II. The European front and the threat that was closer to home, the Pacific. The experiences of Australians fighting on these fronts was extremely diverse as Australians fought in vastly different locations against different enemies. Australia faced the possibility of being invaded by Japanese forces with Darwin being bombed several times and midget submarines found in Sydney Harbour. Australians were conscripted into active service for the first time in history and were only allowed to serve in Australia or Australian territories which at the time included Papua New Guinea.

Watch Pictures of significant events provide insights into the experience of people who lived in those times. Watch the video [World War II: The Australian Experience](#) and then answer the following questions.

Q1 What events, sieges, battles, and other concepts does the video highlight?

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

Q2 Australian's served on both the European and Pacific Fronts. Using the images and narration from the video, how would the experiences of Australian's on the European Front be different to those on the Pacific Front?



Australian's contributed to many significant Events, Battles and Sieges throughout World War II on both the European and Pacific Fronts including:

Research

- Battle of Britain
- Siege of Tobruk
- Battle of Crete
- Fall of Singapore
- Bombing of Darwin
- Thai Burma Railway
- Kokoda Track Campaign
- Bougainville and New Britain Campaigns
- Allied Bombing of Germany

Research each of these events using the templates provided below and think about the diversity of the Australian experience during World War II. Events highlighted in Green occurred on the European Front. Events highlighted in Yellow occurred on the Pacific Front.

Battle of Britain

When was the Battle of Britain?

Who fought in the Battle of Britain?

Where was the Battle of Britain fought?

How was the Battle of Britain Fought?

Why did the Battle of Britain occur?

What would an Australian have experienced in the Battle of Britain?
(include geographical considerations in your answer).



Siege of Tobruk

When was the Siege of Tobruk?

Who fought in the Siege of Tobruk?

Where was the Siege of Tobruk and why is this location significant?

How was the Siege of Tobruk fought?

Why did the Siege of Tobruk occur and what is its significance?

What would an Australian have experienced in the Siege of Tobruk?
(include geographical considerations in your answer).

Additional Notes



Battle of Crete

When was the Battle of Crete?

Who fought in the Battle of Crete?

Where was the Battle of Crete and why is this location significant?

How was the Battle of Crete fought?

Why did the Battle of Crete occur?

The Allies lost the Battle of Crete and thousands were forced to surrender to the Germans. What would conditions have been like for these Australians as Prisoners of War?

Additional Notes



Fall of Singapore

When was the Fall of Singapore?

Who fought in the Fall of Singapore?

Where did the Fall of Singapore take place and what geographical features were important?

How did the Fall of Singapore occur?

Why was the Fall of Singapore significant?

What would an Australian have experienced during and after the Fall of Singapore?

Additional Notes



Bombing of Darwin

When was the Bombing of Darwin?

Who was involved in the Bombing of Darwin?

How did the bombing of Darwin occur?

What were some of the Allied losses from the bombing of Darwin?

Why was the bombing of Darwin significant?

What would an Australian have experienced during the bombing of Darwin?
(include geographical considerations in your answer).

Additional Notes



Thai Burma Railway- Australian Prisoner's of War

When was the Thai Burma Railway built?

Who were Prisoners of War and who were their captors?

Where was the Thai Burma Railway built?

How were the Prisoner's of War treated who worked on the Thai Burma Railway?

Why is the Thai Burma Railway significant to World War II?

What was the other name given to the Thai Burma Railway and why do you think this was?

Additional Notes



Kokoda Track Campaign

When was the Kokoda Track Campaign?

Who fought in the Kokoda Track Campaign?

Where was the Kokoda Track Campaign and why is this location significant?

How was the Kokoda Track Campaign fought?

Why did the Kokoda Track Campaign occur?

What would an Australian have experienced on the Kokoda Track Campaign?
(include geographical considerations in your answer).

Additional Notes



Bougainville and New Britain Campaigns

When did the Bougainville and New Britain Campaigns occur?

Who fought in the Bougainville and New Britain Campaigns?

Where were the Bougainville and New Britain Campaigns and why is this location significant?

How were the Bougainville and New Britain Campaigns fought?

Why did the Bougainville and New Britain Campaigns occur?

What would an Australian have experienced as part of the Bougainville and New Britain Campaigns?
(include geographical considerations in your answer).

Additional Notes



Allied Bombing of Germany

When did the Allied Bombing of Germany occur?

Who participated in the Allied Bombing of Germany?

Where did the Allied Bombing of Germany take place and what was the significance of some of the bombing locations?

How did the Allied Bombing of Germany occur?

Why were the allies able to bomb Germany?

What would an Australian have experienced as part of the Allied Bombing of Germany? (include geographical considerations in your answer).

Additional Notes

