

Early German/Axis Successes

Britain's policy of appeasement had failed to stop Hitler. Hitler invaded Poland on 1st September 1939 and Britain and France declared war on Germany two days later. However, there was little fighting for the first six months of the war and this period is known as 'the phoney war'.

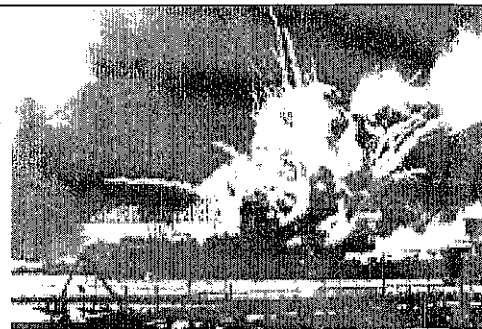
As in World War One, there were two sides in World War Two	
The Axis Powers	The Allied Powers
Germany Japan Italy	Britain Russia USA

The years 1939-1942 saw a string of victories for the 'Axis' powers (Germany and those countries fighting with Germany):

Date	German/Axis Successes
1 st September 1939	Hitler invaded and occupied Poland
April/May 1940	Hitler invaded and occupied Denmark and Norway
10 May 1940	Hitler launched a 'Blitzkrieg' (lightning war) against Holland and Belgium. Both countries were occupied.
19 May 1940	British troops were pushed back to the beach at Dunkirk and had to be rescued by British boats.
22 June 1940	France was occupied by Germany.
Early 1941	Germany and Italy attacked Yugoslavia, Greece and North Africa.
22 June 1941	Germany attacked Russia (Operation Barbarossa). Russia entered the war.
7 December 1941	Japan attacked Pearl Harbour in the USA. The USA entered the war.
February 1942	Japan took Singapore from the British



British Soldiers being rescued from the beach at Dunkirk



An explosion at the US naval base at Pearl Harbor

German/Axis Failures

The Battle of Britain

After France was occupied, Britain stood alone against the Axis powers. Hitler decided to launch an invasion of Britain in June 1940. German bombers flew across the channel and dropped bombs on London and other large cities. British RAF (Royal Air Force) planes defeated the German air force and Hitler was forced to call off the invasion.



A Spitfire chasing a Messerschmitt

Operation Barbarossa

In June 1941, Hitler sent 3 million soldiers and 3,500 tanks into Russia. The Russians were taken by surprise as they had signed a treaty with Germany in 1939. Many Russian cities fell to Germany but Hitler had not expected the conquest of Russia to last into winter. The German soldiers did not have winter clothing and many froze to death. By November 1942 the tables were turning and the Russians won their first victory against Germany at the Battle of Stalingrad.



German soldiers surrendering to the Russians

The Battle of Midway

After the attack on Pearl Harbour, the USA declared war on Japan. On 11th December 1941, Germany and Italy declared war on the USA. The Japanese won a string of victories over the USA for the next six months. In June 1942 however, the USA defeated the Japanese navy at the Battle of Midway. Following this victory, the US navy was able to push the Japanese back.



Exploding oil tanks on Midway Island

El Alamein

During the early part of the war the Axis powers had a number of victories in British controlled North Africa. The Axis powers wanted to capture the important Suez canal which would give them access to the Middle Eastern oil fields. However, the battle, at El Alamein, was won by the Allies. The Germans did not take the Suez canal or the oil fields. This left their tanks and trucks short of fuel and prevented them from taking North Africa.



Victorious allies after the Battle of El Alamein

Activities

1. Why was June 1940 a good time for Hitler to try to invade Britain?
2. How did Operation Barbarossa contribute to the ultimate success of the allies?
3. How did the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor contribute to the ultimate success of the allies?
4. Ironically, it was often the early successes that led to actions by the allies that resulted in ultimate failure for the Axis powers. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain your answer.