

AMERICA AND WWII

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Abstract: *The present paper highlights the influence of the USA on the outcome of WWII. But in order to understand a certain aspect of the war, it is necessary, first of all, to analyze the major elements that triggered the world in this military conflict. Therefore, the first part of this article presents the major causes of the start of the second global conflict (ideologies, economic issues, political difficulties, or territorial expansionism). The USA was reluctant to the idea of participating in a new world war (because of the traumas left by WWI), but it was triggered in WWII by the bloody (and still controversial) Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Immediately, the USA joined Great Britain, the Soviet Union and other allies, in their efforts to neutralize the Axis forces. The American intervention eradicated the Axis occupation on both major war theaters: the Pacific and the one represented by Europe and Africa. The end of the war was triggered by the USA's decision of launching two atomic bombs in the Japanese territories. This decision determined Japan to surrender, but it also created the foundation of the Cold War, a conflict which was the main constituent of the post-war world.*

Keywords: *WWII, the USA, war theaters, battles, causes, events, aftermath.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the 20th century, the world history was marked by two global conflicts. The first one started under the pretext of the assassination of the Austrian Archduke, but it emerged in a zone, which was in a state of conflict, eager to have an event that would lighten the flames of war. The US president, Woodrow Wilson, saw WWI as the perfect opportunity of gaining the desired status of world-wide superpower (and of course, all the benefits which emerged from it). The American participation in the war was almost unnoticeable, but it gained that status because Europe was ruined and the Old Continent was in need of the US help.

One of the greatest moments in the American history was represented by the *Roaring Twenties*. But after ten years, the glory was replaced by the trauma initiated by the dark *Great Depression*. Europe was struck by the American economic issues, which fueled everyone's fear: a new global conflict was about to start.

2. AMERICA AT WAR

2.1 The major causes of WWII. The effects of the *Great Depression* were considered the main causes of the beginning of WWII, but as previously mentioned, this theory is still debatable. The start of the war was determined by various factors, such as: doctrines, philosophies, military actions, social issues, etc. First of all, it is worth to mention *expansionism* (Hitler's desire to regain the territories lost by Germany in WWI and unite the populations of German origin and ancestry under one flag, and with a central government). Then, there were the *political ideologies* (communism, Nazis, Fascism), the *Versailles Treaty* (it was supposed to be a peace treaty, but instead it just created the desire of starting a new war).

It is also worth to mention the *League of Nations* (UN's ancestor) which could not prevent the initial German, Soviet and Italian aggressions (including the *Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact*, Hitler's and Stalin's plan of dividing post-war Europe). The start of the

second global conflict can be related to two distinct phases acting simultaneously: the German invasion in Poland, and the Japanese invasion in China.

2.2 Pearl Harbor. The US population was not at all eager to participate in this war, and the same position was adopted by the Government. The US leaders preferred to maintain the old 19th century perspective, that of being isolated from the European issues. But their quiet life was obliterated in the morning of 7 December 1941, when the Japanese Imperial forces attacked the US Naval Force stationed at Pearl Harbor. The conflict started after the 1931 Japanese invasion of Manchuria. The USA imposed certain penalties for the Empire's actions. The most important one was the oil embargo. 80% of Japan's oil came from America. If Washington had not cancelled the embargo, then Japan's oil would have lasted only two more years. The negotiations between the two sides brought no positive result and the emperor ordered the attack on Pearl Harbor. Japan wanted to neutralize and prevent the American fleet from initiating any operations in the Pacific.

The USA was not ready for such an attack. The US generals were expecting an attack in the Far East, in the Philippines, Indochina, or Thailand. Therefore, the Pearl Harbor base had its unmanned weapons lacking the required ammunition, the aircrafts not being ready for an emergency situation, and other similar problems. The generals also thought that the geography protected Pearl Harbor from torpedo attacks, thus solving the previously mentioned problems.

The emperor did not want his army to attack without a declaration of war. Therefore, Tokyo sent the "14-part Message", which stipulated that Japan put an end to any diplomatic relationship with the USA (it was not actually an accurate declaration of war); but the Japanese embassy in the USA had problems transcribing the message, and the message was delivered to Washington a few hours after the attack. The Japanese planned a three-wave attack, which lasted 90 minutes and killed 2,403 killed and wounded 1,178. Furthermore, eighteen ships were destroyed

(including 5 battleships), 188 aircraft destroyed and 159 damaged. The Japanese lost fifty-five airmen, 9 submariners, and 103 aircrafts (29 destroyed and 74 damaged). The following day, the USA entered WWII.

2.3 The European and North African War Theater. The USA entered a new military global conflict. But this one was going to be much tougher than the previous one. After long debates, Washington's leaders finally adopted Franklin D. Roosevelt's plan of focusing first on neutralizing the Axis forces present in Europe and North Africa, and only afterwards on the Japanese forces.

The first major operation of the US Army was the invasion of North Africa, *Operation Torch*. The Allied commanders believed that neutralizing the German troops situated on those territories would enforce their military force in the Mediterranean Sea and therefore, they could prepare an invasion in South Europe. This operation lasted 8 days, from 8 to 16 November 1942. The command of this operation was given to *General Dwight D. Eisenhower*. The plan of this operation consisted in the invasion of Morocco, Algeria (belonging to Vichy France), and Tunisia. Occupying the territories belonging to the Nazi puppet state of Vichy was not hard (some of the French generals even welcoming the invading troops). But now, the Allied had to prepare a much harder battle, the invasion of Tunisia, or the decisive blow which would close the African theater. And steadily, the liberation troops occupied important territories. After the Axis defeat in *Operation Capri*, the famous German general, Rommel, asked permission to retreat his troops from Africa. He was refused and replaced. This was the beginning of the collapse for the Axis powers stationed in Africa. In the following period of time, they lost more and more territory. Furthermore, the Allies cut down the Axis supply routes. Eventually, the Italian and German troops stationed in Africa had to surrender. From Tunisia, the allies initiated their European conquest. *Sicily* was the first one on the list. This territory was important because, if conquered, it would open the road for occupying Italy's mainland. The allied army was led, again, by Eisenhower. Fierce

battles occurred for every km of the island's territory. The German reaction was to retreat from the Western part of the island in order to create a stronger, compact army, capable of slowing down the Allied advancements. And in the beginning, this decision proved to be successful, the Allies having unsuccessful attempts of occupying territories like Catania for example. But slowly, the Allies managed to break through the Axis lines and to occupy important strategic points like Palermo, one of the Axis supply routes. And this determined the German leaders to retreat their troops in Italy.

The Battle of Italy started. This operation lasted 13 days. Italy was already weakened. Following the defeat in Sicily, numerous anti-war movements occurred, and Benito Mussolini had to resign and leave Italy. The Allies hoped that Mussolini's removal from power would determine a weaker Italian army resistance, and therefore could eliminate Italy from the Axis Powers, and weaken Germany. And indeed, shortly afterwards, the Italians surrendered and joined the Allied Forces. Hitler decided to retreat his troops in Rome and stay there as much as possible in order to halt the Allied advancements towards the German borders and to protect the vital oil supplies from the Balkan area. But the *Wehrmacht* was just a shadow of the former fierce army, which obliterated in the past the European armies. Germany was pushed out of Italy and the entire world was waiting for the decisive blow.

And this decisive blow came in *Operation Overload*, led brilliantly by the same Eisenhower. The assault was one of the major ones in the history of warfare and was made with the help of 8 navies (divided into the Western Naval Task Force and the Eastern Naval Task). The most difficult task was given to the American Units, who had to occupy the best fortified beach, Omaha. After heavy long battles, the Allies occupied important strategic points, and gave the Americans the opportunity of launching *Operation Cobra*, which penetrated the German lines and from that point on, the Nazis' days were numbered. Germany was surrounded. From the West, Germany felt the pressure imposed by the

Allies. And in the East, the Nazis had to face the fierce and powerful *Red Army*. The *Wehrmacht* tried one more counteroffensive, in the *Ardennes Offensive*, but it was an unsuccessful attempt. On 2 May, 1945 Germany surrendered. WWII in Europe was over.

2.4 The Pacific War Theater. But there still was the problem of Japan's Army, which destroyed everything in the Pacific area. The first major battle on this theater was the *Battle of the Philippines*, in which Japan occupied these islands. The Philippines were protected by a weak US Army (most of the troops were deployed on the other war theater) and by inexperienced Filipinos. The Imperial Forces smashed any form of resistance. Roosevelt predicted that America would lose this battle and ordered General MacArthur to leave Philippines and head to Australia in order to become the leader of the Pacific Allied Forces. This decision would represent one of the key elements of the American victory in the Pacific. Japan continued afterwards its Asian conquests and managed to win in battles like the *Wake Islands* or the *Invasion of Indonesia* (which was an important oil provider). Afterwards the Japanese initiated the *Solomon Islands Campaign*. The Imperial Forces wanted to build important airfields, which would cut down the supply routes between the USA and Australia. The Japanese managed to build some of these airfields, but they were not able to use them at their full capacity, mainly because of the problems imposed by the American counteroffensives. The first important US victory came in the *Battle of the Coral Sea* (some say the most important naval battle of WWII). This battle was also the first battle in which aircraft carriers engaged in direct confrontation. The allies managed to halt the Japanese expansion. The Allied forces were aware now that Japan had its weaknesses. Chronologically, the next battle was the invasion of the *Aleutian Islands*, part of Alaska, which would last almost a year, not because of the military power held by the two sides, but because of the remoteness of the area. The victory belonged, as well, to the US troops. But the next battle was one of the most important Allied victories in WWII, the *Battle*

of Midway. Japan tried to trap the US fleet in Midway Atoll in order to determine the USA to capitulate. The battle started with Japan's attempt to gain air superiority, which would have allowed ground troops to occupy the desired territory. Numerous US aircrafts were destroyed, but Japan failed its goal, and, furthermore, the USA attacked its fleet. This result was important because it crippled the Imperial Fleet. Japan did not have enough time to recover.

Japan was pushed to its mainland after the *Guadalcanal Campaign*, in which the Allies managed to secure the supply routes between the USA and Australia, and more importantly occupied *Henderson Field* from where they could launch attacks on Japan's mainland. The battles of *Iwo Jima* and *Okinawa* were the first Allied attacks on Japan's territory. The Imperial forces knew that the end would come, that they were going to lose those territories, and eventually the war. But still, there were blood baths for every inch of territory. The USA occupied Okinawa and Iwo Jima, but knew that a much harder mission will be the occupation of Japan's mainland. And that is why the US Government took the decision which shaped the post-war world: the use of the atomic bomb. The Americans applied *Project Manhattan*. They picked *Hiroshima* and *Nagasaki* to be their targets (they were important military, supply points). *Little Boy* (Hiroshima) and afterwards *Fat Boy* (Nagasaki) were launched. In a few seconds, more than 200,000 people died and

approximately 70% of the cities were destroyed. Japan was in a state of shock. Shortly afterwards, the Emperor ordered Japan to surrender. WWII was over finally.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The USA was triggered in a war which they did not want to enter, but the Pearl Harbor attack determined America to join the allies. Heavy battles took place on the European and African War Theater as well as the Pacific one. It would be hard to imagine what kind of world we would have had nowadays if the USA had not entered the war. America shaped the course of the war and the postwar period. And even more important is the fact that the USA became a worldwide superpower and nowadays it has the status of a vanguard. The question is: for how long?

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