Timeline of WWII

Part I: Phoney War, Blitzkrieg, Dunkirk, Vichy France

* After Germany took over Czechoslovakia, Britain promised to protect Poland since Germany controlled the western border with Poland
* Britain declares war on Germany Sept 3, 1939
* Sept 1939 Poland
* Hitler attacks Poland
* France and Britain declare war but take the time to prepare

aka. “The Phoney War”

* Poland surrenders Sept 30, 1939

Britain’s Phoney War Sept 1939-April 1940

* Britain makes war preparations
* Citizens take it seriously at first but by 1940, they see no threat of war
* Britain sends 158,000 men to France
* France believes in the Maginot Line
  + Attack the Saar but they don’t proceed any further to prepare for the war
  + France is not well equipped for a war

Blitzkrieg - The Lightening War

* April 1940, Denmark is taken, then Oslo, Norway
* May 10, Germany invades Belgium
  + Chamberlain resigns
  + Winston Churchill takes over
* Allies abandon Narvik in early June, 1940 and Norway falls to Germany
* May 15, 1940 Holland surrenders
* May 28, 1940 Belgium surrenders
* N.France is being attacked

Miracle at Dunkirk  
May 26-June 3, 1940

* Hitler orders the slowing of the advance in order to regroup and better prepare in the case of a more organized Allied counterattack
* This gives the Allies time to plan an evacuation of troops at Dunkirk
* “Operation Dynamo”
  + Every possible British ship (even civilian) was called upon to help evacuate the remaining Allied troops
* Over 700 vessels used
* Royal Air Force lost 177 aircraft during the operation
* Royal Navy lost 10 warships.

June 10, 1940 Italy declares war

June 22, France signs an armistice with Germany

Vichy France

* Henri-Philippe Petain will control Vichy France (former commander of the French Army who created the armistice)
* French army is disbanded
  + Kept 100,000 to maintain order
* All Jews turned over to Germans
* Britain attacks and destroys France’s Navy

WWII Timeline

Part II: Battle of Britain, Operation Barbarossa

BATTLE OF BRITAIN  
(Operation Sea Lion)   
July-Oct 1940

Goals of Operation Sea Lion

1. Germans needed to land at Kent and Sussex beaches
2. To land on the beaches, they needed control of the English Channel
3. To control the Channel, they need to control the air

German Advantages

* Luftwaffe had about 2500 planes to use VS RAF with 1200
* Britain had few experienced pilots left
  + Most were killed in the Blitzkrieg

Britain’s Advantages

* RADAR – 51 radar posts ready by spring 1940
* Royal Observer Corps – used binoculars as lookouts
* British planes (Spitfires and Hurricanes) could easily land and refuel
* German bombers could make the flight easily but depending on how much action their fighters had, they may have had to head back to the mainland to refuel or rearm

Events

* July 10, 1940 Germans attack the Straights of Dover
* RAF had lost 150 aircraft while the Luftwaffe had lost 268
* August, 1940: plan of attack changes to focus on bombing air fields and radar stations
  + Even destroying runways would better the German’s chances of controlling the skies
* Weather impeded Germany’s progress to attack with precision
  + August 15, most Stukas had been destroyed

The Blitz

* Hermann Goering orders focus of attack away from radar stations and towards cities
  + Thought it wasn’t important to take out radar
  + Revenge for bombing Berlin
* Late August-early September night bombings by Luftwaffe begins
  + Successful in destroying more southern air fields
* Losses at this point:
  + Luftwaffe @1000
  + RAF @ 550
* Sea Lion soon fizzles out with total losses of 1100 for Luftwaffe and 650 for RAF

Why were the Germans unsuccessful?

1. The Germans fought too far away from their bases so that refueling and rearming were difficult.
2. British fighters could land, refuel and rearm and be in the air again very quickly.
3. It is believed that Fighter Command was perhaps only 24 hours away from defeat when the attack on the cities occurred.
4. The Hurricane and Spitfire were better than Luftwaffe Messerschmitts (turning radius, speed).
5. Radar allowed Fighter Command to see where the Luftwaffe was headed all throughout the battle.

BATTLE OF BRITAIN  
(Operation Sea Lion)   
July-Oct 1940

"The gratitude of every home in our island, in our Empire, and indeed throughout the world, except in the abodes of the guilty, goes out to the British airmen who, undaunted by odds, unwearied in their constant challenge and mortal danger, are turning the tide of the world war by their prowess and by their devotion. Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few. " - Winston Churchill

Yugoslavia and Greece

Invasion of Yugoslavia and Greece

* April 6, 1941, Hitler’s forces, in alliance with the Hungarians and the Bulgarians, invaded Yugoslavia and Greece
  + Hitler intervened to secure his southern flank in anticipation of the invasion of the Soviet Union
* Yugoslavia lays down arms April 18
* Greece taken by the end of April
* Italy had tried to attack Greece but failed, Germany puts the attack on Russia on hold and helps take Greece

Operation Barbarossa

Why did Hitler want to attack Russia?

1. Russian military was weak
   * Seen as unorganized albeit largest
   * Stalin had purged many of the experienced commanders
   * Difficulties in taking Finland although they had a larger army and heavier artillery
2. Hitler knew that the US would enter the war on the Allied side
   * Began the Lend-Lease agreement with nations that would defend the US (Britain)
   * Backed the Chinese against Japan
3. Mein Kampf:

Lebensraum

Anti-Communism

Advance

* 3 million German soldiers and 3000 tanks cross the Russian border
* Luftwaffe destroys 2000 Russian aircrafts before Russia could mobilize them and were thus wiped out
* Within the first 17 days, German Center Army Group alone (3 groups) captured 300,000 men,
  + 2,500 tanks, 1,400 artillery guns and 250 aircraft captured or destroyed

June 22- Sept 1, 1941

Factors that led to German failure

1. Advance was so swift that they had thinned their communication and supply lines
2. The mobilization potential of Russia was underestimated
3. Because of the time loss due to the thinning of the communications, the battle dragged on into the winter where they were not equipped for it
4. Hitler over-confident that this would be another Blitzkrieg
5. Russian road system was not well developed so it was difficult to continue moving forward

Leningrad Sept 1941(- Jan 1944)

* Siege lasted for 900 days
* 3 million civilians with only a 1-2 month food supply
* Throughout the siege, workers still went to factories to produce war materials
* 641,000 civilians dead

Stalingrad September 1942

* Individual streets were fought over using hand-to-hand combat
* Germans failed to fully assert their authority
  + Areas captured by the Germans during the day, were re-taken by the Russians at night
* November 19th, the Russians were in a position whereby they could launch a counter-offensive.
* Marshal Zhukov used six armies, totalling one million men, to surround the city.
  + The German Sixth Army – 250,000 to 300,000 men – was trapped in the city by Zhukov

"My hands are done for, and have been ever since the beginning of December. The little finger of my left hand is missing and - what's even  worse - the three middle fingers of my right one are frozen. I can only hold my mug with my thumb and little finger. I'm pretty helpless; only when a man has lost any fingers does he see how much he needs them for the smallest jobs. The best thing I can do with the little finger is to shoot with it. My hands are finished." -Anonymous German soldier

Battle of Kursk July 1943

* Reaction to the losses suffered so far and especially Stalingrad
  + Need of a morale boost
* Largest tank battle of WWII (8000 tanks – 3000:5000))
* If Germans couldn’t take Kursk, Russians could advance from Kursk to Orel (north) and Kharkov (south)

WWII Timeline

Part III: Pearl Harbor, D-Day

Pearl Harbor

Events leading up to Pearl Harbor

* April 1940 - US fleet moves into Pearl harbour to deter aggressive moves from Japan
* September 1940 – Tripartite Pact – alliance between Italy, Germany, Japan
* March 1941 - Lend Lease Act between US and Britain, France, Russia, China – exchanged supplies for bases
* July 1941 – trade embargo placed on Japan
  + US would not supply Japan with oil
  + Japan retaliates by occupying French Indochina (Vietnam)
* Attacked December 7, 1941

D-Day

* D-Day aka. “Operation Overlord”
* 3 airborne divisions on the flanks
* 150,000 men to land
* Planned deception to confuse the Nazis
* Most obvious place to land was Pas de Calais

D-Day Deception: Operation Fortitude

* Nazis convinced it would be in Calais
* Sending fake radio transmissions
  + Allies obscure the time and place of D-Day
* Creation of fake armies
  + Plywood tanks, trucks, armour created in a studio to deceive Germans
* Creation of a fictitious American million man army
* Sending false spy reports
* Allies bombed Calais twice a day prior to D-Day
* Allied planes dropped strips of aluminum foil to fool the German radars
* Dummy paratroopers are dropped – caused Germans to think twice before reporting an invasion
* When the Allies actually invaded Normandy, Germans thought they were trying to distract them from Calais

June 6, 1944

* Airborne assault first to secure the flanks
* British land on the eastern banks
  + First goal to capture Pegasus bridge then Caen

Seaborne assault

* Ships made it across the Channel because Germans had halted patrols due to bad weather
* First landing at Utah beach by Americans
  + Troops supported by tanks overcame the German defenses with ease
* Omaha beach landings ran into problems
  + Mines, losing bearings for landing location
* By noon, Americans had secured an area 2 miles deep and 6 miles wide at a cost of 3000 casualties
* British occupied an area 6 miles deep and 12 miles wide

Germans

* Still convinced that a major landing was intended for Calais
* Hitler was asleep and could not authorize Panzer divisions (no one wanted to wake him)
  + Hitler set up a system where only he could authorize Panzer deployments
* Slow and confused reaction to the landings

Results

* Allies regained an area 50miles wide and 12 miles deep with 300,000 men stationed there
* More American troops land in Brittany and helped attack German troops trying to break the regained Allied territory