

Classroom

VIDEO

Teacher's Notes

WWII

CONFLICT IN THE PACIFIC

PART 1

1937-1942

Years: 8-12

Duration: 25 mins

INTRODUCTION

World War II began in September 1939, following Germany's invasion of Poland. Both France and Britain declared war on Germany. The war ended when the Japanese agreed to surrender in August 1945 after the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

There were two main theatres of war. In the European theatre, the major Allied Powers, Britain, the USA and the USSR fought two of the Axis Powers, Germany and Italy. In the Asia-Pacific theatre, the third Axis Power Japan, fought Britain, the USA, Australia, China and the Netherlands.

In the Asia-Pacific region the war began when Japan attacked the US naval base at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The Japanese also showed their intentions towards British and Dutch colonies in South-East Asia. Some historians however hold the view that the war in the Asia-Pacific region had already been going for ten years, as Japan had been in conflict with China since its invasion of Manchuria in 1931.

EMERGENCE OF JAPAN AS A WORLD POWER

Japan was an isolated nation until she was opened up following a visit from the US fleet under the control of Commodore Matthew Perry in 1854. European colonial powers followed the lead of the USA and forced Japan to enter into trade treaties and agreements. Faced with superior military and technological superiority, they decided rather than opposing Western nations as China had done, to embark on a course of modernisation and westernisation, while maintaining their own culture.

Borrowing practices used by the Western nations, Japan was able to develop into a military and industrial power within fifty years. This development can be measured by Japan's victory over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5 in which Russia was forced to recognise Japan's predominance in Korea. This victory also allowed Japan to take over areas of the Russian sphere of influence in the Chinese province of Manchuria. During World War I, Japan entered the war on the side of the Allied forces and provided naval and economic assistance to the Allies as well as taking over German territory in East Asia.

From the beginning of the twentieth century there was a strong militarist and imperialist influence in Japan, eventually giving rise to a form of nationalism which favoured further expansion into China. This was balanced by an 'internationalist' approach to world affairs amongst Japan's civilian politicians and business leaders, who sought to advance Japan's interests through trade and peaceful co-operation with other nations. By the 1930s the nationalists had won the struggle, ensuring that Japan would adopt an aggressive and expansionist foreign policy.

Understanding the issues

Explanation of terms: Zaibatsu; Bushido; Shintoism; Meiji.

Research: Why was Japan disappointed with the outcome of the Paris Peace Conference?

Why did the militarists want to establish a Japanese empire in Asia?

What were the Twenty-One Demands presented to the Chinese Government?

Analyse the implications of the Washington Conference for Japan.

Discussion: The nature and impact of Emperor-worship within Japanese society.

Film Study: What does the video reveal about the problem of Japan's lack of resources?

THE USA AND ISOLATIONISM

The USA wanted to avoid being involved in European conflicts. When World War I broke out it was perceived as a European war and the USA remained neutral. It was largely German provocation, highlighted by unrestricted German submarine warfare, which brought the USA into the war on the side of the Allies in 1917.

The President of the USA, Woodrow Wilson, played a major role in the Paris Peace Conference and the setting up of the League of Nations. The success of the League, the arbiter of Wilson's new world order, was heavily dependent on the participation of the USA. However Republican isolationists succeeded in securing its rejection, with the result that the USA remained outside the League and returned to its isolationist roots.

The USA was involved in the Pacific and wanted to maintain an Open Door Policy in China. She

was concerned that Japan had emerged as a Pacific power with territorial ambitions in China. President Harding convened the Washington Conference to deal with the tensions in Asia after the war and the fears of a naval race developing. The challenge for the USA was to contain Japan without provoking war.

Isolationist sentiment strengthened in the early 1930s, with the rise of fascism in Europe increasing fears that the USA might be dragged into another European war. The aim of the Neutrality Acts of 1935-7 was largely to prevent US involvement in war.

Understanding the issues

Explanation of terms: Isolationism; Open Door Policy.

Research: What did the USA hope to achieve from the Washington Conference?

What was the significance of the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928?

How did the Nye Committee's Report of 1936 contribute to isolationist sentiment in the USA?

Discussion: If the USA followed a policy of isolationism, why didn't it cut itself off completely from the political affairs of the rest of the world?

Film Study: How does this film portray the anti-war sentiment of the US Government in the 1930s?

JAPANESE EXPANSION AND MILITARISM

In the 1920s, nationalists within the military believed that Japan should abandon the international system of law and diplomacy, which was dominated by the western powers, and pursue its own interests through military expansion. A fear of overpopulation, economic problems and a shortage of vital raw materials encouraged the belief that Japan needed more territory at the expense of weaker nations. Nationalists developed a rationale for this imperialism of 'Asia for the Asians'. By the late 1930s this developed into the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, with the aim of freeing colonies from the control of western powers such as Britain, France and the Netherlands and placing them under Japanese leadership.

In September 1931 the Japanese army used the pretext of a bomb explosion on the Japanese controlled South Manchurian Railway to seize resource-rich Manchuria, enabling the Japanese Government to create the puppet state of Manchukuo with the last Qing emperor Puyi, installed as emperor.

The invasion of Manchuria went against the Nine-Power Treaty and the League of Nations Covenant. China's plea to the League for military or economic action against Japan invoked little response. Japan followed their act of aggression by resigning from the League in March 1933 and serving notice in December 1934, that they would no longer abide by the naval restrictions of the Washington Conference.

Japan had turned its back on internationalism for a policy of militaristic expansion and a continuation of its aggression in China. The balance of power in Asia was now being dramatically altered.

On July 7 1937, Japanese and Chinese troops clashed on the Marco Polo Bridge, near Beijing. The Japanese used this incident as an excuse to invade China. Within a year, Japan had made many more gains in China. Nanjing, Beijing and Shanghai were captured. Japanese troops committed many atrocities against the Chinese particularly in Nanjing. Captured Chinese soldiers and civilians were often shot, beheaded or used as bayonet practice. Women were raped. Buildings were burned and looted.

Even although the Japanese controlled the main cities and ports in China, the Chinese refused to submit to the Japanese. The Guomindang Government of General Jiang Jieshi, withdrew to the mountains of Chongqing and organised resistance to the invaders. The Chinese communists, under Mao Zedong, proved effective guerilla fighters. However relations between the CCP and the GMD remained poor despite their nominal pact against the enemy in 1936.

In 1940 the military in Japan succeeded in stifling parliamentary government in Japan. The Emperor Hirohito and the Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro, could do nothing without military support. The government was dominated by General Tojo Hideki, the Minister for the Army. Tojo was significant in the formation of an Axis pact with Germany and Italy. This set the stage for the creation of a Japanese empire in the east.

Tojo also insisted on a new Japanese drive south, to invade French Indochina and later the Dutch East Indies. This was now possible because of the tripartite agreement and because both France and the Netherlands had fallen to Hitler. Vichy France which was now under German influence, still had control over French colonies but it wasn't in a position to resist Japanese aggression. In September 1940 the Vichy Government accepted the occupation of Haiphong and North Vietnam. In July 1941 Vichy France allowed the Japanese to occupy the rest of Indochina. The Japanese allowed the French to administer Indochina as long as they could use the facilities available and take whatever resources they required.

Understanding the issues

Explanation of terms: East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere; Vichy; Hakko Ichiu; Guerilla warfare

Research: What was the significance of the following people to the period covered: Jiang Jieshi; Mao Zedong; Tojo Hideki; Hirohito?

Why did the militarists want to establish an empire in Asia?

How did the militarists in Japan go about seizing political power?

What problems did the Japanese face in their efforts to subjugate China?

What was the Axis Pact and how did it help Japanese ambitions in Asia?

Discussion: Could any measures have been taken that would have effectively curbed Japanese aggression and expansion in Asia?

Film study: What does this section of the film **reveal about the behaviour of Japanese soldiers** in war?

How did the Japanese attempt to weaken the forces of General Jiang Jieshi and control China?

THE BOMBING OF PEARL HARBOR

Japan's actions were viewed with alarm by the USA. The US Government wanted Japan to withdraw from occupied territories and to curb their militaristic and imperialistic intentions. In 1938 the USA tried to put pressure on Japan with an embargo on aircraft exports to Japan. After the invasion of Indochina, President Roosevelt's government stopped the sale of iron, oil, steel and rubber to Japan and froze Japanese assets in the USA. However the militarists had no intention of withdrawing from occupied territories. Konoe who was keen to negotiate with the USA, was forced to resign as Prime Minister and was replaced by Tojo.

By mid-1941 the militarists in Japan saw the USA as the main obstacle to the fulfillment of their plans. At this stage France and the Netherlands were occupied, the USSR had been invaded by Germany, and Britain was finding it difficult standing alone.

Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku persuaded Tojo that a surprise attack on the US fleet stationed at Pearl Harbor would weaken US influence in the Pacific, giving the Japanese the necessary time to establish their Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. The Japanese would then have access to the raw materials they required.

The Japanese Fleet under the command of Admiral Nagumo Chuichi, set sail on November 26 1941. It was comprised of six aircraft carriers, two battleships, two cruisers, fifty smaller craft and 423 planes. The fleet sailed

across the North Pacific, between the Aleutian and Midway Islands, and reached its destination undetected, aided by bad weather. On Sunday December 7, 1941, Commander Fuchida Mitsuo led the first wave of 183 aircraft over Pearl Harbor. Although detected by radar, the US failed to act on these warnings. During the two waves of aircraft, eighteen ships were severely damaged, two of which the 'Arizona' and the 'Oklahoma' were a total loss, 188 aircraft were destroyed and 159 damaged, 2403 people were killed including 1177 entombed on the 'Arizona'. Losses to Japanese aircraft amounted to less than ten percent.

However, the attack on Pearl Harbor was not the devastating blow that Yamamoto had hoped for. Four US aircraft carriers had been out on exercises and oil storage areas had not been destroyed. Most of the ships that had been damaged were repaired and took action later on against the Japanese. This sneak attack did a lot to unify the American people and bring the USA into World War II against Japan, Germany and Italy.

Understanding the issues

Explanation of terms: Sneak attack

Research: What were the strategic and political reasons for bombing Pearl Harbor?

Why were the Japanese able to get to, and bomb Pearl Harbor with minimum resistance?

Assess the use of aircraft and aircraft carriers in this conflict.

Why did Roosevelt move much of the Pacific Fleet from California to Pearl Harbor in June 1940?

Assess the role played by Admiral Yamamoto and Commander Fuchida in the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Discussion: Is it possible that President Roosevelt may have deliberately provoked the Japanese into war? Why?

Film study: What does the film suggest about the tactics used by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor?

THE JAPANESE THRUST 1941-1942

While the raid on Pearl Harbor was in progress, Japanese land, sea and air forces were expanding the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Guam surrendered to attacking Japanese forces on December 10, Wake Island on December 23 and Hong Kong on December 25. Manila in the Philippines surrendered on January 2, 1942. Singapore surrendered on February 15, 1942. The attack on Singapore was expected to come from the sea, where the major defences were located. However the Japanese advance came by land, down the Malay Peninsula. Japanese air attacks had devastated Singapore and Allied resistance was ineffective. The loss of Singapore, with the surrender of 85,000 troops was a major blow to the Allied war effort.

The Dutch East Indies was occupied on March 7. Japanese troops also overran New Britain, New Ireland, the Admiralty and Solomon Islands, and landed on the northern coast of Papua New Guinea. Thailand came under Japanese influence and Burma was invaded. At sea, the Japanese sank the British warships *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* off the coast of Malaya on December 10, and defeated other Allied ships in the Battle of the Java Sea on February 27, 1942.

The fears of many Australians were confirmed when the fall of Singapore was followed by two Japanese bombing raids on Darwin on February 19, 1942. Damage to military and civilian

targets was extensive. There is still some debate over the death toll with at least 243 people killed and hundreds injured. Many more attacks occurred over the next two years.

With the US base in the Philippines under threat from the Japanese, President Roosevelt ordered his Pacific Commander, General Douglas MacArthur, to move his headquarters to Sydney, Australia. This was viewed by many Australians as a commitment by the USA to defend Australia.

Understanding the issues

Explanation of terms: Militarism

Research: Why did the supposedly impregnable fortress at Singapore fail to resist the Japanese forces?

What was the impact of the fall of Singapore on both Britain and Australia? Outline the key events of the Japanese bombing of Darwin in February 1942.

How did Australians react to this bombing? The Japanese had much success up to mid 1942. However they also had to confront a number of problems. List these problems.

Discussion: To what extent was there a fear of invasion in Australia in 1942? Was it justified?

Film Study: What role can documentary film play in the understanding of historical issues such as the conflict in the Pacific? What care should an historian take when using documentary film?

Website: Australian War Memorial
<http://www.awm.gov.au>

By the middle of 1942 the Japanese had occupied most of South East Asia. The speed and ferocity of their victories over Allied forces took many by surprise. Japanese control over their new gains was both systematic and brutal. However their victories also created a number of problems for the Japanese. They had to control or subdue the local population, maintain a large network of supply lines, deal with a large number of POWs, administer a wide and varied empire and find ways to get resources from conquered areas back to resource starved Japan.

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