

# New Zealand in the Second World War



# War on Many Fronts

Unlike the First World War, the Second World War is a complex thing to learn about for several reasons:

- It had two very separate, very major conflicts, which occurred in Europe (with Germany as the aggressor) and the Pacific Ocean (with Japan as the aggressor).
- New Zealand's troops were spread across many forces, several of whom were tagged to Britain, such as the Royal Air Force. Some New Zealanders were fighting on the front lines well before the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force had begun to leave New Zealand.
- The technology of war had changed significantly since the First World War. For the first time, countries could fight with planes as well as with ships and infantry. This meant that countries could travel further to invade other territories - as Australia found when Darwin was bombed in 1942.



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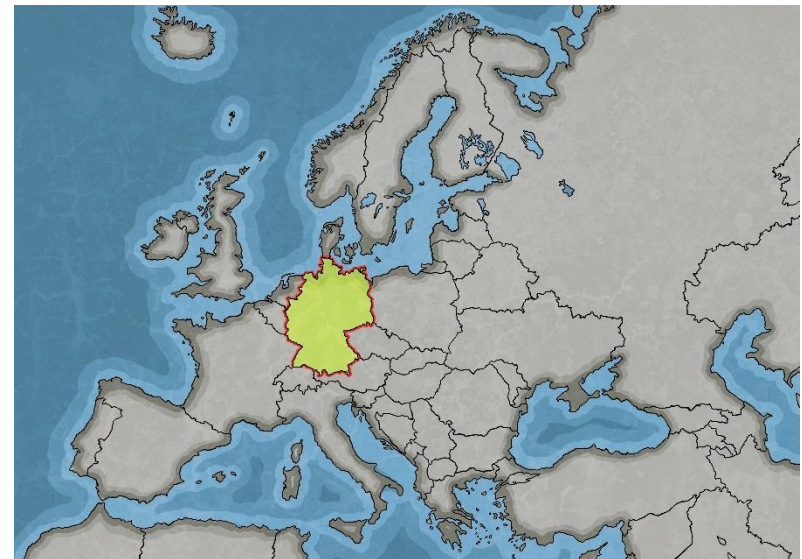
# A New Conflict

## Germany Rises

Following the First World War, an agreement called the Treaty of Versailles was made as a punishment for Germany. The land they had taken was given back to the countries it had been taken from, they were told to pay **reparations**, and they were forbidden from amassing the kind of military might they'd had in 1914.

However, Germany's new leader, Adolf Hitler, thought the Treaty was unfair, and he came to power intending to restore Germany to what he thought of as its former glory. Hitler also wanted to add to Germany's living space, and he decided to do this by **conquest**.

In September 1939, Germany invaded its neighbour Poland, causing Britain and France to declare war. It would not be long until Hitler's ambitions would expand beyond Poland.

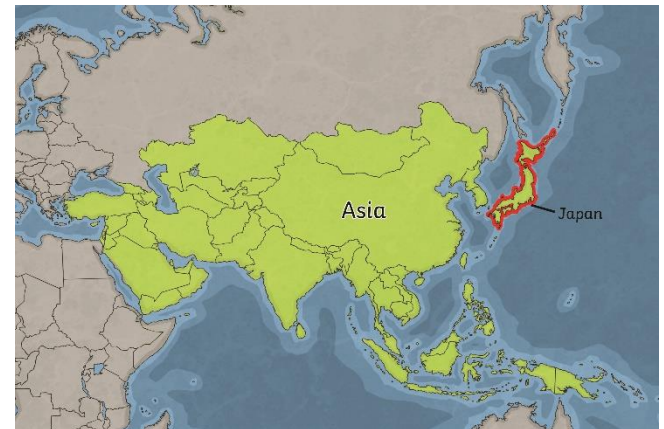
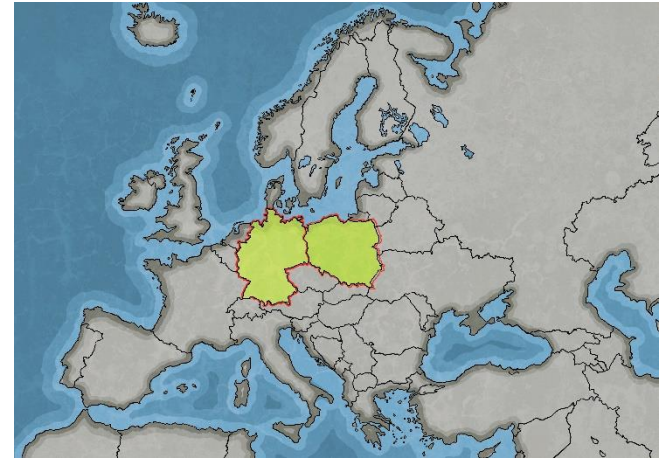


# A New Conflict Aotearoa Decides

Over the course of the war, the Allies and Germany would be joined by various other countries. The side that fought alongside Germany would be known as the Axis.

When the First World War was declared, the New Zealand government felt that it meant New Zealand went to war automatically as part of the **Commonwealth**. This time, however, New Zealand declared war on Germany itself.

A concern closer to home was Japan, which was growing stronger and looking to expand. New Zealand, which still didn't have much military strength, was relying on Britain to help if Japan chose to attack. For this reason, it seemed in the best interests of New Zealand for Britain to be successful in the war in Europe.



# Contributions from New Zealand

New Zealand's leaders decided that as they had in the First World War, they would support the Allies with food production. They also decided again to send military troops, this time in three divisions:

**Air force** - This was the first war in which any nation had an air force. New Zealanders could already serve as part of the Royal Air Force (RAF), and later, they would form the 75th (New Zealand) Squadron. 7000 New Zealanders served as airmen in the Second World War.

**Navy** - New Zealand still only had a few naval cruisers, and both were pledged to the war as part of the Royal Navy. One, the *HMS Achilles*, helped a British squadron to destroy a German warship as early as December 1939.

**Infantry** - The 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force was formed from volunteers, as was a Māori Battalion. They began leaving for Egypt in January 1940.



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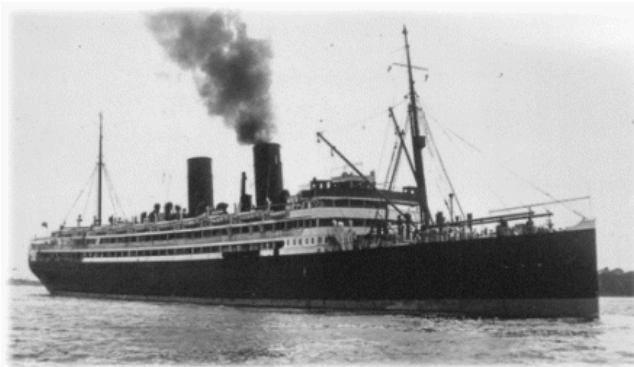
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Transport ship *Rangitata* carries New Zealand troops to the Middle East.

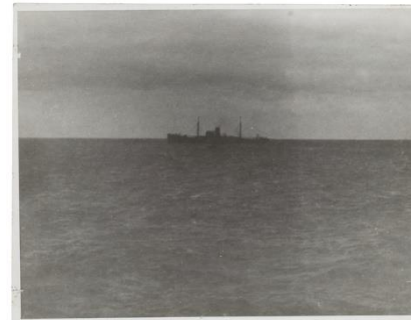
# The Phoney War

For a while, the Second World War was referred to as a 'Phoney war'. After Germany invaded Poland, Europe settled down for a while, and so many world leaders thought it might end quickly and quietly. However, Germany spent this time continuing to build its military strength. When France fell quickly to Germany in May 1940, they realised it was more serious than they thought.

In New Zealand, things began to look more serious when a German raider ship called the *Orion* entered the waters around New Zealand in 1940. It laid mines which had catastrophic effects - steamer *Niagara* was sunk off Bream Head in June. The *Orion* also engaged in gun battles with New Zealand ships, sinking the *Turakina* and the *Rangitane*, killing 50 people.



NZ passenger steamer *RMS Niagara*



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German Raider *Orion*

# Assembling an Army

In 1914 when the First World War began, New Zealand had a territorial force - a group of people who had volunteered to be part of an army should the country ever be invaded. This group formed the start of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force.

This time, New Zealand had no territorial force, so the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force was put together almost from scratch when the war began. New Zealand's leaders also felt it important that the country had a Home Guard - as this time, the threat to home security was closer.

Some New Zealanders were serving for the RAF in Britain, but the bulk of New Zealand infantry arrived in Egypt for training in three 'echelons' beginning in February 1940.

Volunteer numbers were lower than in the First World War, so **conscription** began in New Zealand in July 1940.



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2NZEF soldiers train in the South Island, preparing to join the Home Guard.

# The Battle of Britain

In July 1940, following his successful invasion of France, Hitler decided to invade Britain. The Battle of Britain was mostly a campaign waged by air, with the German Luftwaffe standing off against the Royal Air Force.

New Zealanders were involved in the air for the RAF and on the sea (**minesweeping** in the English channel). They made up part of the infantry division, with part of the second echelon of the 2NZEF being diverted to defend the coastlines of Britain against a German landing.

The Allies won, and this victory is thought to have changed the course of the war, as it meant Hitler then set his sights on the **Soviet Union** - an extremely challenging conquest.



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An example of a minesweeper ship, this one manned by the Australian Navy.



# Battles in Greece & Crete, 1941

Italy had taken over large parts of Libya and Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia), and Britain attacked with some help from troops from the 2NZEF. Thousands of Italian troops surrendered almost immediately.

Italy had also attacked Greece late in 1940, and now it was looking like German reinforcements were coming to the area. Before they could do so, the Allies went to Greece's aid. The first and second echelons of the 2NZEF were part of this force.

However, the Allies lost this battle quickly, and the 2NZEF troops were sent to the island of Crete. The Allied forces put up more of a fight here, but eventually, Crete fell too, and the remaining Allied troops were evacuated.

In June 1940, Italy had entered the war on Germany's side, declaring war on Britain and France. New Zealand declared war on Italy the next day.

Britain was worried about the threat Italy made to the Suez Canal - a vital transport route - and to the supply of oil that came from the Middle East.



ANZAC troops arrive in Crete after evacuation from the Greek mainland.

# North Africa, 1941-1943

Germany and Italy had placed many troops in North Africa early in the war, and now the Allies, including the 2NZEF, sought to overcome them.

- Operation Crusader, November 1941, successfully pushed German forces back from the Libyan port of Tobruk.
- El Alamein:
  - June 1942: The Axis had captured Egypt, and 2NZEF troops assisted with stopping their advance at El Alamein. However, many New Zealanders were taken prisoner.
  - October 1942: A second battle pushed the Axis forces back further.
- Tunisia, November 1942 - May 1943: Allied forces pushed the Axis back further and further until they were finally forced to **capitulate**.



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Allied airmen receive their briefing prior to embarking on Operation Crusader.

# The Threat from Japan

In December 1941, Japan suddenly attacked British and American territories in the Pacific: Malaya, the Philippines, and Pearl Harbour in Hawai'i. They quickly expanded their campaign, capturing Singapore, Burma, and Sri Lanka and bombing Darwin in North Australia.

Since 1940, the USA had provided financial support to the Allies but had stayed out of the fight itself. However, with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, the USA now entered the war officially.

For New Zealand, this new threat was much more direct and changed life significantly for those at home in New Zealand.



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Damage caused to Darwin's new hospital following bombing by the Japanese in early 1942.

# The Home Front

Shocked by the sudden moves made by Japan, New Zealand leaders quickly set up defences at home. 43000 men were called into action as part of the Home Guard, and an infantry brigade was deployed to Fiji, hoping to stop any potential invasion before it arrived on New Zealand shores.

A policy of **man powering** called upon both men and women to give up their current work and move into key industries. Further disruption to regular life came from **rationing** and **blackouts**. It was more and more difficult to avoid the reality of war.

US troops arrived in Auckland and Wellington in June 1942 to aid the defence of New Zealand, should Japan invade.

On New Zealand's hills and coastlines, you can still see many of the gun emplacements, bunkers, and other defences which were put in place when Japan's aggression loomed over New Zealand.

Are there any near where you live?



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New Zealanders building grenades in a factory at home.

# Working Together with the USA

In the second half of the war, New Zealand worked closely with the USA to defend the Pacific from Japan. Most notably, New Zealand forces - infantry, air force, and navy - supported the USA in driving the Japanese from the Solomon Islands, and then a 2NZEF Third Division went to New Caledonia's defence.

US Naval forces moved quickly to stop Japanese expansion in the Pacific, decisively defeating them in the Battles of the Coral Sea and Midway. Because of this, there was a greater danger to New Zealand waters from Germany than from Japan in the Second World War.

New Zealand itself became a base for America to send their servicemen for rest and recuperation, and from September 1942, it also hosted a prisoner of war camp for Japanese soldiers.



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Pilots are briefed on Bougainville Island before taking off on an Anzac offensive against Japanese targets.

# Working Together with the USA

## The war brings New Zealand... hamburgers?

Americans who arrived in New Zealand were given a helpful pocket guide which informed them of various things New Zealand didn't have, such as:

- Donuts
- Waffles
- Good coffee
- Nightclubs
- Hot dogs
- Hamburgers

However, local industries quickly popped up to provide them with these home comforts.

# Ending the War In Europe

The Allies aimed to weaken Germany by chipping at their defences in multiple areas. Invading Sicily in 1943, the Allies then landed at the bottom end of Italy and, following Italy's surrender, pushed Germany north. However, the main war effort was still in Northern Europe.

- Battle of the Atlantic - throughout the war, German forces had tried to cut off supply lines to Britain. This ongoing conflict was finally won by the Allies in 1944.
- Air bombardment of Germany - many New Zealanders took part in the air force campaign, which aimed to disrupt German production of supplies for the war.
- D-Day - the Allies (10 000 2NZEF troops included) landed at Normandy in France. Over the next three months, they systematically drove German forces back to free France from German occupation.
- The Soviet Union was also working to drive Germany back from the North, and finally, Russian troops captured Berlin. Germany capitulated in May 1945.



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German soldiers travel by horseback to surrender to Allied forces.

# Ending the War In the Pacific

Japan had maintained a defensive perimeter around itself in the Pacific, which America broke down through a series of campaigns.

After Germany's capitulation, Britain was able to provide a Pacific Fleet (including New Zealand ships *Achilles* and *HMNZS Gambia*), who joined American forces to subdue Japan. The next step was to be an infantry invasion of Japan, and this campaign was expected to take many Allied lives.

However, the invasion was avoided when America dropped atom bombs on the Japanese cities Hiroshima and Nagasaki, at the same time that Russian troops launched an onslaught in Manchuria (a Japanese-occupied area of China). Japan capitulated six days later, on the 15th of August, 1945.

After the war, 12 000 New Zealand troops remained in Japan as an occupying force, finally returning home in 1948.



Following Japan's surrender, a Japanese official passes the keys for the Yokosuka Naval Base to Captain Buchanan of Australia.



# Casualties

In total, around 140 000 New Zealanders served in the Second World War. 104 000 of these were in the 2NZEF.

New Zealand suffered 11 928 fatalities.

Compared to the First World War, many more New Zealanders were held as prisoners of war by their enemies. Only about 500 New Zealanders had been POWs in the First World War; over 8000 were captured in the Second World War.

While there were rules around the treatment of POWs under the **Geneva Convention**, Japan operated outside these. Many New Zealanders who had been held in Japanese camps suffered long-term ill-health as a result of their time in captivity.



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ANZAC avenue in POW Stalag 383 in Germany - named for its neighbouring areas for New Zealand and Australian POWs.

# Glossary

## Blackout

- a period where the power to lights is turned off so that enemy aircraft can't attack cities and towns.

## Capitulate

- to surrender, with terms agreed on in advance.

## Conquest

- the act of conquering a place or thing.

## Conscription

- when citizens are enrolled into military service by force.

## Geneva Convention

- rules that tell countries at war how to treat the wounded and captured enemy forces and enemy civilians.

## Man powering

- when citizens are redeployed from regular work into industries supporting the war effort.

## Minesweeping

- removing mines which have been dropped at sea.

## Rationing

- controlling the amounts people can use of certain things.

# Glossary

## Reparations

- money or materials paid or to be paid by a country losing a war to the winner to make up for damages done in the war.

## Soviet Union

- a group of countries, led by Russia, which broke apart in 1991.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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New Zealand airmen.

