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About the Author

Steven Greif has been named a “Distinguished Alumni” of Southwestern Oregon Community College, where he earned his Associate of Arts degree. His Bachelor of Arts degree in history came from Oregon State University, where he won several awards for student writing. He also studied colonial history at the College of William and Mary and obtained his Interdisciplinary Master’s degree in history and geography at the University of Oregon. For 32 years, Greif taught leadership and civics classes, Advanced Placement® American history, and Pacific Northwest history at North Bend (Oregon) High School, and coached track and field as well. He was honored with the Oregon Education Association’s “Excellence in Education Award” in 1996 and was named “Citizen of the Year” in North Bend in 2005. Greif has been a volunteer member of the Coos County Historical Society Board of Directors since 1999. Since retiring in 2010, he has taught night classes at the local community college.

Lesson 34

WW II Ends in Europe

A. D-Day

¹By 1944, the Allied nations had started to close in on the Axis Powers of Europe (Germany and Italy). ²The Soviet Army had pushed German troops west into Poland. ³American and British forces had cleared the Nazis out of Africa and were pushing north up the Italian peninsula. ⁴By mid-year it was time to launch an attack on a third European front—across the English Channel and into northern France. ⁵Under the leadership of U.S. General Dwight Eisenhower, British, Canadian, and American military officials prepared for “Operation Overlord” months in advance. ⁶It was important to keep the cross-channel attack as secret as possible so that Hitler could not concentrate his defensive forces. ⁷In case spies learned of the invasion, Allied officials never referred to the specific moment the attack would begin. ⁸Instead their plans only referred to “D-Day” and “H-hour.”

⁹The Allies sent the largest armada (a huge fleet of ships) ever assembled across the English Channel to land on German-controlled shorelines of the Normandy region of northern France on June 6, 1944—a day thereafter known in history as D-Day. ¹⁰More than 5,000 vessels transported nearly 200,000 troops while 11,000 Allied aircraft

D-Day Invasion



→ U.S. Troops

provided air cover and support. ¹¹As the battle began on the Normandy beaches, President Roosevelt made a radio address to tell the American people about the invasion. ¹²He led a prayer which said in part: “Almighty God: Our sons, pride of our nation, this day have set upon

a mighty endeavor, a struggle to preserve our Republic, our religion, and our civilization, and to set free a suffering humanity ... Help us, Almighty God, to rededicate ourselves in renewed faith in Thee in this hour of great sacrifice.”

¹³It took a week to fully secure the beaches. More than 4,000 Allied troops lost their lives in the D-Day invasion, with thousands more wounded, captured, or missing. ¹⁴By the end of June, nearly three-quarters of a million Allied troops, thousands of vehicles, and tons of equipment were safely landed. ¹⁵Allied armies started marching inland, liberating (setting free) dozens of French towns that had been controlled by German (Nazi) forces. ¹⁶By late August, the capital of France (Paris) was also released from the grip of the Nazis, after four years of German control.

B. The Battle of the Bulge

¹⁷As American, Canadian, British, and French forces moved east in the fall of 1944 to launch a full-scale assault on the Nazis, Hitler ordered a last-ditch counter-offensive (an attack against someone who has already attacked you). ¹⁸In mid-December, the German military succeeded in pushing back a

weak point in the American position. ¹⁹A bend in the U.S. frontlines was created that was 80 miles long and 50 miles wide. ²⁰The so-called “Battle of the Bulge”



U.S. troops fought winter and the Axis Powers at the Battle of the Bulge.

lasted for a month and was one of the toughest U.S. battles of the war. ²¹More than 55,000 U.S. soldiers were killed or wounded in the fight. ²²In one desperate situation, an American unit that was nearly surrounded by German forces and weakened from the snowy winter conditions, was told to surrender by the Germans. ²³U.S. General Anthony C. McAuliffe sent back a one-word reply to the Nazi commander—“Nuts!”—which inspired his troops to continue to fight. ²⁴Eventually McAuliffe and the Allied forces prevailed (succeeded, won). ²⁵Germany was now out of manpower and equipment and open to an invasion of Germany itself in the spring of 1945.

C. The Holocaust

²⁶As early as 1942, Americans had started to hear about atrocities (behavior that is wicked, ruthless, or extremely cruel) in prisoner-of-war camps in areas controlled by the Nazis. ²⁷As Allied troops moved into Germany and Poland in 1945, and entered the camps, the evidence was overwhelming: the Axis Powers had systematically killed more than six million Jews and several million more gypsies, communists, Polish Catholics, and others deemed unfit to live under Nazi rule. ²⁸“The things I saw beggar description,” wrote General Eisenhower when he entered a death camp. ²⁹“The visual evidence and the verbal testimony of starvation and cruelty were so overpowering as to leave me a bit sick.” ³⁰He and his troops viewed dead bodies of prisoners stacked like firewood, train cars holding piles of human bones, and huge pits filled with thousands of murdered people. ³¹They took photographs and wrote personal descriptions of what they saw so that others would later believe the horrors they had witnessed.



Allied troops and surviving prisoners view a pile of bodies at a Nazi death camp.

³²About 75 percent of European Jews, a religious group called inferior by the Nazis, had been sent to poison-gas chambers or shot, in a program Nazi rulers called “the Final Solution.” ³³Historians have since labeled this event as the “Holocaust.” ³⁴A holocaust is defined as “complete destruction by fire.” ³⁵Many of the dead in Nazi death camps, like Auschwitz or Dachau, had been burned in crematoriums (buildings where bodies were burned into ashes).

D. V-E Day

³⁶Soviet troops raced into the heart of Germany from the east as British and U.S. forces came from the west in the spring of 1945. ³⁷Just as victory in WWII seemed near, Americans were shocked to learn that their president had died.

³⁸Franklin Roosevelt had been reelected to a fourth consecutive term as president in November of 1944. ³⁹The next February, he traveled to Yalta in the U.S.S.R. to meet with Britain’s Winston Churchill and the Soviet leader, Josef Stalin, to discuss how to conclude the war. ⁴⁰The trip weakened FDR, and the exhausted president died of a stroke on April 12, 1945, within a month of taking the oath of office for his fourth term. ⁴¹Harry S. Truman had been a U.S. Senator from Missouri until his 1944 selection as Roosevelt’s vice president. ⁴²He felt ill-prepared to take on the responsibility of Commander-in-Chief. ⁴³“Last night the moon, the stars, and all the planets fell on me,” he told reporters on his first day as FDR’s successor.

⁴⁴Favorable war news soon reached President Truman and Americans, however. ⁴⁵At the end of April, Italy’s Benito Mussolini was captured and executed by Italian fighters, and Soviet troops invaded Berlin, Germany, closing in on Hitler’s headquarters.



The funeral procession for FDR in Washington, D.C., in 1945.

⁴⁶As the Allied troops advanced on his headquarters, Adolf Hitler committed suicide on April 30, 1945. ⁴⁷Surviving leaders in Germany soon surrendered to the Allies. ⁴⁸On May 8, 1945, Americans celebrated V-E Day (Victory in Europe Day).

⁴⁹But President Truman had little time to enjoy the victory. ⁵⁰Japan was still at war in the Pacific, and now communist Soviet Union was in control of most of Eastern Europe. ⁵¹Truman hoped that a new organization, the United Nations, could help resolve some of the thorny issues remaining. ⁵²As FDR had urged at the Yalta Conference, the United Nations was formed as an international organization for cooperation among nations of the world. ⁵³Unlike its earlier cousin, the post-WWI League of Nations, the United Nations was fully supported by the U.S. Congress.

Fun Fact Feature

Which major world city is the headquarters for the United Nations?

1. Where did D-Day take place?
 - a. across the Mediterranean Sea on the Italian peninsula
 - b. in the Soviet Union (USSR)
 - c. on the deserts of northern Africa
 - d. across the English Channel in Normandy, France

Which sentence best supports the answer?

2. About how long after “D-Day” was the capitol of France liberated?
 - a. two days
 - b. two weeks
 - c. two months
 - d. two years

Give Evidence:

3. What WWII conflict was named for the shape of the battle lines there?
 - a. D-Day
 - b. Battle of Berlin
 - c. Battle of the Bulge
 - d. Battle of Paris

Which sentences best support the answer?

4. What did President Roosevelt do on D-Day?
 - a. lead a national prayer on radio
 - b. commanded the invasion over the English Channel
 - c. made a famous speech before Congress
 - d. nothing, as it was a secret mission.

Which sentences best support the answer?

5. When did Franklin Roosevelt die?
 - a. just after WWII ended in Europe
 - b. just a month after starting his fourth term as president
 - c. shortly after the D-Day invasion
 - d. just after Britain’s Winston Churchill but before the death of USSR’s Josef Stalin

Which sentence best supports the answer?

6. Which high-level American official viewed the Nazi death camps as the United States invaded Germany at the end of WWII?
 - a. President Roosevelt
 - b. President Truman
 - c. General Anthony C. McAuliffe
 - d. General Dwight Eisenhower

Which sentence best supports the answer?

7. Explain the term “Holocaust” (with a capital “H”).

8. Why did Americans celebrate on May 8, 1945?
 - a. The D-Day invasion was a success.
 - b. Germany surrendered and WWII ended in Europe.
 - c. The Axis dictators Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini were both captured on that day.
 - d. Americans won the Battle of the Bulge.

Which sentences best support the answer?

9. What new organization was created at the end of WWII to help foster international cooperation?
 - a. League of Nations
 - b. Yalta Conference
 - c. Auschwitz
 - d. United Nations

Which sentence best supports the answer?

Written Response Question

10. Look at the 1944 political cartoon of D-Day to answer the questions.
- a. Who is the main person drawn in the cartoon? What evidence from the lesson and cartoon supports your answer?



- b. Whose hand might be resting on the shoulder of the person in this cartoon? What evidence from the cartoon leads you to that conclusion?

- c. What is the soldier looking at in this cartoon? What evidence from the lesson and cartoon supports your answer?

- d. Explain the meaning of the phrase written on the man's shoulder?

Fun Fact Finale

The United Nations headquarters is in the United States in New York City.

