

HISTORY 396: TOPICS IN HISTORY
WORLD WAR II SEEN THROUGH MODERN EYES

3 Semester Hours
T, 7:10-9:50 pm

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World War II was the greatest military conflict of all time. At least 60 million human beings lost their lives during or directly after the war. It shaped the world in which we now live--politically, socially, economically, militarily. Numerous events during the last few years are the product of World War II. Obvious examples include the Berlin Wall and German unification, Swiss bankers' use of Nazi assets, divided Korea, and the hostile reaction of the Chinese government to Japan's remembrance/celebration of that country's participation in the war. Perhaps less obvious, but equally important, are the large scale entry of women into the labor force, the racial integration of American society, and the impact of the GI Bill upon higher education.

This course will focus upon the war itself--what happened--but also link those events to the world we see today. There are five reasons why a reexamination of World War II as a set of historical events is more profitable now than it might have been twenty years ago. First, nearly all of the major participants in the war now are deceased. While it is a significant disadvantage that we are no longer able to talk with them, it also means current discussions no longer are influenced by the sometimes self-serving recollections of participants, particularly at the level of command. This will also afford the opportunity to talk about how history ultimately is written and what the role of participants is or should be in that process. Second, the demise of the Cold War has opened new sources of information, especially those in the former Soviet Union. A prominent example is Antony Beevor's, *The Fall of Berlin, 1945*, which presents important new information on that climactic episode of the war in Europe. Third, important revelations concerning code breaking and message interception that bear on the ultimate conduct of the war have come to light as the ULTRA and MAGIC projects have been given publicity. Fourth, sophisticated computer software now is available that enables us to undertake counterfactual "what if" experiments concerning the critical wartime decisions. Fifth, using the advantage of hindsight, we now have the capability to undertake a more precise assessment of major societal/world developments that either were begun or were accentuated by the war, including rapid American industrialization, migration to California, the movement of African-Americans out of the south, racial integration, permanent increases in the proportion of women in the labor force, changing sex mores, the end of

colonialism, the creation of Israel, the dawn of the Atomic Age, and the advent of the cold war.

With new sources of information and different ways of looking at events and people, there is ample reason to study World War II. In addition, and again relying upon hindsight, we now know that many events in World War II might have turned out quite differently than they actually did. This provides us with the ability to reevaluate the role and wisdom of most of the major military personalities in the war. Hindsight is wonderful!

In sum, there is abundant reason to take another look at World War II. We will undertake that reappraisal by reading, viewing appropriate videos, listening to both participants and experts, and utilizing computer simulations to undertake counterfactual historical experiments.

The Textbooks

John Keegan, The Second World War (New York: Penguin Books, 1989).

Keegan, an Englishman, is a renowned military historian. His recent history is well written, well researched, and offers more analysis than most previous histories. Also, it takes advantage of recent military intelligence revelations that have changed our views of how and why events occurred. Note: Keegan was on the Old Dominion campus in 1997 and taught one evening in this class.

Guy Sajer, The Forgotten Soldier (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

Sajer was a very young Alsatian who grew up of mixed German and French parentage. He enlisted in the *Luftwaffe*, but failed its pilot tests and was assigned to a support unit on the Eastern Front. Subsequently, he volunteered for service in *Grossdeutschland*, an elite German army division that deliberately contained soldiers from all of the areas of the greater German Reich. Sajer fought for almost four years against the Russians on the eastern front. His story is regarded as the best first person account of the utter horror experienced by the millions of combat infantrymen on both sides of the line in the former Soviet Union. I should note, however, that some critics do not believe he actually was in *Grossdeutschland* when and where he said he was. We'll discuss the implications of this.

Reading Assignments, Etc.

The most important thing you can do is to read all of Keegan as quickly as possible in order to obtain a good overview of the war. Then, as we progress through the material, reread the appropriate chapters, as suggested below. You should have completed, and be ready to discuss and write about Sajer by the middle of March. Note that the order in which we cover several of these topics is a function of when our guests are available and we must be flexible in that regard.

The Web Site

There is a Blackboard Web Site for this class. Its address is: <http://www.blackboard.odu.edu>.

The Web Site contains the following:

- Syllabus
- Copies of the Weekly Problems
- Copy of the Final Examination Questions
- Copies of most maps and tables distributed in class
- A World War II Time Line
- Short Biographies on Major War Participants and Leaders
- Library citations for most books, articles mentioned in class

Other Web Sites

- There are hundreds of excellent WW II web sites, though some contain propaganda and significant errors. But, *caveat emptor!*
- The best single place to start is the book, *World War II on the Web: A Guide to the Very Best Sites* (J. Douglas Smith and Richard Jensen, SR Books, Wilmington, DE, 2003).
- Most major World War II documents made be found at:

www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/wwii/wwii.htm

Examinations, Etc.

Nearly every week, I will give you a question to answer or an exercise to complete that will be due the next class period. Typically, your answer will not exceed two typed pages, single-spaced. You will do eleven of these during the semester. I will discard your lowest score before computing your average on these questions. This will allow you to miss a class, or mess up, once. Two of the beneficial effects of the questions are that they require you to come to grips with specific important material, and they require you to written coherently.

We will have two midterm examinations and a final examination. The first midterm likely will occur on 17 February and will cover Sections 1-6. The second midterm likely will occur on 13 April and will cover Sections 7-13. Each separate midterm examination will account for 25 percent of your final grade.

In contrast to the two midterm examinations, **the final examination is open book, open notes**. On or about 30 March, I will supply you with a list of about 50 questions from which I will select all of your final examination questions on the actual examination day (which is 4 May). You are encouraged to spend exorbitant amounts of time studying and preparing answers to these

questions, and you may work in groups with other students, and collude and conspire, in order to do so. However, once you enter the classroom for the final examination, all collusion with other students must end. You may bring any materials you wish to the final examination, including semi-prepared or fully prepared answers. However, you must rewrite the answer for me on the final examination day. If this class imitates the behavior of other classes, it is likely that most students will spend more time preparing for this final examination than almost any other. The final examination accounts for 25 percent of your final grade.

You will not be graded on your class participation; however, it will be taken into account to "tip" you from one grade to the next when you are on the borderline.

Grade Determination

Problems and Exercises	25 percent
Midterm I	25 percent
Midterm II	25 percent
Final Examination	25 percent

Note that I will average the letter grade you receive on each of these four course segments in order to arrive at your final grade. The points you are assigned on one examination are non-comparable to the points you receive another examination, on the problems, or on the final examination. Further, I do **not** grade on a 90 to 100 = A. 80 to 90 = B, etc., basis. Your final point total, then, is not the determinant of your grade, but the letter grades are. I do assign + and – grades.

Important Dates

First Class Day	15 January
Last Drop Day, No Penalty	18 January
Midterm I	19 February
No Class: University Vacation	11 March
Midterm II	15 April
Final Examination	6 May

Some Ground Rules

You are responsible for everything that is covered in every class. However, class attendance is not required and you will not be graded on class attendance.

Please do everything in your power to avoid missing either a scheduled examination or the due date for a writing assignment. If you find that you must miss the examination, or turn a writing assignment in late, please call me beforehand to state your case. I can be convinced, but you will

need some evidence. Use e-mail whenever possible to alert me if you have a problem.

You may feel free to call me at my office or at my home to discuss any matter relating to the course. In addition, I encourage you to utilize e-mail at any time to talk with me. It's a great way to stay in contact and you may submit your weekly problems via e-mail in an emergency. The time on the e-mail must be prior to our class session, as we will discuss each problem at the beginning of the class in which it is due.

Please **turn off all cell phones, Blackberries** (and other electronic communications devices) when you enter the classroom. Active cell phones disrupt the class and exhibit disrespect both for other students and for the professor. You are subject to dismissal from the class if you violate this rule.

Research and Citations

You commit a serious violation of Old Dominion University's academic policies and the University's Honor Code if you plagiarize information or sources (i.e., do not provide appropriate citation for the work of others that you have used). When you write for me, I will assume your thoughts are your own. If not, then you must cite your sources---which is an excellent idea in any case if you want to buttress you case. The Internet is a wonderful tool; however, if you quote from it or any outside source, then you must provide me with a searchable citation that shows the source of your material. Failure to do so will result in your receiving an F for the course. Take this obligation seriously.

1) 15 January

Read: Keegan, Chaps. 1,2

Video: A New Germany

The Prewar Situation in Europe: economic, political, social, geographic
Hitler
Other People, Events, and Attitudes

Note that the last day for a no penalty withdrawal is 13 January

2) 22 January

Problem I due

Read: Keegan, Chaps. 12,13,14

Prewar Situation in the Pacific

Japanese Expansion Prior to Pearl Harbor
Pearl Harbor
Pearl Harbor to Midway

Intensive Examination of Battle of Midway

3) **29 January**

Problem II due

Read: Keegan, Chaps. 3,4,6,7,8
Video: France Falls

German Expansion in Western Europe Prior to the Invasion of the Soviet Union

4) **5 February**

Problem III due

Read: Keegan, Chap. 14,15,16

Midway
Japanese Momentum Breaks
The Home Fronts
Japanese Internments and Related Issues Today
Role of Women
Role of African-Americans

5) **12 February**

Visit by Kendall Eakes, B-26 pilot

Problem IV due

Read: Keegan, Chaps. 9,10,11
Video: Barbarossa

German Invasion of the Soviet Union
Battle of Moscow

Intensive Examination of the Battle of Stalingrad

6) **19 February**

Read: Keegan, Chaps. 17,18,19

North Africa
Sicily
Italy

MID-TERM EXAMINATION ONE OCCURS DURING THE SECOND HALF OF THIS CLASS, BUT WILL COVER ONLY SECTIONS (1) THROUGH (5).

7) **26 February**

Problem V due

Read: Keegan, Chaps. 5,22
Video: segments from Whirlwind

Air War in Europe
U-Boat Warfare in the Atlantic

Visit by Mrs. Hildegard Demmert of Williamsburg, who grew up in wartime Germany and her husband Don, who flew a B-17 over Germany, was shot down, and spent time in a prison camp

8) **4 March**

Problem VI due

Read: Keegan, Chaps. 15,16
Video: The Island to Island War

Island Hopping in the Pacific
Pacific Air War
Submarine Warfare in the Pacific

9) **11 March**

Read: Chap. 26

Since we do not have class on this date, you should spend time reading Keegan and Sajer!

10) **18 March**

Visit by David Katz of Chesapeake, a Holocaust Survivor

Problem VII due

Resistance and Guerrilla Warfare
Codebreaking and Intelligence
Ultra and Magic
Evaluating Combat Effectiveness

11) 25 March

Problem VIII due

Read: Keegan, Chaps. 24,25,26,27,28

Kharkov and Germany Recovery in the East
Kursk
Germany Retreats to its 1939 Borders
Battle of Berlin

12) 1 April

Visit by Capt. R.A. Gohr, USN Pacific veteran

Problem IX due

Read: Keegan, Chaps. 29,30,31,32

We will discuss *The Forgotten Soldier*
Final Island Battles in the Pacific
Atomic Bomb

13) 8 April

Problem X due

The War Conferences: Atlantic Charter Through Yalta
War Aims of the Various Nations

14) 15 April

Read: Keegan, Chap. 23
Videos: Remember; Reckoning

Normandy
Battle of the Bulge

MID-TERM EXAMINATION NUMBER TWO OCCURS IN THE LAST HALF OF THIS CLASS, BUT WILL COVER ONLY SECTIONS (6) THROUGH (13).

15) 22 April

Visit by Chris Behnke of Knotts Island, NC, a Marine veteran of the Iwo Jima invasion

Problem XI due

The Holocaust in Europe
German War Crimes
Japanese War Crimes
Allied War Crimes

16) 29 April (Last Regular Class Session)

Visit by Dr. William Whitehurst, Old Dominion University faculty member, former U.S. Congressman and USN Pacific veteran

Read: Keegan, Chap. 33

Winners and Losers in World War II
What difference did the war make?

Topics: If we have time, we'll choose several topics that especially interest you. The following are examples of the types of topics we could cover:

- A. The SS
- B. Plots on Hitler's Life
- C. Prisoners of War
- D. The Resistance in Europe and German Governance/ Oppression
- E. Nuremburg Trials and the Japanese Nuremburg
- F. Russian View of WW II
- G. Hitler and his generals' alleged military mistakes
Video: How Hitler Lost the War
- H. Race War in the Pacific
- I. The War in China and Communism

- J. Myths About WW II
- K. Who Were the Best Soldiers? Combat Effectiveness
- L. WW II as an Economic Contest
- M. Alternative WW II Scenarios

17) **6 May**

FINAL EXAMINATION: The questions already are posted on the web site. I'll pick three or four questions from that list.