World War II Civilians and Soldiers: Crash Course European History #39

Crash Course: European History
https://youtube.com/watch?v=rlx6ur_D51s
https://nerdfighteria.info/v/rlx6ur_D51s

===== (00:00) to (02:00) =====

Hi, I'm John Green and this is Crash Course European History.

So total war involves the participation of entire populations as we saw with World War 1. But if anything, populations participated far more, both willingly and unwillingly, across Eurasia and Africa during World War 2. Lethal weapons played a huge role, of course, but so did human labor, and the systems created to capture and allocate resources, not just guns and ships, but also food and medications and even books. To cite just one example, shortly before the American writer F. Scott Fitzgerald died in 1940, he tried to find one of his books at several bookstores, but none carried them because he and his work were almost entirely forgotten until the U.S. army started sending out armed services editions of novels to soldiers in the war. Among the books distributed was Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby,* which went from being almost out of print to being a great American novel thanks to the U.S. soldiers who read it and the army that distributed it.

In military history, we tend to focus on the generals and the weaponry, both of which are important, but to really understand World War 2, we also need to look at the experiences of soldiers and civilians.

[Intro]

Most Europeans did not welcome the war. I mean, remember World War 1 had only ended a couple of decades earlier and it had been a horrific trauma that many felt hadn't in the end done much to make the world better.

In Germany, however, many soldiers were riding a wave of nationalist enthusiasm that Hitler had aroused with his attacks on the Versailles Treaty and the takeover of the Rheinland, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. And they were also most enthusiastic about the invasion of Poland in 1939. This brings us to a big point in our study of history: we like to cordon evil off to make evil the domain of a few demented individuals, ideally individuals who seem quite different from us.

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But whether it's transatlantic slave trade or Nazism or genocide we'll explore next week. We see again and again that evil is not the product of demented individuals. It is the product of demented social orders. Yes, it took a leader like Hitler to encourage others to dehumanize and destroy the lives of outsiders. But why are we willing to listen to such voices?

And, so, another reason to look at the war, as experienced by so-called regular people, is that it paints in stark relief the reality that evil is not exceptional.

But, right, back to the war.

Italian soldiers also enthused not just over their conquest over Ethiopia but of Mussolini's attacks that coordinated with Germany's. Even in the depths of battlefield suffering commitment and loyalty to Mussolini were very strong.

"Terrible night from the seventeenth to the eighteenth." one wrote home. "In that night, which I will remember all my life, which I would pass entirely on foot under the snow and rain that soaked my shoes... and froze three toes. The only thing that keeps me always on my feet and always ready: Faith in God and in the Duce (i.e. Mussolini)".

Throughout the wars, soldiers suffered and died in extraordinary numbers. But civilian losses were even worse. In fact, they were much worse. Across Europe houses, public buildings and factories were bombed with entire towns and villages sometimes obliterated along with their inhabitants. In Britain close to one-third of all housing was entirely destroyed. Germans dropped thirty thousand bombs on the city of Swansea alone in a three-day raid in 1941. The allies, in turn, firebombed German cities including Dresden which became the subject of Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

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Still, soldiers endured unendurable hardship especially on the Eastern Front and especially as Hitler stopped the production of warm winter clothing and other necessities. Many soldiers froze to death. But they somehow still remained motivated. As is often the case in war soldiers and the personnel who served them, even if not ideologically aligned with the governments they served, often reported ultimately fighting not for country or for ideology but for their comrades who they came to see as bands of brothers and sisters. To cite one example, Vera Ivanovna Malakhova, a Russian doctor in the prolonged and horrific Battle of Stalingrad, noted she was saved by the senior physician in her regiment as he found a horse, gave her his spare pair of slacks and wrapped the horse's mane around her hands. Eventually, they found more soldiers and together they found safety. "And that's how I got out of the encirclement," she said "thanks to the loyalty of the senior physicians and the unity of the comrades-in-arms".

And, while, we often think of the lives of soldiers as being all about shooting or being shot, when you read accounts written by regular soldiers one thing that comes up, again and again, is the daily challenges, the miseries of being cold and tired and hungry.

Did the center of the world just open? There's some Campbell soup here which I am going to enjoy later.

We don't talk nearly enough in military history about food. Soldiers with the constant marching and digging need to eat a lot. Strategies for feeding soldiers varied throughout the war. But in the US army one of the strategies used was the C-ration which came in a can and in three varieties: meat and beans, meat and potato hash, or meat and vegetable stew. By most accounts, none of them were great but also initially they came with very flimsy paper wrapping which fell off immediately. And, so, you didn't know which one you were gonna get. But at least you always knew you were gonna get meat. Ah, I mean, suddenly Campbell's tomato soup seems amazing!

===== (06:00) to (08:00) =====

But of course, most of the combatants in Europe in world war two were not Americans, they were fighting closer to home, and for many, the home-front was also a battle-front, so the line between civilian and military blurred, as civilians might be informers, or collaborators or resistors. And the nature of governments was also changing on whatever still existed of the home front.

Government was expanding as it often does during total war to allocate goods and organize transportation. European governments

were deciding how much food and clothing people could access through ration cards and governments took control of transport, medical, and other systems, a change that would have a deep and lasting effect in Europe.

The war changed European's ideas about what governments could and should do. For instance, there was no National Health Service in the United Kingdom before World War II.

Let's go to the thought bubble. Governments actually sent out recipes for cooking showing how *ersatz*, or alternative ingredients could be used as substitutes for scarce products like meats, fats, and sugar. For example, instead of coffee, consumers could drink hot beverages made from herbs or other plants like chicory.

And governments were also involved in art making and propaganda to boost and militarize civilian morale and also to entertain. Filmmakers were directed by governments to make patriotic films about war heroes successfully facing off with evil enemy forces. A soldier in the Soviet film *Two Warriors* sings around the campfire about his wife tending the cradle and of the ways in which the knowledge of her fidelity saves his life despite the bullets whizzing by.

Soldiers and officers stationed in large cities and capitals like Paris often enjoyed peacetime entertainment in cafes alongside privileged urban residents.

Meanwhile, many authors, composers, entertainers, and scholars escaped to enrich the culture and science of the United States, Canada, and other places of refuge from the painter Piet Mondrian to the novelist Thomas Mann.

===== (08:00) to (10:00) =====

In Paris, some of the most famous actors performed during the occupation to audiences in which German officers had the best seats. After the war, these performers countered charges of collaboration with the defense that they were doing a job or as one French working-class woman said- "Under the occupation, everyone worked for the Germans."

Thanks thought bubble. Ideas about gender also played an important role in the war. Nazi ideology never shut up about the German male's invincibility and racial superiority. Women who knew their place were supposed to concentrate on breeding and raising the next generations of racial patriots to support their male masters.

In fact, there were bronze, silver, and gold mothers' crosses based on how many children you had. Broze if you had 4 or 5 kids, silver if you had 6 or 7, and gold if you had 8 or more.

Nazis and Italian fascists removed women from the workforce except for jobs as domestic servants and agricultural workers. Many women adhered to the Nazi ideology of women subservience by keeping themselves occupied in the household, even at the height of the war when their labor was sorely needed in industrial production.

In contrast, Soviet women rushed to defend the nation, especially after the invasion by the Nazis. The USSR did share the ideology that men were the armed protectors and women and children the inferior protected ones, but it also talked a lot about equality, especially around jobs in heavy industry. Women worked with big machinery and in the early days of the war they were enlisted in battlefront nursing corps, and then as the German invasion expanded, tens of thousands of Soviet women rushed to join the front line troops.

As the communist newspaper Pravda editorialized in 1941, "A Soviet woman loves her motherland passionately. And if the enemy dares to attack our country, the enemy will be beaten, beaten without mercy. Woman will stand up as a fighter, equal in her rights, next to man."

===== (10:00) to (12:00) =====

Say what you will about the Soviets, but my God they could do some propaganda. So hundreds of thousands of Soviet women participated in combat and hundreds of thousands more were army nurses and doctors, orderlies and support staff to the military.

British women also contributed as the National Service Act of December 1941 conscripted women into military, farming, or munitions jobs. From 1943 until the wars end, 80% of married women in the UK and 90% of single women served the war effort, including playing crucial roles in code breaking and the secret planning of military campaigns, and even thought they were forbidden to assume combat roles, many women still used to learn rifles and other weapons on their own time, others learned to fly airplanes.

As conditions worsened for Germany with the Battle of Stalingrad, Nazi officials tried to achieve the full employment of women that had put the USSR and Britain's productivity so far ahead of Germany's, but propagandizing that women's role was in the home and subservient, the male protector, had been all too successful. Meanwhile in Leningrad and in Bengal, millions of people were dying because of wartime famine. Germans began the siege of Leningrad in September 1941, cutting off heating and food supplies, starving citizens ate cats and birds and castor oil, and even the glue from their wallpaper, but as one noted with black humor, "not all people in the enormous city had such supplementary sources of food."

Deprived of nourishment, Leningraders nonetheless dug anti-tank trenches and watched for fires set by German infiltrators, as bodies piled up in a city that lacked wood for coffins, still radio and live performances continued aiming to boost morale.

When the siege ended in January 1944, between 800,000 and 1.4 million people had died. Among them was a child named Viktor Putin, whose parents nearly died of starvation.

===== (12:00) to (14:00) =====

Their 3rd son, Vladimir Putin, was born in 1952.

And then there was the civilian catastrophe that was the scorched earth infliction of famine on India in 1943. The very colony that contributed some 2.5 million soldiers to the British war cause. In that year, Winston Churchill, the unquestionably racist yet eloquent British Prime Minister, had thousands of tons of grain removed from India and sent to build up supplies at home using several justifications. The British claimed the Indians already had plenty of food, that the Japanese might take it all if they invaded, and that the British needed the grain more than the already "Fat" Indians. Australia and the United States offered grain to India, but Churchill had those offers rebuffed, perhaps to weaken the Indian drive for independence.

This manufactured famine led to the deaths of an estimated 3 million children and adults. It is also another reminder that famines on that scale are almost never natural, and are almost always inflicted by humans on each other.

Next time, we will consider the holocaust and further mass murder in World War II, but I want to leave you today with the Bengal famine, because it is a horrifying reminder of what happens when we imagine others as less than human.

There were of course also heroes throughout the war, agricultural scientists in Leningrad who starved to death while surrounded by edible seeds that they had sworn to protect for future harvests, Indian men and women who gave what little they had to those in greater need, wartime resistors who helped escapees over borders or onto boats to safety. That is also part of human nature, but none of us is immune from the evil that inevitably precedes from the dehumanization of others.

Thanks for watching.

===== (14:00) to (14:25) =====

I'll see you next time.

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Thanks again for watching, and as they say in my hometown, don't forget to be awesome.