World War II: Combatants and Casualties (1937 - 45)

The figures below are gathered from various sources and, inevitably, are estimates for the most part. The starting point is taken as 1937, when in July of that year China was invaded by Japan in a widening war that continued until the defeat of both Japan and Germany in 1945. The figures for China and the Soviet Union (U.S.S.R.), in particular, may be off by millions. The purpose is to indicate the immensity of the human losses in this most terrible of all wars, one characterized by unspeakable atrocities, germ warfare, enormous civilian casualties, genocide of 5 1/2 million European Jews, and the use of a new and terror-laden weapon of war--the atomic bomb. Estimates of the death toll attributable to the war for military and civilian losses have ranged upward to 60 million, with civilian losses at or more than 50 percent of that total (a stark contrast with the losses of WWI, in which such losses were no more than five percent). Th war had a far greater global reach than its predecessor; over 50 countries or dependencies were listed as having some degree of involvement.

The greatest human losses, as indicated below, were suffered by combatants and civilians of the Soviet Union and China. In the near two-and-a-half year siege of Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) by the German forces, 1 1/2 million Russians alone died from shelling, bombing, disease and starvation, a figure that exceeded all the military casualties of the U.S.A. and British Commonwealth combined. The cruelties perpetrated by morally depraved units of the Japanese army in China is demonstrated most vividly in the torture and massacre of civilians and the barbaric killing of war prisoners in the infamous Rape of Nanking that took the lives of over 300,000 Chinese. Other mass civilian deaths, apart from the singular destruction of European Jews, comprise the hundreds of thousands of slave laborers in the Japanese-held Netherlands East Indies (Indonesia) as well as the 1 1/2 million deaths in Bengal as a consequence of war-related famine.

The war also produced mass dislocation and movement of refugees. In the immediate post-war period, millions of ethnic Germans were expelled from the liberated countries of eastern Europe, many of whom died in displaced-persons camps. For China alone, an estimate of 60 million homeless has been estimated. Similarly, millions of German and Japanese prisoners-of-war required repatriation. It took ten years, for example, before the last German prisoners were released while unknown numbers of surviving Japanese soldiers left on the Asian mainland disappeared without trace.

The material destruction of those areas that became battlegrounds or were the targets of Allied bombers was colossal. The destruction of cities--Warsaw, Hamburg, Dresden, and, especially, Russian and Japan urban centers--left millions homeless. The damage to roads, bridges, railways and industrial plant created mass economic dislocation while the financial costs of the war weighed on victor and vanquished alike.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Axis Forces</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Country</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Pop.</th>
<th>Killed/Missing</th>
<th>Wounded</th>
<th>Total(Military)</th>
<th>Civilian (deaths)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>78m</td>
<td>3.5 million</td>
<td>4.6 million</td>
<td>8.1 million</td>
<td>2 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>44m</td>
<td>330,000</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>70,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>72m</td>
<td>1.75 million</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>350,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumania</td>
<td>20m</td>
<td>500,000</td>
<td>300,000</td>
<td>800,000</td>
<td>400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>6m</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>10m</td>
<td>120,000</td>
<td>250,000</td>
<td>370,000</td>
<td>200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>4m</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td>145,000</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Allied Forces** (in order of entry into the war)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Pop.</th>
<th>Killed/Missing</th>
<th>Wounded</th>
<th>Total(Military)</th>
<th>Civilian (deaths)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>450m</td>
<td>1.3 million</td>
<td>1.8 million</td>
<td>3.1 million</td>
<td>9 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>35m</td>
<td>130,000</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>330,000</td>
<td>2.5 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>48m</td>
<td>400,000</td>
<td>300,000</td>
<td>700,000</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>42m</td>
<td>250,000</td>
<td>350,000</td>
<td>600,000</td>
<td>270,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>7m</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>70,000</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>360m</td>
<td>36,000</td>
<td>64,000</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>2m</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So. Africa</td>
<td>10m</td>
<td>9,000</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>23,000</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>11m</td>
<td>42,000</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>92,000</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>4m</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>3m</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>8m</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>16,000</td>
<td>28,000</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland</td>
<td>9m</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>21,000</td>
<td>250,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>7m</td>
<td>90,000</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yugoslavia</td>
<td>15m</td>
<td>320,000</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1.3 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.S.R.</td>
<td>194m</td>
<td>9 million</td>
<td>18 million</td>
<td>27 million</td>
<td>19 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>U.S.A.</td>
<td>129m</td>
<td>300,000</td>
<td>300,000</td>
<td>600,000</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes.**

(a) **AXIS:**
1. Germany: She began the war in Europe with the invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939 and in the following year swept westward to invade and defeat, in turn, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Holland and France. Only Britain, in her island fortress, survived to join the U.S. and Soviet Union in the final victory over Germany in May 1945.

2. Italy: As the ally of Germany, Italy declared war on G.B. and France in June 1940 and invaded Albania and Greece in October. With the invasion of Italy by the western allies in 1943, a new government switched allegiance and declared war on Germany.

3. Japan: Began her war in Asia in 1937 after years (since 1931) of border clashes and occupation of parts of northern China. Widened her war with the attack on the U.S. in December 1941. Succumbed to the Allies in August 1945.

4. Rumania: Participated with Germany in the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. Occupied by the Soviet Union in late 1944 and switched sides to declare war on Germany and Hungary.

5. Bulgaria: Pressured by Germany into a friendship agreement in February 1941 and participated in the invasion of Greece and Yugoslavia, though refrained from joining in the invasion of the Soviet Union. Occupied by the Soviet Union in 1944 and changed sides to declare war on Germany.

6. Finland: Attacked and defeated by the Soviet Union in the brief Russo-Finnish winter war of 1939-40. Ally of Germany in the invasion of the Soviet Union; signed armistice with the latter in September 1944.

7. Hungary: Joined with Germany in the attack on the Soviet Union. Attempts to conclude peace with the latter in 1944 foiled by the German occupation of the country and the setting up of a puppet regime that fought alongside the Germans until the closing weeks of the war.

(b) ALLIES:

8. Only the main combatants are listed. In addition to those, nine of the ten South American republics (with an eye to membership of the United Nations) declared war on the Axis in early 1945. The exception was Brazil, which entered in August 1942 and was the only one to send military contingents to Europe. Nine of the Central American and Caribbean states also sided with the U.S. in December 1941, providing assistance to the U.S. in the form of transit facilities and sea and naval bases, with Mexico as the only one to provide some military assistance. Other stragglers included Saudi Arabia and Turkey, both of whom entered in February 1945. The British Commonwealth members (Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa) joined with Britain in September 1939, as did the latter's Asian dependency, India.
9. The German offensive in the West began in April 1940 with the occupation of Denmark and Norway to be followed by the attack on and defeat of Belgium, Holland and France within the following two months.

10. United Kingdom: Declared war on Germany following the latter's invasion of Poland in September 1939. After withdrawing her expeditionary force from France in June 1940, she continued the war on other fronts, chiefly by the long-drawn-out Battle of the Atlantic against the German submarine menace and the see-saw battles against the German Afrika Corps in the Western Desert of North Africa before the joint Anglo-American invasion of Italy and the final D-Day invasion of Nazi-held Europe.

11. France: Like Britain, declared war on Germany on September 1, 1939. After invasion by Germany in May 1940, the so-called Vichy government signed an armistice in the following month that consigned the northern half of the country to German occupation but this became a full occupation in late 1942 as pressure from the Allies mounted. Meanwhile, a French underground resistance movement developed in France which, coupled with volunteers from the colonies, culminated in the proclamation (from London) of the Committee of National Liberation. The resulting Free French force participated in the Allied D-Day invasion and subsequent liberation of France.

12. U.S.S.R.: Invaded by Germany in June 1941, the Soviet Union fought a lone, heroic struggle on the European mainland against Nazi Germany and her allies from that date until the opening of the Second Front in the D-Day invasion in June 1944. She suffered by far the greatest casualties of any country on either side. By 1943, in the wake of the climactic victory at Stalingrad, the Red Army drove the Germans out of Russia in a series of giant offensives that ended with the capture of Berlin in May 1945. It may fairly be said that in "bleeding the German army white" the Soviet Union made the greatest contribution to the defeat of Nazi Germany.

13. U.S.A.: Declared war on Japan in December 1941 after the latter's attack on Pearl Harbor. Allied with Britain in the struggle against Nazi Germany while also conducting naval warfare against Japan. Participated with Britain in ousting German forces from North Africa, invading Germany's ally, Italy, and opening the Second Front in the West in June 1944.

14. The final envelopment of Germany was marked by the joining up of American and British forces moving from the west with units of the Red Army at the Elbe River west of Berlin on May 3, 1945. All three powers, along with a Free French representative, were present in Berlin six days later to take the German unconditional surrender.