

World War II in Europe



The World at War

World War II was one of the most important and devastating events of the twentieth century. More than 40 million people lost their lives. The war cost over \$1 trillion. Cities were ruined. People around the world were affected.

At the same time, great progress was made. New technologies were invented. Medicines were created. Discoveries changed the lives of people all over the world. Important social changes arose during the war. Women, African Americans, and others were encouraged to join the work force—many for the first time. The Great Depression came to an end in most countries.

How could such a destructive event bring about so much good? What was it about the war that showcased the worst and the best in humanity?

World War II was a global war; nearly every country took part in it in some way. The war was fought between the Axis powers and the Allied forces. The Axis side included Germany, Italy, and Japan. The countries leading the Allies were Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States. After six long years of fighting, the Allies won. When the war ended, people everywhere hoped peace would last.





The Slinky

In 1943, American engineer Richard James was working to solve a problem for U.S. naval ships. The navy needed a way to keep sensitive instruments from bouncing around in rough waters. While working, James bumped a box of tools off a shelf. A spring fell to the ground and seemed to walk. James and his wife took out a loan for \$500 to develop their walking toy. His wife came up with the name—Slinky®.

Medical Marvels

Great medical advancements were made during World War II to treat wounded and sick soldiers. New medicines helped fight infections. **Skin grafting** was used for treating burn victims. The process for transferring blood from one person to another was perfected. New vaccines were introduced. In the middle of so much death, improvements in health care held great promise.

An Uneasy Peace

The Price of Bread

Germany's economy was ruined after World War I. Before the war, a loaf of bread cost less than 1 mark (about \$4 in 1913). After the war, German money had completely lost its value. That same loaf of bread cost 200 trillion marks (about \$4 billion in 1923). The German government printed bills worth \$10 billion marks each. Workers used laundry baskets and suitcases to carry their earnings home.



The People's Car

In 1934, the German government was trying to fix its economy. They thought building a new roadway would help. They called it the *autobahn*. To promote travel, they created *Volkswagen*, or the "People's Car." Their cars sold for \$140 each (around \$2,000 today). This brand of car is still sold.

When World War I ended in 1918, an uneasy peace settled over the world. For a short time, people celebrated. But peace did not bring **stability**. The end of the war did not solve everything. The Treaty of Versailles of 1919 had ended the war. But the treaty set harsh terms for Germany. The German government had to pay to fix all damage to the Allied countries from the war. The terms wrecked Germany's economy. They were not alone. Many countries had spent a lot of money during the war. Now, they owed large **debts**. To add to the chaos, governments across Europe were becoming unstable. Revolutions and civil wars broke out.

▼ German marks became so worthless that some children used them as toys.



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