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ATLAS of WORLD WAR II
20th Commemorative Edition

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The seeds of World War II were sown in the political and economic rubble left over from the previous war. The Allied Powers had dictated treaties imposing terms on vanquished Germany and Austria that could never be satisfied. The map of Europe was redrawn but only to the satisfaction of a few. Those who were unhappy with the results pressed for revision of the treaties. Newly formed and reconstituted states joined the family of nations

with submerged minorities and economic instabilities that would surely test their liberal constitutions. Nothing was done to end militarism or the senseless division into rival alliances. To the lofty ideals in which President Woodrow Wilson believed, other leaders gave only lip service. Brazen voices arose, preaching hate and proclaiming new ideologies that menaced the peace of both Europe and the world.

The world had scarcely recovered from the shattering effects of World War I when the depression struck. For nations already struggling to achieve some kind of political stability the added problem of economic collapse proved an intolerable burden. Few nations were free from the paralysis that saw business stagnate, factories and farms cease production and the arteries of world trade dry up. To Mussolini, already established as dictator in Italy, and Hitler, with his National Socialists waiting in the wings to take over in Germany, capitalism's troubles only brought new strength. After Hitler

became chancellor of Germany in 1933, the world could no longer sleep easily. When Mussolini flaunted the League of Nations by attacking Ethiopia, Hitler denounced the Versailles Treaty and proceeded to rearm Germany. In 1936, he bluffed his way into an unopposed remilitarization of the Rhineland. In the Far East, the militarists, who had plotted their way to power in Japan in 1931, had not been idle. They had overrun Manchuria and were bombing Chinese cities, bent on forging their own empire. The League of Nations remained powerless as the world turned its back on the rising menace.

In the late 1930's, with time running out, the leadership in France and Great Britain was unequal to the challenge posed by Hitler's deceptions. Britain's Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain sought to ease international tensions. During previous ministries Britain had allowed its armaments to decline. Only a few leaders, such as Winston Churchill, foresaw the folly of Britain's policy and warned an unheeding nation of the growing Nazi war machine. Britain's army, lacking in modern weapons and strength, was scattered around the world; her air arm pitifully small. Even the apparent British naval superiority was diminished to large degree by Germany's rapidly expanding submarine fleet. By 1937, when the war clouds could no longer be ignored, Britain was too far behind to catch up. Only the determined spirit of an island nation would offset Britain's weaknesses in the coming test.

France's strategic position in the 1930's was one based on alliances with other neighbors of Germany. As the number of allies vanished under the wave of appeasement, France's position became vulnerable. French armed forces had been partially mobilized, but the overwhelming sentiment was for peace at any price. Production and development of aircraft and mechanized armaments lagged badly. The French army had nearly 800,000 officers and men, but in no way were they equipped or prepared to fight a modern war. Little of France's economic output was earmarked for the military despite the pleadings of a relatively unknown army officer, Charles de Gaulle. One more precious year passed before De Gaulle received government cooperation in revamping the military establishment. The action came too late; the German juggernaut was about to be unleashed.

As Hitler's insatiable appetite for new territories rose, the peaceful phase of German domination of Europe came to a close, and the continent moved closer to the conflagration which eventually would engulf the world. Aided and abetted by Mussolini, Hitler by his bold maneuvers had marched unopposed into Austria and had taken over Czechoslovakia. The western powers finally realized the fruitlessness of further appeasement. German expansion now depended on the might of German armies. A Soviet-German non-aggression pact with Stalin gave Hitler the chance to openly oppose Great Britain and France.

On September 1, 1939, Poland was invaded and World War II began. The world watched in shock as Poland collapsed before a new kind of war machine. Dismay mounted as France was overrun and British forces narrowly escaped annihilation. German armies swept through the Balkans and took over the Italian campaign in North Africa. Unable to bring England to her knees, Hitler turned his attention to the east and launched an invasion of

Russia. As the Soviet army struggled to stem the German panzers, the United States realized its increasingly important role as the last remaining bastion in the free world.

Respect for the strength of the United States was recognized by the nature of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor which brought America into the war. Japanese plans for a short, limited war called for seizure of the resources of Southeast Asia, but to retain possession she had to neutralize the United States Pacific Fleet. Premier Tojo's naval units moved in secret to capture or cripple U.S. bases in the Pacific while land forces prepared to sweep over the mainland and islands of Southeast Asia. When the Philippines were invaded, U.S. troops fought a gallant holding action on Bataan Peninsula and Corregidor that lasted four months. Singapore and the Netherlands Indies fell as the Japanese moved southward to threaten supply lines to Australia. Only by the summer of 1942 could sufficient Allied forces be assembled to challenge the Japanese offensive.

By the time of the march of Hitler's legions into Poland in 1939, America had slowly moved from a position of avowed isolationism to general support of the Allied cause. In the next two years of war and repeated Axis triumphs, that support took on more and more substance with lend-lease aid to Great Britain and mobilization of the United States as an arsenal of democracy. By November 1941, if the United States was not yet a belligerent, it was certainly no longer neutral. With Germany's attack on Russia and Japan's raid in Pearl Harbor, the war became truly global.

As the Axis offensive reached its crest, the Allies were forced to take stop-gap measures to maintain defense lines all over the world. Faced with a shortage of shipping and the strangulation hold of German U-boats

operating in the Atlantic, it was imperative that German power be crushed first. The refusal of British and Russian peoples to accept what looked like inevitable defeat gave the Allies time to gather the manpower and resources needed for a well-coordinated effort against Germany and Italy. The period of crisis was over.

Late in 1942 the Allies had cleared North Africa, were bombing Germany and had a limited offensive underway in the Pacific. By 1944 the Allied effort was in high gear on all fronts. Europe continued to receive the greatest attention with the opening of a second front against Germany. Despite the great distance to be crossed in supplying the Pacific theater the offensive there was stepped up. The Axis Powers were everywhere on the defensive. Final victory was in sight.

The long pull to victory in Europe began with a buildup of supplies and troops in the United Kingdom. The first step on the road back was the Allied invasion of North Africa. Success opened the Mediterranean to Allied shipping, provided positions for the attack on Southern Europe and afforded combat experience for American troops. The ensuing campaign in Italy was vital, as it tied down German troops which otherwise would have been used against the Russians or deployed in France, threatening the impending cross-channel invasion. On June 6, 1944, the American, British and Canadian forces landed in Normandy. Germany soon found herself fighting a three-front war with the principal pressure coming from powerful Allied armies unleashed in France and a massive Russian offensive in the east. The end for Germany was near. By April 1945, Allied spearheads had penetrated the heartland of Germany and the Russians were storming Berlin. A totally defeated Germany sued for peace.

The initial phase of the war had gone according to Japanese plans. The conquest of Southeast Asia and Western Pacific islands had succeeded beyond expectations. With U.S. victories in the battles of the Coral Sea and Midway, the tide turned. The losses inflicted on the Japanese fleet left Japan's forces overextended. Growing Allied strength made it impossible for Japan to produce enough planes and ships to defend her empire. Twin lines of advance, one led by Admiral Nimitz through the Central Pacific, the other led by General MacArthur northward from New Guinea, made it impossible for the enemy to concentrate his forces. The two prongs of the Allied drive joined in the invasion of the Philippines. With her fleet decimated in the Philippine Sea, her air arm all but wiped out and industrial centers battered by incessant bombing, Japan was a shattered nation when the atomic bomb delivered the knockout blow. The Japanese government accepted the Allied terms for peace and six long years of costly war ended on September 2, 1945.

As a result of the holocaust brought about by Hitler, Germany and Italy lost all territory acquired by conquest. Italy forfeited her African colonies and relinquished all claims on Albania. Germany was placed under Allied occupation, the western two-thirds under the United States, France, and Great Britain, the eastern third under the U.S.S.R. Poland, who had lost eastern territory to Russia, was compensated by German land. Russia was by far the chief beneficiary of territorial acquisitions. Early in the war she had illegally taken over the Baltic States and by the war's end had effected domination over

much of Central Europe. In the Far East, Japan was forced to return to China all territories wrested from her. Specifically, this involved restoration of Manchuria and Formosa. Jurisdiction of the Pacific islands' mandates passed to the United States. The U.S.S.R. was handed the southern half of Sakhalin, the Kurile Islands, and granted concessions in Manchuria. Mongolia was to become independent but under the tutelage of the Soviet Union. Thus the shadow of the Red Army was cast across Europe and Asia from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific Ocean.