

HI 537

World War II

Causes, Course, Consequences

This seminar explores World War II from its discrete causes in Asia and Europe through its major military campaigns to its global consequences. It includes discussion of economic, geopolitical, and moral consequences of the greatest war ever fought. We ask whether major decisions by individual leaders determined the grand strategic outcomes of the war, or whether material factors offer a better explanation of who won and lost and how they won or lost. While the course explores statecraft, grand strategy and command, it also deals with battle as experienced by flesh and blood soldiers and to a lesser extent with ‘home front’ conditions such as resistance or collaboration with occupation. It is international in approach: it does not take an Anglo-American centric view of the war, as is common. It explores in-depth the motives of the Axis powers, the strange policies of Imperial Japan, and gives due emphasis to the German-Soviet war as well as key events and actors in Italy, Africa, China & the Pacific. It delves into the ‘moral history’ of the war, from obliteration of law and combat rules to starvation and bombing by the Western Allies, to Japanese war crimes, German and Soviet atrocities and forced migrations, and the origins and nature of Nazi *Rassenkampf* (“race struggle”) as a central war aim.

Required Readings

- Andrew Roberts, *Storm of War: A New History of the Second World War* (2012).
- Story - *Concise Historical Atlas of WWII*, 2006 (Oxf), ISBN 9780195182200
- Beevor - *D-Day: The Battle for Normandy*, 2010 (Penguin) ISBN 978-0143118183
- Sledge - *With the Old Breed*, 2007 (Random), ISBN 9780891419198
- Grossman - *A Writer at War*, 2007 (Random), ISBN 9780307275332
- Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China’s World War II, 1937-1945* (2013)

- Willy Peter Reese, *A Stranger to Myself: The Inhumanity of War, 1941-1944* Note: This book is no longer in print. So I have copied it as a PDF to the course site. It is a first-hand account of the eastern front by a young German soldier; evocative and intense. Reese began it as a diary/set of notes at age 21, when he was conscripted into the *Ostheer* in 1942. He was killed in 1944.

Administrative Information

Office hours: Tues & Thu 3:30-5:00 p.m. or by appointment. Room B-13, 725 Commonwealth Ave. Phone: (617) 353-1165 **e-mail:** cnolan@bu.edu (email is better)

Grading: Attendance and participation in the seminar is required. Weighting is as follows:

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| • Participation: | 25% | Must be regular and active, with evidence that readings are done in advance. Be prepared to answer questions and even to lead the debate. |
| • Book review (5-8 pages) | 25% | Due: October 18th |
| • Major research paper (12-15 pages) | 50% | Due: November 29th |

Graduate students are graded to a higher standard and write a 25-page paper. All students must submit a 1 page **“work-in-progress”** report on their research idea no later than October 25th.

SCHEDULE

We approach World War II the way it unfolded: chronologically and geographically and as a series of breaking storms that hardly let participants catch their breath. I have reserved one or two later sessions for topical treatments based on developing interests of the class. Take this list below as a fairly tight, but not rigid, guide for advance readings & topics.

Week 1: War in the West: Democracies Defeated, 1939-1940

Roberts, *Storm of War*: Chapters 1, 2, & 3

[Online article](#): “British Surrenders in 1940”

Nolan *Allure of Battle*: “Annihilation of Nations” online PDF

Week 2: The War Expands: Africa, Mediterranean, China and Pacific, 1937-1941

Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*: Chapters 1 through 10

Roberts, *Storm of War*: Chapter 4

[Online article](#): Nolan *Allure of Battle*: “Annihilation of Nations” PDF

Week 3: Germany’s War: Barbarossa and barbarism, 1941

Roberts, *Storm of War*: Chapter 5

Willy Peter Reese, *A Stranger to Myself*. Foreword and Preface

Grossman - *A Writer at War* Introduction and Part I: pp.3-65

[Online article](#): Nolan *Allure of Battle*: “Annihilation of Mercy” PDF first half only, to end of *Barbarossa*

Week 4: Japan’s War: China and the Pacific

Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*: Chapters 11 & 12

Roberts, *Storm of War*: Chapters 6 & 8

Sledge - *With the Old Breed*: Part I: *Pelileu*

Week 5: Russia’s War: Moscow, Leningrad, Stalingrad, 1942-1943

Roberts, *Storm of War*: Chapters 9, 10 & 13

Willy Peter Reese, *A Stranger to Myself* pp.3-65

Grossman - *A Writer at War* Part II: pp.67-200

Week 6: War at Sea, in the Air, in Secondary Theaters: 1942-1944

Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*: Chapters 13, 14, 15, 16

Roberts, *Storm of War*: Chapters 11 & 12

[Online article](#): “Prisoners of War in World War II”

Week 7: Occupation and Genocide: 1942-1944

Willy Peter Reese, *A Stranger to Myself* pp.77-165.

Grossman - *A Writer at War* Part III pp.203-225, Part IV pp.280-306.

Roberts, *Storm of War*: Chapters 7 & 14

[Online article](#): Browse the PDFs entitled “Nazi-ideology” 1-6

Week 8: Turn of the Tide: January 1943-June 1944

Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*: Chapters 17 & 18

Roberts, *Storm of War*: Chapter 13

Grossman - *A Writer at War* Part III: pp.225-244 and Part IV: pp.247-269

[Online article](#): Nolan *Allure of Battle*: "Annihilation of Mercy" PDF second half

Week 9: Assault on Hitler's "Fortress Europe," 1944

Beevor, *D-Day* read the whole book

Roberts, *Storm of War*: Chapter 15

Grossman - *A Writer at War* Part IV: pp.270-279, 309-321

Week 10: The Beast's Lair: Germany, 1945

Roberts, *Storm of War*: Chapters 16 & 17

Grossman - *A Writer at War* Part V: pp.322-343

Week 11: Defeating Japan, 1944-1945

Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*: Chapter 19

Roberts, *Storm of War*: Chapter 18

Eugene Sledge, *With the Old Breed*: Part II: *Okinawa*

[Online article](#): Nolan *Allure of Battle*: "Annihilation of Illusions" PDF

Week 12: Why did the Axis lose/Allies Win?

Roberts, *Storm of War*: Conclusion

Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*: Epilogue

Week 13: What did it all mean?

What if the Axis had Won? General discussion of the meaning of World War II, not as precursor to the Cold War but as the culmination of a much longer and more profound trend toward total war in the military, political, social, and economic history of the modern world.

Grossman - *A Writer at War* Part V: pp.344-350