

Mathematics Level 7

Chapter 3 — Investigation: Australians and the world wars (1914–1945): causes, fronts and the home front

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Why two world wars broke out

Curriculum trace — Victorian Curriculum 2.0 History, Levels 9 and 10

Owns VC2HH10K13

Draws on — VC2HH10K13.E01, VC2HH10K13.E02, VC2HH10K13.E03, VC2HH10K13.E04, VC2HH10K13.E05

Builds on — section 1A (VC2HH10K01) and section 1B (VC2HH10K02).

Between August 1914 and November 1918, and again between September 1939 and September 1945, the world fought two wars larger than any before them. Both wars began in Europe and both spread across the world — and both shaped why Australians went to war, which is the story of this whole chapter. This section asks the first question: **why did these wars happen?**

Historians do not answer that question with a single cause. They sort causes into **long-term causes** — deep pressures building over years or decades, such as rivalries between empires — and **short-term causes** — the events of the final weeks and months. Within the short-term causes they look for the **trigger**: the single event that set the chain of decisions running. This section teaches you that sorting method, and then applies it to both wars.

By the end of this section you should be able to describe World War I's long-term causes and its short-term triggers; identify the significant events and ideas between the two wars and weigh how significant each was as a cause of World War II; analyse the major events on the road to World War II; and evaluate the League of Nations, the Treaty of Versailles, the growth of fascism and militarism, and appeasement's failure as factors leading to World War II — including where historians disagree.

Theory

1. How historians think about causes (VC2HH10K13)

A **cause** is something that helps bring an event about. **Consequences** are what follow from it. Three habits make cause-and-consequence reasoning stronger:

1. **Sort long-term from short-term.** The long-term causes behind World War I had been building since the late 1800s; the short-term crisis lasted only five weeks. A war can have causes decades long and a trigger days old.
2. **Look for the trigger.** The trigger is the event that turns tension into action. It is not usually the deepest cause — it is the spark that lands on the fuel. Historians then ask why the fuel was so dry.
3. **Rank the causes.** Historians argue about which causes mattered most. Ranking causes is not a matter of taste: it is done with evidence, and reasonable historians can weigh the same evidence differently. Where they do, the debate itself is part of history — you will meet three such debates in this section (parts 5, 7 and 9).

Watch for two recurring patterns. First, **continuity and change**: some features of European politics (rivalry between great powers, for example) continued from 1914 into the 1930s, while others (the map, the governments, the balance of wealth) changed completely. Second, **perspectives**: the same event — the Treaty of Versailles, for instance — looked different from Paris, Berlin and Moscow. Explaining causes well means showing *whose* view you are reporting.

2. The long-term causes behind World War I (VC2HH10K13.E02)

By 1914 the great powers of Europe — Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Austria-Hungary and Italy — had created the conditions for a general war. Four long-term causes are often grouped under the letters **M.A.I.N.**: militarism, alliances, imperialism and nationalism. Each is a contested term — different writers use each in different senses — so this section defines each at first use. Figure 1 sets all four out as a table.

Defining the term: militarism. The curriculum uses *militarism* but does not define it. In this section, *militarism* means **the build-up of armed forces and the growing influence of military leaders, plans and values in a country's politics — together with a readiness to use military force to settle disputes.** That is the operational definition used here, and every question in this section is answerable on it alone.

Militarism. Between 1890 and 1914 the great powers expanded their armies and navies and drew up detailed war plans. Germany passed naval laws in 1898 and 1900, under Kaiser Wilhelm II and his naval commander Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, to build a fleet to challenge the British. Britain answered in 1906 with HMS *Dreadnought*, a battleship so far ahead of anything afloat that it made every older warship out of date — and the race began again. On land, Germany, France and Russia all expanded their armies, and every power trained its railway timetables to move millions of men to the frontier within days of an order to **mobilise** — to put an army on a war footing. Mobilisation plans mattered because generals argued that whoever mobilised first would win; in a crisis, that gave every government a reason to strike early rather than wait.

Defining the term: alliance. An **alliance** is a formal agreement between countries to support one another, especially in war. By 1914 the European alliance system had hardened into two rival blocs. Figure 2 maps them.

Alliances. In 1879 Germany and Austria-Hungary formed the Dual Alliance; Italy joined in 1882, making the **Triple Alliance**. France, isolated by Germany after losing a war in 1870–71, allied with Russia in 1894, settled its colonial quarrels with Britain in the **Entente Cordiale** of 1904, and watched Britain and Russia settle theirs in 1907 — forming the **Triple Entente** between France, Britain and Russia. Alliances were meant to keep the peace by making any attack too risky. Instead, they meant that a quarrel between two countries could drag in all of them: a local crisis could become a general war within days.

Defining the term: imperialism. The curriculum uses *imperialism* but does not define it. The British writer J. A. Hobson gave the term its modern analysis in *Imperialism: A Study* (1902). In this section, *imperialism* means **the policy of extending a country's rule or control over other lands and peoples, and the rivalry between countries doing so** — the empire-building you studied in section 1A.

Imperialism. The great powers competed for colonies in Africa and Asia — Britain and France above all, with Germany arriving late, after its unification in 1871, and demanding its “place in the sun”. Colonial quarrels repeatedly brought the powers close to war: Germany twice challenged France’s takeover of Morocco, in 1905 and 1911, and both crises ended with the powers angry and more heavily armed. Every colonial dispute tightened the alliance blocs, because each power looked for friends against its rivals.

Defining the term: nationalism. The curriculum uses *nationalism* but does not define it. David Miller, in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry ‘Nationalism’, notes the word “may refer to a political movement, to a psychological disposition (devotion to one’s nation), or to a system of beliefs”. In this section, *nationalism* is used in all three senses: **devotion to one’s own nation, the belief that the nation’s interests come before others’, and the political movement by which a people demands its own state.**

Nationalism. Two forms of nationalism made war more likely. First, rivalry between the great powers themselves: French people longed to recover Alsace-Lorraine, the border provinces Germany had taken in 1871; Germans took pride in their new empire and resented being treated as a newcomer. Second, the nationalism of peoples without states of their own — above all in the Balkans, the south-east of Europe, then still ruled largely by the Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary. Serbia, independent since 1878, wanted to unite the South Slav peoples, many of whom lived under Austrian rule. Russia saw itself as the protector of the Slavic peoples. Austria-Hungary saw Serbian nationalism as a threat to its very existence. The Balkans became known as the “powder keg” of Europe — a barrel of gunpowder waiting for a spark.

Figure 1 summarises the four long-term causes; Figure 2 maps the alliance system that turned them into one connected system.

The long-term causes behind World War I: M.A.I.N.

Four pressures, building over decades, that made a general war possible by 1914

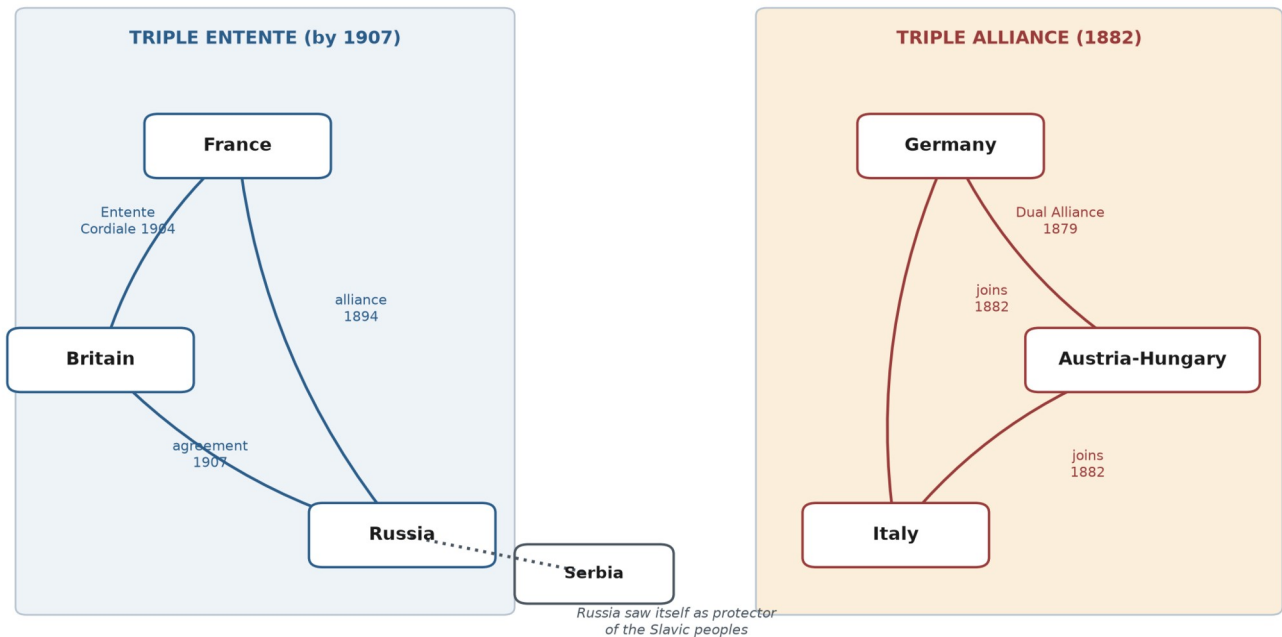
Cause	What it means	Example in Europe by 1914	Why it made war more likely
Militarism	Build-up of armed forces, and growing influence of military leaders, plans and values in politics; readiness to settle disputes by force	The naval race: Germany's naval laws (1898, 1900) against Britain's HMS Dreadnought (1906); growing armies; railway timetables drawn up to mobilise millions of men in days	Every power feared striking second; mobilisation plans made speed matter more than caution
Alliances	Formal agreements between countries to support one another, especially in war	Triple Alliance: Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy (1882). Triple Entente: France, Britain, Russia (by 1907)	A quarrel between two countries could drag in all the great powers within days
Imperialism	Extending a country's rule over other lands and peoples, and the rivalry between countries doing so (Hobson, 1902)	The scramble for colonies in Africa and Asia; Germany arriving late; the Morocco crises of 1905 and 1911	Colonial quarrels pushed the powers into rival blocs and fed the arms races
Nationalism	Devotion to one's nation, putting its interests first, and movements by which a people demands its own state (Miller, 2019)	France longing for Alsace-Lorraine; Serbia aiming to unite the South Slavs; great-power rival pride	Backing down felt like dishonour; the Balkans became the 'powder keg' of Europe

M.A.I.N. is a memory aid; each term is defined at first use in part 2 of this section.

Table of the four long-term causes behind World War I — militarism, alliances, imperialism and nationalism — with a definition, example and war-risk for each

Europe's alliance system in 1914

Two rival blocs, and one promise of support to Serbia



An attack on one country became an attack on its friends: a local quarrel could become a general war in days.

Diagram of the European alliance system in 1914, showing the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy and the Triple Entente of France, Britain and Russia, with Russia's links to Serbia

3. The short-term triggers: assassination, the July Crisis and Germany's invasion of Belgium (VC2HH10K13.E02)

The spark fell on 28 June 1914. **Archduke Franz Ferdinand**, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, and his wife Sophie were shot dead in the streets of Sarajevo, the capital of the Austrian province of Bosnia, by **Gavrilo Princip**, a 19-year-old Bosnian Serb nationalist. Princip was one of a group armed and trained in Serbia by members of a secret society of Serbian army officers. Austria-Hungary resolved to punish Serbia — and Germany, its ally, gave its full backing on 5–6 July 1914, the promise historians call the “**blank cheque**”.

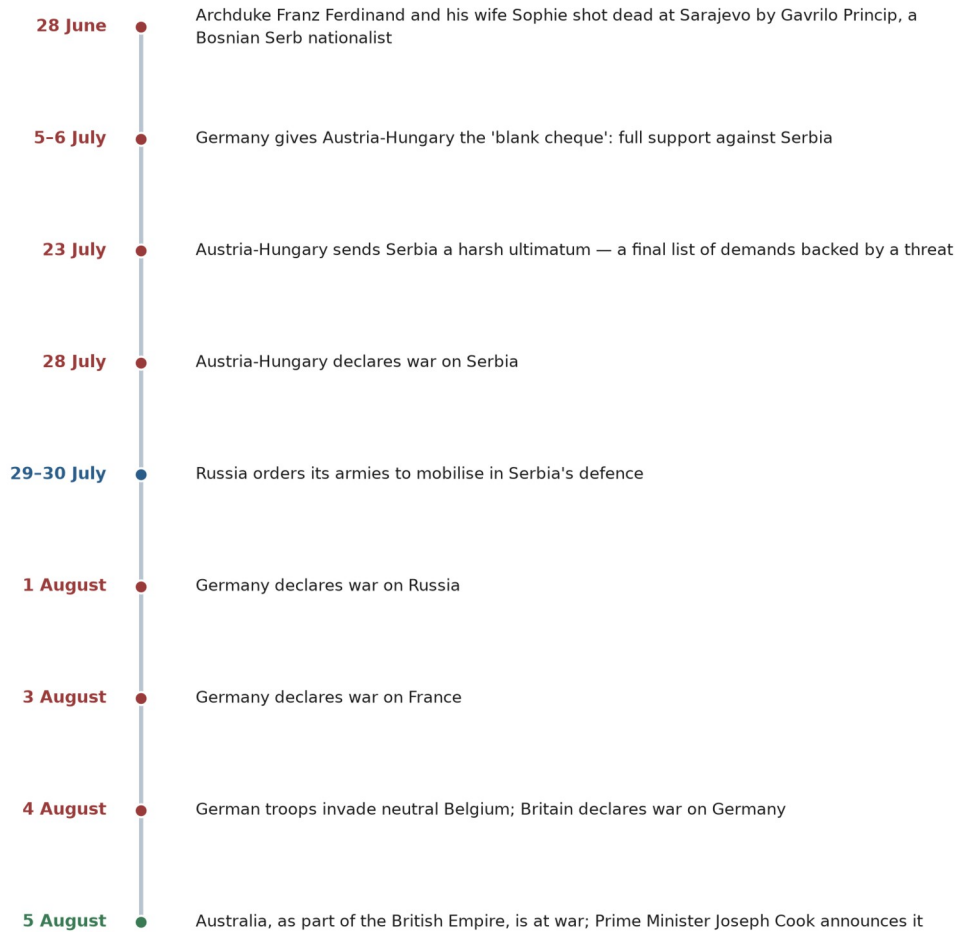
What followed is called the **July Crisis** — five weeks in which a murder in the Balkans became a European war. Figure 3 sets out the chain of decisions. Austria-Hungary sent Serbia a harsh **ultimatum** — a final list of demands backed by a threat — on 23 July; Serbia accepted most but not all of it; Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on 28 July. Then the mobilisation plans took over. Russia, Serbia's protector, ordered its armies to mobilise. Germany, allied to Austria-Hungary, declared war on Russia on 1 August and on France two days later. German war plans called for knocking out France quickly before Russia's huge army could arrive, and that meant marching west through **Belgium** — a small country whose **neutrality** (its freedom from taking sides in war) had been guaranteed by the great powers, including Britain, since 1839. German troops entered Belgium on 4 August 1914. Britain declared war on Germany the same day.

Australia was part of the British Empire, so when Britain was at war, Australia was at war: Prime Minister Joseph Cook announced it on 5 August 1914. Section 3B examines why Australians went.

Notice how the triggers worked. The assassination was the spark; but the fire spread because of the long-term causes: alliances pulled country after country in, mobilisation timetables made delay feel dangerous, and nationalism made governments unwilling to back down. Historians still debate how much **blame for the war** each government carried — part 5 returns to that debate, because the peace treaty of 1919 made the question official.

The July Crisis, 1914

From one assassination to a European war in five weeks



Each decision made the next harder to reverse: mobilisation timetables gave every government a reason to strike first.

Timeline of the July Crisis of 1914, from the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand on 28 June to Britain's declaration of war on 4 August

4. World War I and its ending (VC2HH10K13)

World War I lasted four years and three months. On the Western Front, in France and Belgium, the war settled into trenches, and battles such as the Somme in 1916 cost hundreds of thousands of lives for gains measured in kilometres. Where Australians fought — Gallipoli, the Western Front, the Middle East — is the subject of section 3C. Two events in 1917 changed the war's shape and its aftermath. The United States, under President Woodrow Wilson, entered the war against Germany in April 1917. And in **Russia**, the strain of the war brought down the government of Tsar Nicholas II in the **Russian Revolution** of 1917 — which mattered so much for what followed that part 6 gives it its own treatment.

Fighting stopped on **11 November 1918**, when Germany signed the **armistice** — the agreement to stop fighting. Germany had lost the war; its allies Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire had broken apart. The victors now had to write the peace, and the peace they wrote sits at the centre of every account of World War II's causes.

5. The Treaty of Versailles and the war-guilt question (VC2HH10K13.E03, VC2HH10K13.E05)

The main peace treaty, between the Allied powers and Germany, was signed at Versailles, near Paris, on **28 June 1919** — five years to the day after the assassination of Franz Ferdinand. The chief Allied leaders were President

Woodrow Wilson of the United States, Prime Minister David Lloyd George of Britain, and Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau of France, whose country had suffered the most damage. Germany was not invited to negotiate; it was presented with the treaty and told to sign. Germans called it a **Diktat** — a dictated peace. Figure 4 sets out the treaty’s key terms.

Key terms of the Treaty of Versailles

Signed 28 June 1919 — five years to the day after the assassination. Germany was not invited to negotiate.

Category	Term	Article
Territory	Alsace-Lorraine restored to France	Art. 51
Territory	Germany's overseas colonies taken away; new states created from lands that had been German or Austrian (including Poland); union with Austria forbidden	Various
Military	Army limited to 100,000 volunteers; compulsory service abolished	Arts. 160, 173
Military	Navy cut to six battleships; no submarines; no air force	Arts. 181, 191, 198
Military	The Rhineland, Germany's border region with France, demilitarised (no German forces or fortresses)	Arts. 42–44
Money	Germany to pay compensation for damage of the war (reparations); amount fixed in 1921 at 132 billion gold marks	Arts. 232–233
Responsibility	Germany accepts responsibility for 'all the loss and damage' of the war	Art. 231
The League	League of Nations created; Germany not invited to join at first	Part I

Germans called the treaty a Diktat — a dictated peace. Source: Treaty of Versailles via Wikisource; US Department of State, Office of the Historian (retrieved 26 August 2026).

Table of the key terms of the Treaty of Versailles, covering territory, military limits, money, responsibility under Article 231, and the League of Nations

The most argued-about term was **Article 231**. It did not use the words “war guilt”, but it forced Germany to accept “the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage” of the war. Figure 5 reproduces the article as a source; worked source analysis 1 reads it closely. The article mattered for two reasons: it was a national humiliation for Germany, and it provided the legal basis for demanding **reparations** — payments for the damage of the war, fixed in 1921 at 132 billion gold marks, a sum far beyond Germany’s ability to pay at once.

Source 1 — Article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles

“The Allied and Associated Governments affirm and Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies.”

Treaty of Versailles, Article 231, signed at Versailles 28 June 1919 (full text via Wikisource, retrieved 26 August 2026)

A source reproduction of Article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles, in which Germany accepts responsibility for the loss and damage of the war

The historian’s debate: was Germany to blame for World War I? This is one of the great contested questions of modern history, and both of its main positions deserve their strongest form.

- **The case for German responsibility.** Germany gave Austria-Hungary the “blank cheque” against Serbia in July 1914, knowing it risked a general war; its war plan required invading Belgium, turning a Balkan war into a Western one; and it declared war on Russia and France before those countries had invaded it. The historian Fritz Fischer, in *Germany’s Aims in the First World War* (1961; German edition 1961), went further: he argued from Germany’s own wartime records that German leaders chose to fight a war of conquest, and that Germany’s aims in 1914 pointed toward the aims of 1939. Fischer’s thesis transformed the study of the war’s origins.
- **The case for shared responsibility.** Other historians point out that Austria-Hungary chose to attack Serbia; that Russia mobilised first, pushing Germany to act; that France backed Russia; and that Britain’s leaders let Germany believe Britain might stay out. Christopher Clark, in *The Sleepwalkers* (2012), argues that no single government chose a world war: a chain of decisions by frightened leaders, working with poor information and rigid mobilisation timetables, “sleepwalked” Europe into a war none of them truly wanted. Article 231, on this view, was victors’ politics, not settled history.

Both positions use the same documented record of July 1914 and weigh it differently — which is exactly how contested history works. What is not contested is the *effect* of Article 231: most Germans, whatever the true share of blame, experienced the clause as a lie forced on them at gunpoint, and every German government of the 1920s worked to overturn the treaty.

The historian’s debate: was Versailles too harsh? A second debate follows from the first. The British economist John Maynard Keynes, who resigned from the British delegation in protest, published *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* in 1919: he argued the treaty was a “Carthaginian peace” that would ruin Germany’s economy, breed resentment across Europe, and end in another war. Other critics — starting with Étienne Mantoux in *The Carthaginian Peace; or, the Economic Consequences of Mr Keynes* (1946) — answered that the treaty was not too harsh but too weak: Germany’s territory and industry were largely intact in 1919, far stronger than any neighbour’s, and the real failure was that the victors never enforced the treaty’s limits once Germany began breaking them. Both readings explain part of what followed: the treaty was harsh enough to feed bitterness and too weakly held to stop a recovering Germany.

6. Between the wars: revolution and depression (VC2HH10K13 . E03)

Two developments between the wars did more than anything else to make the second war possible: revolution in Russia and economic collapse across the world.

The Russian Revolution. In February 1917, with Russia losing the war and its people going hungry, crowds and soldiers in the capital, Petrograd, forced Tsar Nicholas II to give up the throne. In October 1917 the **Bolsheviks** — a revolutionary party led by **Vladimir Lenin** — seized power. They took Russia out of the war in March 1918 and set up the world's first communist state, which became the **Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (the USSR)** in 1922. The revolution mattered for World War II in three ways. It took Russia out of World War I early, which shaped how Germany expected wars to end. It split the victors of 1919 — the new Soviet state was excluded from the Versailles talks and feared by many governments. And it created the great political fear of the interwar years: the fear of communist revolution. That fear drove many property owners, business people and middle-class voters across Europe to support hard-right movements that promised to crush revolution — including the movement led by Adolf Hitler.

The Great Depression. In October 1929 the stock market in New York collapsed, and the richest economy in the world stopped lending to the rest of it. The crash became a worldwide slump — the **Great Depression** — as trade fell, banks failed and factories closed. Germany was hit hardest of the great powers: its recovery in the 1920s had been built on American loans, and when those were called in, German banks collapsed and unemployment climbed until nearly one worker in three was out of work by early 1932. Hunger, poverty and the fear of losing everything made millions of German voters abandon the moderate parties of the **Weimar Republic** — Germany's new democratic government, founded in 1919 — for the extremes of politics, on the left and, above all, on the right. The Depression did not cause World War II by itself. But without the Depression, the Nazi Party would have remained the small, fringe party it was in 1928.

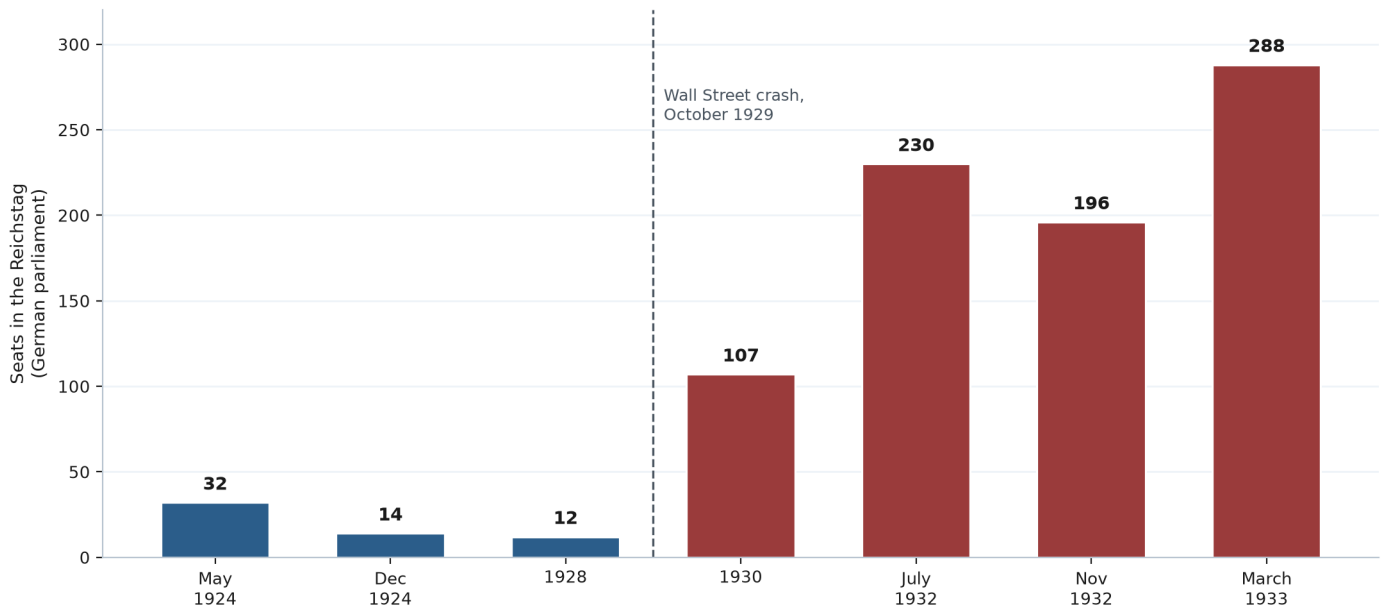
7. How Hitler and the Nazi Party rose to power (VC2HH10K13.E03)

Defining the terms: fascist and militarist. The curriculum uses the words *fascist* and *militarist* but does not define either term. The word *fascism* comes from the movement Benito Mussolini founded in Italy in 1919; historians still contest its exact definition. The historian Roger Griffin, in *The Nature of Fascism* (1991), defines it as a form of ultranationalism built around the myth of national rebirth. In this section, *fascist* describes **a hard-right, anti-democratic movement or regime that exalts the nation, is led by a single dictator, crushes opposition by force, and mobilises the people behind the leader** — the sense in which Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany were fascist regimes. *Militarist* describes **a regime that builds up armed forces and uses military force, or the threat of it, as its main tool of policy** — the sense in which Japan's government in the 1930s was militarist even though it was not fascist.

The **National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazi Party)** was founded in 1920 and led from 1921 by **Adolf Hitler**, who had been a corporal in World War I and had a gift for public speaking. In November 1923 Hitler tried to seize power by force in Munich and failed; while in prison he wrote *Mein Kampf* ("My Struggle"), which set out his core beliefs: hatred of the Versailles treaty; hatred of Jews, whom the Nazis blamed falsely for Germany's defeat and for revolution; and the demand for "living space" (*Lebensraum*) for Germans in the east, to be taken by war. The Nazi programme was racist from first to last: its **antisemitism** — hostility to Jewish people, treating them as a race to be blamed and removed — was at the centre of its view of the world. (Where that hatred led is the subject of Chapter 4.)

While the 1920s economy ran well, almost no one voted for such a party: in 1928 the Nazis held only 12 of the 491 seats in the Reichstag, Germany's parliament. The Depression changed everything. As unemployment rose, Nazi votes rose with it; by July 1932 the Nazi Party was the largest party in the Reichstag. Conservative politicians around President Paul von Hindenburg believed they could use Hitler's mass support and still control him. On **30 January 1933** Hindenburg appointed Hitler Chancellor — head of government. Within months Hitler had used a fire at the Reichstag building to suspend civil rights, and an **Enabling Act** to give his cabinet the power to make laws without parliament. Germany's democracy was dead by the summer of 1933. Rearmament began in secret, then openly from 1935 — in direct breach of the Treaty of Versailles. Figure 6 charts the Nazi Party's seats in the Reichstag across these years; watch how the line of the Depression and the line of Nazi seats climb together.

Nazi Party seats in the Reichstag at each election, 1924-1933



Source: official German election statistics, as compiled in 'Reichstag (Weimar Republic)', Wikipedia (retrieved 26 August 2026). Bars in red: elections after the Depression began.

Bar chart of Nazi Party seats in the German Reichstag at each election from 1924 to 1933, showing the leap after the Great Depression began in 1929

8. The slide into World War II (VC2HH10K13.E04)

Between 1931 and 1939, a series of aggressive moves tested the post-1919 order, and each test showed it would not be defended. Figure 7 places them on a timeline; the list follows the curriculum's own.

The slide into World War II, 1931-1941



Red: moves by the aggressor powers. Blue: the democracies' response. Brown: the outbreak and the war going global.

Timeline of the slide into World War II, 1931-1941, from the Japanese invasion of Manchuria to the attack on Pearl Harbor, with each aggression and the response to it

The Japanese invasion of Manchuria, 1931. Japan had modernised since the 1860s into a military and industrial power, and its army wanted the raw materials of **Manchuria**, the region of northern China where Japanese railways already ran. On 18 September 1931, after an explosion on a Japanese-owned railway near Mukden that the army itself arranged, Japanese forces occupied Manchuria and set up a puppet state called Manchukuo. China appealed to the League of Nations; the League sent a commission, which took a year to report that Japan was in the wrong. Japan simply left the League in February 1933. The lesson the militarist leaders of Japan — and every other watching government — took from Manchuria was that the League could not, or would not, stop aggression.

The Italo-Abyssinian Wars. Italy had tried to conquer **Abyssinia** (Ethiopia), one of the only independent African countries, once before, in 1895–96, and had been beaten. Mussolini, Italy's fascist dictator since 1922, wanted revenge, an empire, and glory. In October 1935 Italian forces invaded Abyssinia with aircraft, tanks and poison gas. The League imposed economic **sanctions** — penalties such as trade restrictions — but not on oil, and not through the Suez Canal, the route Italy's supplies travelled through; Britain and France privately hoped Mussolini could be kept

friendly against Germany. Abyssinia fell in May 1936. The sanctions had annoyed Mussolini without stopping him — the worst of both outcomes — and the League’s credibility never recovered.

The Spanish Civil War, 1936–39. In July 1936 generals of the Spanish army, among them **Francisco Franco**, rose against Spain’s elected republican government. Hitler and Mussolini sent aircraft, weapons and troops to help Franco; the USSR sent aid to the republic, and volunteers from many countries joined the **International Brigades** that fought beside it. The German air force bombed the northern Spanish town of Guernica in April 1937, killing hundreds of civilians — an event that showed the world what bombing could do to cities. Franco won in April 1939 and ruled Spain as a dictator until 1975. For the causes of World War II the war mattered because it brought Germany and Italy together as allies, and because both used Spain to test weapons and methods they would use in 1939.

The occupation of China. In July 1937, after a clash between troops at the Marco Polo Bridge near Beijing, Japan launched a full-scale invasion of China, occupying Beijing, Shanghai and the capital Nanjing, where Japanese troops killed vast numbers of civilians and prisoners in December 1937. China fought on, but by 1939 Japan controlled the great cities and railways of eastern China. Japan’s war in China bound its army to conquest as policy — the same militarist path that in 1941 led it to attack the United States.

The annexation of Austria (the Anschluss), March 1938. Hitler, born in Austria, had always meant to unite Austria with Germany — forbidden by the treaties of 1919. On 12 March 1938 German troops marched into Austria to cheering crowds, and Austria was proclaimed part of Germany. There was no fighting, and the democracies protested on paper.

The Munich Agreement and Germany’s annexation of the Sudetenland, September 1938. The **Sudetenland** was the German-speaking border region of **Czechoslovakia**, home to about three million people of German background. Hitler demanded it, threatening war. At a conference in Munich on 29–30 September 1938, Hitler, Mussolini, Chamberlain and the French Prime Minister Édouard Daladier agreed that Germany would take the Sudetenland — without any Czechoslovak representative in the room. Chamberlain returned to Britain saying he had secured “peace for our time”. Six months later, in March 1939, German troops occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia — proving that Hitler’s aim was not to unite German peoples but to conquer. Figure 8 reproduces the key terms of the Munich Agreement; worked source analysis 2 reads them closely.

Source 2 — The Munich Agreement (key terms)

“Agreement concluded at Munich, September 29, 1938, between Germany, Great Britain, France and Italy” ... providing “for the cession to Germany of the Sudeten German territory” of Czechoslovakia ...

“The evacuation will begin on 1st October” ... and “shall be completed by the 10th October”. “The occupation by stages of the predominantly German territory by German troops will begin on 1st October.” In some disputed districts a vote on which country they belong to is to be held “not later than the end of November”.

Signed: ADOLF HITLER (Germany) · NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN (the United Kingdom) · EDOUARD DALADIER (France) · BENITO MUSSOLINI (Italy).

Munich Agreement, 29 September 1938 (Avalon Project, Yale Law School, retrieved 26 August 2026). Note: no representative of Czechoslovakia signed this agreement.

Source reproduction of the key terms of the Munich Agreement of 29 September 1938, signed by Hitler, Chamberlain, Daladier and Mussolini, with no representative of Czechoslovakia present

The invasion of Poland, September 1939. Britain and France now guaranteed Poland's independence. Hitler ordered his generals to prepare an attack, and signed a non-aggression pact with the USSR on 23 August 1939 — the **Nazi–Soviet Pact** — whose secret clauses divided Poland between the two dictators. On **1 September 1939** Germany invaded Poland. On 3 September Britain and France declared war on Germany; Prime Minister Robert Menzies announced the same evening that Australia was also at war. World War II had begun in Europe.

9. Why the peace failed (VC2HH10K13.E05)

Four factors explain why the order built in 1919 collapsed by 1939. They are the four factors the curriculum asks you to evaluate — and evaluating them means weighing how much each contributed, with evidence.

The Treaty of Versailles: its impact on Germany. The treaty's effects worked on German politics like a slow poison. Article 231 branded Germany the guilty party; reparations drained its money, and when Germany fell behind in 1923, French and Belgian troops occupied the Ruhr industrial region, and German prices exploded so far that money became worthless. The Weimar Republic, the democracy that signed the treaty, was blamed for it: its enemies called its leaders the criminals of November 1918. Hitler never let Germans forget Versailles; every grievance he fed came back to the treaty. The treaty's impact was not only what it did to Germany's economy — it was what it did to Germans' willingness to support a democracy.

The League of Nations' structural weaknesses. The League was created in 1919, on Wilson's insistence, to settle disputes before they became wars. Its **Covenant** — its rulebook — shows why it failed. Figure 9 lists the weaknesses; the most damaging were built into its design. Any decision of the Assembly needed the agreement of all members present, so a single country could block action. The League had no armed forces of its own: its Covenant left it to members to say what forces they would contribute, and members never wanted to. The great powers stayed away or walked out: the United States Senate refused to join at all, Germany was excluded until 1926, the USSR joined only in 1934, and Japan and Germany left in 1933 and Italy in 1937. A peace-keeping body without the largest powers, without forces, and unable to decide quickly could do what the League did: condemn, delay, and watch.

The League of Nations' structural weaknesses

Built into the Covenant in 1919 — and exposed in the 1930s

Weakness	What it meant in practice
No armed forces of its own	Article 16 of the Covenant left it to each member to say what forces it would contribute — and members never wanted to send troops
Decisions had to be unanimous	Under Article 5, any single member present could block action; decisions were slow and watered down
The great powers were absent	The United States Senate refused to join; Germany was excluded until 1926; the USSR joined only in 1934
Aggressors could simply leave	Japan and Germany left in 1933, Italy in 1937 — and none paid any price for leaving
Sanctions were weak	Trade sanctions were slow and easy to dodge; over Abyssinia, sanctions excluded oil and did not close the Suez Canal

Source: *Covenant of the League of Nations* (Avalon Project, Yale Law School, retrieved 26 August 2026).

Table of the League of Nations' structural weaknesses, with what each weakness meant in practice in the 1930s

The growth of fascist and militarist regimes. By the mid-1930s three major powers were governed by regimes that rejected the post-1919 order and prepared for war: fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and militarist Japan — the three

aggressors of the 1930s. Their rise is both a cause and a consequence: the Depression and the bitterness of Versailles helped bring them to power, and once in power their programmes — empire for Italy, living space for Germany, resources and dominance in Asia for Japan — required war. Germany's rearmament from 1935 is the clearest case: within six years of Hitler's appointment, Germany had the most powerful air force in Europe and an army built for attack.

The failure of appeasement policies.

Defining the term: appeasement. The curriculum uses the word *appeasement* but does not define it. In this section, *appeasement* means **the policy of making concessions — giving in to some of an aggressive power's demands — in order to avoid a war**, in the hope that satisfied demands will end. The term is used especially of the policy of Chamberlain's British government in 1937–38, though the practice was older than Chamberlain and not his alone.

In the 1930s, the democracies repeatedly chose not to confront aggression: no force against Japan over Manchuria; half-hearted sanctions over Abyssinia; no response when Hitler rebuilt the German army, or when he marched troops back into the **Rhineland** — the part of western Germany the treaty had kept free of German forces — in March 1936; and Munich in 1938, the high point of appeasement. Figure 10 sets the pattern out: each row is an aggression, the response, and what followed.

Aggression and response, 1931-1939

The pattern appeasement made: each test was answered with words, delay or concession

Event	What the aggressor did	How the democracies responded	Result
Manchuria 1931-33	Japan stages a railway explosion and occupies Manchuria	League commission takes a year; condemns Japan	Japan leaves the League; keeps Manchuria
Abyssinia 1935-36	Italy invades with aircraft, tanks and poison gas	Sanctions — but not on oil, and not through Suez	Italy conquers Abyssinia; the League is discredited
Rhineland 1936	German troops march into the demilitarised Rhineland	Protest on paper	Hitler learns no one will stop him
Austria March 1938	Anschluss: Germany annexes Austria	Protest on paper	Germany grows, without a shot fired
Sudetenland Sept 1938	Hitler demands Czechoslovakia's borderlands and threatens war	Munich Agreement cedes them to Germany	Germany is stronger; 'peace for our time'
Czechoslovakia March 1939	Germany occupies the rest of the country	Britain and France guarantee Poland	Appeasement is abandoned
Poland Sept 1939	Germany invades on 1 September	Britain and France declare war on 3 September	World War II begins in Europe

The pattern is the point: aggression that met no firm response invited the next aggression.

Table of the pattern of aggression and response from Manchuria in 1931 to Poland in 1939, showing what each aggressor did, how the democracies responded, and the result

The historian's debate: was appeasement shameful, or sensible? The two positions, at their strongest:

- **The case against appeasement.** The critics' view was made famous at the time by the book *Guilty Men* (1940), published under the pen name "Cato": the democracies could have stopped Hitler early, when Germany was still weak, and instead they handed him everything — Austria, the Sudetenland with its fortresses and arms factories, and Czechoslovakia's industry — until he was strong enough to start the war anyway. On this view Munich was not peace-making but betrayal: it sacrificed a small ally's freedom for a promise Hitler never meant to keep, and "peace for our time" lasted six months.
- **The case for appeasement.** Its defenders answer with the facts of 1938: Britain's armed forces were not ready for war, its military leaders warned it could not defend Czechoslovakia, and its dominions — including Australia — urged peace. The United States had withdrawn into isolation, and the USSR was an uncertain ally at best. Many in Britain remembered the Western Front and honestly believed another such war might end civilisation. On this view Chamberlain was buying the one thing that mattered — time to rearm — and in 1939 Britain fought better prepared than it would have been in 1938. Historians note, too, that British public opinion supported Munich at the time.

Notice that the two positions judge the same policy by different tests: one by the outcome (war came anyway), the other by the options that existed at the time. Both tests are legitimate, and your own judgement should say which test you are applying and why.

10. The war becomes a world war (VC2HH10K13.E04)

From September 1939 the war spread. Germany overran Poland in weeks, using fast-moving combined attacks of tanks, troops and aircraft; by the summer of 1940 it controlled most of western Europe, France included. But the curriculum's list of causes reaches beyond 1939, to the two events that made the war truly global.

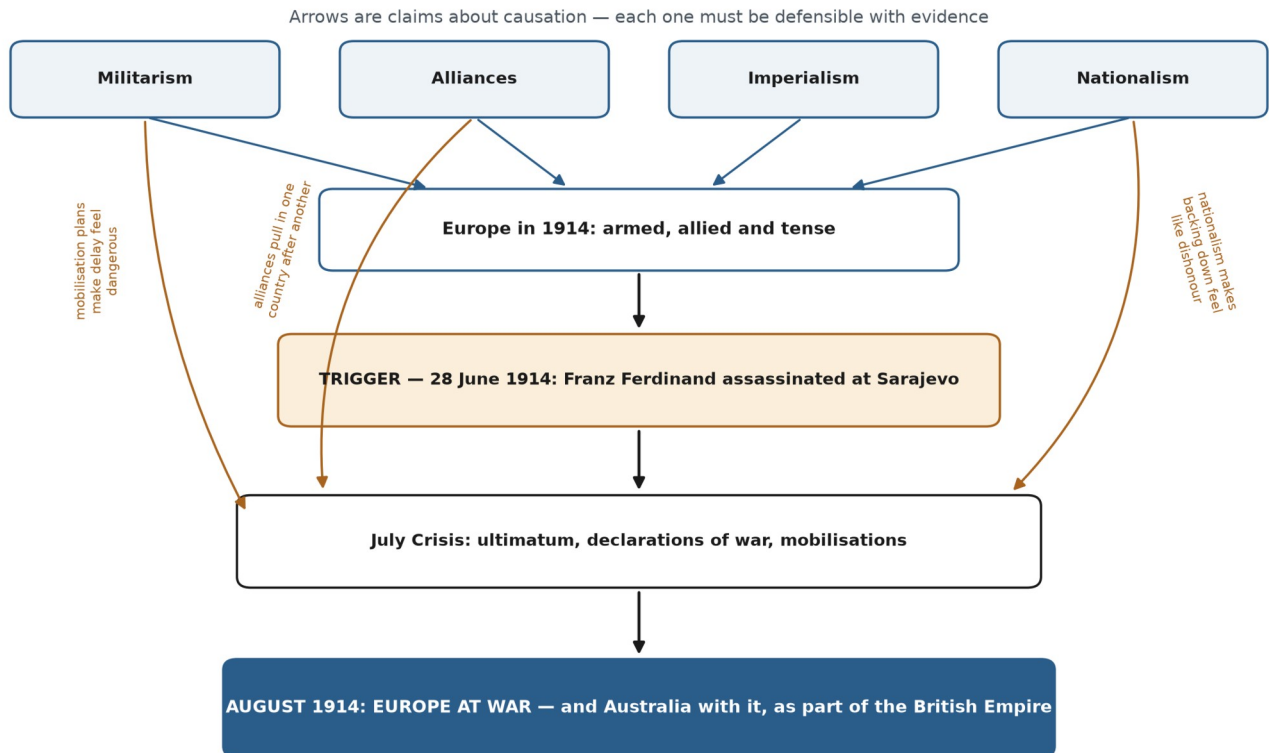
The **attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941**. Japan's war in China needed oil, rubber and steel; the United States had begun cutting off those supplies. Japan's military leaders gambled on destroying the United States Pacific Fleet at its base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii before America could arm. The attack sank or damaged much of the fleet and killed more than two thousand Americans. The next day the United States declared war on Japan; Germany and Italy declared war on the United States days later. Two wars — the European war of 1939 and Japan's wars in Asia — fused into one world war. Australia, now fighting Germany in North Africa, faced Japan directly when Japanese forces swept through South-East Asia in early 1942 — the subject of sections 3C and 3E.

11. Mapping the causes: the concept map (VC2HH10K13.E01)

A **concept map** is a diagram that shows how ideas connect: causes are placed in boxes, with arrows showing what led to what. Concept maps force you to make your ranking visible — an arrow is a claim that one thing led to another, and where arrows cross or meet, you are claiming causes combined.

Figure 11 is a model concept map of what caused World War I. Notice its features: long-term causes at the top, the trigger in the middle, the July Crisis decisions below, and the outbreak at the bottom; and cross-arrows showing how the long-term causes shaped the crisis itself — alliances turned a Balkan quarrel into a general war, and mobilisation plans made each decision harder to reverse.

Model concept map: what caused World War I



A model only — your own concept map may group causes differently or draw different links, but every arrow must carry a reason.

A model concept map of what caused World War I, linking long-term causes, the assassination, the July Crisis decisions and the outbreak of war in August 1914

Your turn. In the practice tasks below you will build a concept map for World War II. Before you start, decide on your organising principle: will you arrange causes by time (long-term to short-term), by type (political, economic, military), or by country? There is no single correct map — but every arrow you draw must be a claim you can defend with evidence from this section.

12. Bringing it together (VC2HH10K13)

Both wars had long-term causes and short-term triggers. World War I grew out of militarism, the alliance system, imperialism and nationalism, and was triggered by the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, the July Crisis and Germany's invasion of Belgium. World War II grew out of the settlement that ended the first war — the Treaty of Versailles, the Great Depression, the Russian Revolution — and out of the growth of fascist and militarist regimes; it was triggered through the slide of aggression from Manchuria to Poland, and became a world war at Pearl Harbor. And in both wars, the causes were not just Europe's business: they reached Australia in August 1914 and September 1939, setting the scene for everything else in this chapter — why Australians fought (section 3B), where they fought (section 3C), and what the wars did to them and to the society at home (sections 3D–3G).

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Worked examples

Worked source analysis 1 — with help

Question. Read Source 1 (Article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles, reproduced in Figure 5). What does this source tell historians about the peace of 1919 — and why did it become one of the causes of the next war?

Working	Comment
Step 1: Identify the source. It is Article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles, the peace treaty between the Allied powers and Germany, signed 28 June 1919. Germany was not invited to negotiate the treaty; it was presented with it and told to sign.	Start with what the source <i>is</i> : one clause of an official treaty, written by the victors and imposed on the defeated. That shapes everything it can tell us.
Step 2: Describe the content. The article states that the Allied governments "affirm", and Germany "accepts", the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing "all the loss and damage" of the war, imposed by "the aggression of Germany and her allies".	Use the source's own words. Notice the legal language: this is a statement of liability, drafted to justify what follows.
Step 3: Explain the context. The article was written to provide the legal basis for reparations — payments for the damage of the war, fixed in 1921 at 132 billion gold marks. The war had killed millions and devastated France and Belgium; Allied publics demanded Germany pay.	Context explains <i>why</i> the victors wrote what they wrote: the clause is a bridge from guilt to gold.
Step 4: Read the perspectives. The source speaks from the Allied perspective alone. From Berlin it read as a lie forced on a defeated country — Germans called the treaty a Diktat, a dictated peace. Historians still debate	A strong analysis states the strongest case on each side before judging, and notes that the clause itself takes one side.

the share of blame: Fritz Fischer argued German leaders chose war; Christopher Clark argues the powers sleepwalked into it together.

Step 5: State significance and inference. Historians can infer that the article was designed for two purposes at once: to justify reparations and to fix responsibility. Its unintended consequence was greater than either: it fed the grievance that German nationalists — above all Hitler — used to destroy the Weimar Republic and overturn the treaty.

Connect the source to what it helped cause. The “war-guilt” clause is a clear case of an intended solution becoming an unintended cause.

Answer: Article 231 shows the victors using the peace treaty to fix responsibility and justify reparations; its unintended consequence was to feed the resentment that helped bring Hitler to power — one of the clearest links between the end of World War I and the causes of World War II.

Worked source analysis 2 — with help

Question. Read Source 2 (the key terms of the Munich Agreement, 29 September 1938, reproduced in Figure 8). What can historians learn from this source about the policy of appeasement — and what does the source leave out?

Step 1: Identify the source. It is an excerpt from the Munich Agreement, signed in Munich on 29 September 1938 by Adolf Hitler (Germany), Neville Chamberlain (Britain), Édouard Daladier (France) and Benito Mussolini (Italy).

An official agreement between four governments. Notice at once who is *not* a signatory: Czechoslovakia, the country whose territory is being given away.

Step 2: Describe the content. The agreement fixes “the cession to Germany of the Sudeten German territory” of Czechoslovakia; evacuation of the territory begins 1 October 1938 and is complete by 10 October; German troops occupy it by stages; and in some disputed districts a vote is promised on which country they will belong to.

Set out the terms in plain language: who gives what to whom, and by when.

Step 3: Explain the context. Hitler had demanded the Sudetenland and threatened war. Britain and France were not ready to fight; their publics remembered 1914–18 and wanted peace. Chamberlain believed that satisfying Germany’s last great demand would settle Europe.

Context explains why four great powers signed away a fifth country’s land without fighting: the fear of another world war.

Step 4: Read the perspectives and what is absent. To Chamberlain the agreement was peace won by negotiation — he returned to Britain speaking of “peace for our time”. To Hitler it was one more step taken without fighting. From Prague it was betrayal: Czechoslovakia lost its border fortresses and much of its industry, and in March 1939 Germany occupied the rest of the country. The source contains no Czechoslovak voice at all — the absence is part of its meaning.

Perspectives include those who are silenced. The absence of the country most affected is evidence in itself.

Step 5: State significance and inference. Historians can infer that by 1938 appeasement had reached its limit: the democracies handed over territory of an ally to a dictator to buy peace, and the peace lasted six months. The source is significant as the high point of appeasement — and, after March 1939, as the proof that changed British

Connect the source to the policy it exemplifies and to what followed.

policy: guarantees were given to Poland, and when Poland was invaded in September 1939, Britain and France fought.

Answer: The Munich Agreement shows appeasement at its height — territory of an ally ceded to a dictator without a shot fired and without that ally at the table. Its silence about Czechoslovakia is as significant as its terms, and within six months the rest of the country was occupied, ending the policy that made it.

Practice questions

With help

Q1. Long-term causes behind World War I (VC2HH10K13 .E02).

- (a) State what the letters M.A.I.N. stand for.
- (b) Using Figure 1, give one example of each long-term cause.
- (c) Choose one of the four and explain how it made a general war more likely.

Q2. The alliance system (VC2HH10K13 .E02). Use Figure 2.

- (a) Name the three members of the Triple Alliance and the three members of the Triple Entente.
- (b) In what sense were the Triple Entente countries less closely bound than the Triple Alliance countries?
- (c) Explain how the alliance system could turn the assassination of one man into a European war.

Q3. The July Crisis (VC2HH10K13 .E02). Use Figure 3.

- (a) Who assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, where, and on what date?
- (b) What was the “blank cheque”, and who gave it to whom?
- (c) Why did Germany’s invasion of Belgium bring Britain into the war?

Q4. The Treaty of Versailles (VC2HH10K13 .E03, VC2HH10K13 .E05). Use Figures 4 and 5.

- (a) State one term of the treaty in each category: territory, military, money.
- (b) In your own words, what does Article 231 say?
- (c) Why did many Germans call the treaty a Diktat?

Q5. Between the wars (VC2HH10K13 .E03).

- (a) Give two consequences of the Russian Revolution of 1917 for the causes of World War II.
- (b) Explain how the Great Depression fed the Nazi Party’s rise to power, using Figure 6.
- (c) On what date was Hitler appointed Chancellor, and by whom?

Q6. The slide into war (VC2HH10K13 .E04). Use Figure 7.

- (a) List four aggressive moves of the 1930s in date order, each with its date.
- (b) For two of them, state how the League of Nations or the democracies responded.
- (c) Why does this section treat the attack on Pearl Harbor as part of the *causes* story, even though it happened after the war began in Europe?

On your own

Q7. Concept map (VC2HH10K13 .E01). Using Figure 11 as your model, draw a concept map of what caused World War II. Include at least four long-term factors, at least three events of the 1930s, and at least one cross-arrow showing how two causes combined. Write one sentence defending each arrow you draw.

Q8. Evaluate significance (VC2HH10K13 .E03). “Which was the most significant cause of World War II: the Treaty of Versailles, the Great Depression, or the rise of Hitler?” Choose one, give two criteria you used to judge significance, and argue your case in one paragraph. Then state the strongest case for one of the other two choices.

Q9. Perspectives (VC2HH10K13 .E05). Choose one of the decisions of the 1930s — the response to Manchuria, the sanctions over Abyssinia, or the Munich Agreement. Explain how that decision looked from (a) the aggressor’s capital, (b) London or Paris, and (c) the country being attacked or abandoned. Why did the same decision look so different from each place?

Q10. Continuity and change (VC2HH10K13). Identify one feature of international politics that **continued** from before 1914 into the 1930s, and one feature that **changed** between 1919 and 1939. Justify each choice with evidence from this section.

Q11. Historian’s debate. Take the appeasement debate of part 9. State the strongest case on each side, say which test each side is judging the policy by (outcome, or options available at the time), and give your own conclusion with reasons.

Q12. Source analysis. Using Source 1 (Article 231, Figure 5) and Source 2 (the Munich Agreement, Figure 8) together, explain what the two sources reveal about how the First World War’s settlement contributed to the Second World War. Use the five steps of worked source analysis 1.

Answers

Q1. (a) Militarism, alliances, imperialism, nationalism. (b) For example: militarism — the naval race between Britain and Germany after HMS *Dreadnought* (1906); alliances — the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy (1882); imperialism — the Morocco crises of 1905 and 1911; nationalism — Serbia's aim to unite the South Slavs; France's wish to recover Alsace-Lorraine. (c) For example: alliances meant that an attack on one country became an attack on its allies, so a local quarrel could spread to every great power within days.

Q2. (a) Triple Alliance: Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy. Triple Entente: France, Britain, Russia. (b) The Triple Alliance was a formal treaty of mutual defence; the ententes were agreements settling disputes and forming understandings, not binding treaties of defence. (c) An attack on one power pulled in its ally; that ally's rivals then mobilised in defence; and the rigid railway timetables meant each government felt it had to mobilise first — so a Balkan quarrel became a general war in days.

Q3. (a) Gavrilo Princip, a Bosnian Serb nationalist, shot Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie at Sarajevo in Bosnia on 28 June 1914. (b) The “blank cheque” was Germany's promise of full support to Austria-Hungary, given on 5–6 July 1914, for whatever action it took against Serbia. (c) Belgium's neutrality had been guaranteed by the great powers, including Britain, since 1839; Germany's invasion of Belgium on 4 August 1914 gave Britain the reason and the legal ground to declare war.

Q4. (a) For example — territory: Alsace-Lorraine returned to France (Article 51); military: army limited to 100,000 men (Article 160), no air force (Article 198); money: Germany to pay compensation for damage (Articles 231–232), fixed in 1921 at 132 billion gold marks. (b) Germany accepts responsibility, with its allies, for all the loss and damage of the war. (c) Germany was not invited to negotiate the treaty; it was presented and told to sign — a dictated peace.

Q5. (a) Any two from: it took Russia out of World War I early; it split and frightened the victors of 1919, who excluded the Soviet state; the fear of communist revolution drove many voters toward hard-right movements that promised to crush it. (b) As unemployment rose after the 1929 crash, voters turned to the extremes; Nazi seats rose from 12 in 1928 to 230 in July 1932 — the two lines climb together. (c) 30 January 1933, appointed by President Paul von Hindenburg.

Q6. (a) Any four in order: Manchuria, September 1931; German rearmament, openly from 1935; Abyssinia, October 1935; Rhineland, March 1936; Spanish Civil War begins, July 1936; invasion of China, July 1937; Austria, March 1938; Munich Agreement and the Sudetenland, September 1938; rest of Czechoslovakia, March 1939; Nazi–Soviet Pact, August 1939; Poland, 1 September 1939. (b) For example: Manchuria — the League sent a commission, condemned Japan, and Japan left the League; Abyssinia — the League imposed sanctions without oil or Suez; Munich — Britain and France agreed to the cession of the Sudetenland. (c) Because Pearl Harbor explains how the European war became a world war: it brought in the United States and fused the European and Asian wars into one — the final stage of the chain of causes set running in the 1930s.

Q7. Award: at least four long-term factors (for example, Versailles, the Depression, the rise of fascism and militarism, League weakness, appeasement); at least three 1930s events (for example, Manchuria, Abyssinia, Austria, Munich, Poland); at least one cross-arrow defended with evidence (for example, Depression → Nazi votes; Versailles grievance → Hitler's message; League weakness → Hitler's gambles). Every arrow must carry a defence.

Q8. Answers will vary. Award: a clear choice; two stated criteria (for example, how many people it affected, how directly it led to war, how much it changed what was possible afterwards); a paragraph arguing the case with section evidence; the strongest case for one other choice. Example: the Depression — without it the Nazis remained a fringe party (12 seats in 1928); with it they became the largest party (230 seats in July 1932) and Hitler became possible.

Q9. Answers will vary. Example — Munich: (a) from Berlin, another gain without fighting, and proof the democracies would not fight for their allies; (b) from London, peace preserved, war postponed, a horrible choice avoided — Chamberlain returned to cheering crowds; (c) from Prague, betrayal: a country's border lands given away at a meeting it was not invited to. Perspectives differ because each government stood in a different place: what reads as prudence in one capital reads as surrender — or opportunity — in another.

Q10. Continued (example): rivalry between great powers — the competition that produced the alliance blocs before 1914 continued as the competition between the powers defending the post-war order and the powers determined to overturn it. Changed (example): the map — four empires (German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian, Ottoman) were

replaced by new states such as Poland and Czechoslovakia; or the League of Nations itself, a new institution with no predecessor. Justification must use section evidence.

Q11. Award: the strongest case on each side (against: *Guilty Men* — Hitler could have been stopped early; the concessions armed him; Munich betrayed an ally; for: Britain was not ready, its leaders remembered 1914–18, the dominions urged peace, time bought rearmament); identification of the tests (outcome vs options available at the time); a reasoned conclusion. Marking is on the quality of reasoning from defined terms and stated evidence, not on the conclusion reached.

Q12. Award: use of the five steps (identify, content, context, perspective, inference) applied to both sources; a stated link between them — for example, the source that fixed guilt and demanded payment (1919) fed the grievance that the source of 1938 tried to manage by concession, and failed: the settlement of the first war, unenforced and resented, set the conditions the second war grew out of.

Fully-worked solutions

Q1.

- (a) M.A.I.N. stands for militarism, alliances, imperialism and nationalism — the four long-term causes behind World War I taught in part 2.
- (b) Examples (one for each): militarism — the naval race between Britain and Germany, which began in earnest after Britain launched HMS *Dreadnought* in 1906 and Germany answered with its own dreadnoughts. Alliances — the Triple Alliance, the formal treaty binding Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy (1882). Imperialism — the Morocco crises of 1905 and 1911, in which Germany challenged France’s takeover of a North African territory and both crises ended with the powers more heavily armed. Nationalism — the Serbian aim of uniting the South Slav peoples, many of whom lived under Austrian rule, and the French wish to recover Alsace-Lorraine.
- (c) Example: alliances made a general war more likely because each promise of support raised the stakes of every quarrel. An attack on one country became an attack on its allies; those allies’ rivals then faced a choice between fighting now and fighting later at a disadvantage; and because every general staff had trained its railway timetables to mobilise within days, each government believed it had to move first. So a quarrel that would once have stayed between two countries could draw in all six great powers within a week — which is exactly what happened in July and August 1914.

Q2.

- (a) Triple Alliance: Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy. Triple Entente: France, Britain and Russia.
- (b) The Triple Alliance was a formal treaty of mutual defence. The Triple Entente was looser: three separate agreements — the Franco-Russian alliance of 1894, the Entente Cordiale between France and Britain of 1904, and the Anglo-Russian understanding of 1907 — which settled disputes and created friendships rather than binding each country to fight. Figure 2 shows this by drawing the entente links differently from the treaty links.
- (c) The assassination killed the heir to Austria-Hungary, which resolved to attack Serbia. Germany’s blank cheque made Austria-Hungary willing to risk a wider war; Russia mobilised to protect Serbia; Germany then declared war on Russia and on Russia’s ally France; and Germany’s war plan sent its armies through Belgium, which brought in Britain. At each step it was a promise of support — an alliance or an entente — that turned a Balkan quarrel into a war of six great powers.

Q3.

- (a) Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary and his wife Sophie were shot at Sarajevo, the capital of the Austrian province of Bosnia, on 28 June 1914, by Gavrilo Princip, a 19-year-old Bosnian Serb nationalist, one of a group armed and trained in Serbia.
- (b) The “blank cheque” was Germany’s promise, given on 5–6 July 1914, of full support for Austria-Hungary whatever action it took against Serbia. It mattered because it made Austria-Hungary willing to take the hardest line — Germany knew this risked a general war and accepted the risk.
- (c) Belgium was a neutral country whose neutrality the great powers, including Britain, had guaranteed by treaty since 1839. Germany’s war plan against France required marching through Belgium; when German troops crossed the Belgian frontier on 4 August 1914, Britain declared war on Germany. The invasion of Belgium is one of the curriculum’s named short-term triggers of the war.

Q4.

- (a) Territory: Alsace-Lorraine was restored to France (Article 51). Military: the German army was capped at 100,000 men (Article 160), conscription abolished (Article 173), the navy cut to six battleships with no submarines (Articles 181, 191), and no air force allowed (Article 198). Money: Germany accepted responsibility for the loss and damage of the war (Article 231) and undertook to pay compensation (Article 232); the amount was fixed in 1921 at 132 billion gold marks.
- (b) In plain words, Article 231 says that the Allied governments state, and Germany accepts, that Germany and its allies are responsible for causing all the loss and damage of the war.
- (c) Because Germany was never invited to negotiate: it was handed the treaty and told to sign. A peace dictated rather than negotiated is what the German word *Diktat* means, and it captured the way most Germans experienced Versailles. That experience — of humiliation forced on a defeated country — is part of what made the treaty one of the causes of the next war.

Q5.

- (a) Two consequences of the Russian Revolution for the causes of World War II. First, it took Russia out of World War I early, which shaped how Germany thought about wars and their endings. Second — and more important for 1933 — it created the fear of communist revolution that haunted European politics for twenty years; that fear drove many property owners and middle-class voters to support hard-right movements that promised to crush revolution, including the Nazi Party. (Also accepted: it split the victors of 1919, and the excluded Soviet state stayed outside the post-war order, joining the League only in 1934.)
- (b) The Depression and the Nazi rise move together on Figure 6. Before the crash of October 1929 the Nazis were a fringe party: 12 seats in 1928 out of 491. As American loans were called in, German banks collapsed and unemployment climbed toward one worker in three, the moderate parties of the Weimar Republic lost support to the extremes. Nazi seats leapt to 107 in 1930 and 230 in July 1932 — making them the largest party in the Reichstag. The Depression did not make Hitler’s message; it made millions of Germans desperate enough to listen to it.
- (c) Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany on 30 January 1933 by President Paul von Hindenburg. Within months the Reichstag fire decree suspended civil rights and the Enabling Act gave Hitler’s cabinet the power to make laws without parliament.

Q6.

- (a) Four moves in date order (any four): the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, September 1931; German rearmament, openly declared from 1935; the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, October 1935; Hitler's troops into the Rhineland, March 1936; the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, July 1936; Japan's full-scale invasion of China, July 1937; the annexation of Austria, March 1938; the Munich Agreement and Germany's annexation of the Sudetenland, September 1938; Germany's occupation of the rest of Czechoslovakia, March 1939; the invasion of Poland, 1 September 1939.
- (b) Two responses (any two): over Manchuria, the League sent a commission of inquiry, took a year to condemn Japan, and Japan left the League in 1933. Over Abyssinia, the League imposed economic sanctions but not on oil and not through Suez, so they annoyed Mussolini without stopping him. Over Austria and the Sudetenland, the democracies protested on paper (Austria) and then signed the cession away (Munich).
- (c) Pearl Harbor is part of the causes story because the curriculum's causes run through to the war becoming a world war. Japan's attack on 7 December 1941, and the German and Italian declarations of war on the United States that followed, fused the European war of 1939 with Japan's wars in Asia into one global conflict. It is the last link in the chain this section traces: Manchuria (1931) → the occupation of China (1937) → the oil embargo and the gamble on Pearl Harbor (1941).

Q7.

Model answer. Organising principle: time, from long-term at the top to short-term at the bottom, as in Figure 11.

Long-term factors (boxes across the top): the Treaty of Versailles and its grievances; the Great Depression; the growth of fascist and militarist regimes; the policy of appeasement; the structural weakness of the League of Nations.

Events of the 1930s (boxes below): Manchuria 1931; Abyssinia 1935; Austria and Munich 1938; Poland 1939.

Cross-arrows, each defended:

- **Great Depression → rise of the Nazi Party.** Defence: Nazi seats rose from 12 in 1928 to 230 in July 1932, as unemployment climbed toward one worker in three (Figure 6).
- **Versailles grievance → Hitler's message.** Defence: Hitler built his case on Article 231, reparations and the "November criminals"; every grievance led back to the treaty.
- **League weakness → Hitler's gambles.** Defence: Hitler watched Japan leave the League unpunished over Manchuria and Mussolini get away with Abyssinia before he remilitarised the Rhineland in 1936; each gamble tested what the League had already shown it would not defend.
- **Appeasement → Germany stronger by 1939.** Defence: Munich handed Germany the Sudetenland's fortresses and, with them, the Czechoslovak arms industry; by 1939 Germany was far stronger than in 1938.

Bottom box: **World War II begins in Europe, September 1939.**

Q8.

Model answer (one of several defensible choices). Choice: the Great Depression.

Criteria used: (1) how much the cause changed what was politically possible afterwards, and (2) how directly the cause led to the outbreak of war.

Argument: the Depression is the most significant cause because without it the chain breaks at its most important link — Hitler. In 1928, with the German economy recovering, the Nazi Party held 12 of 491 Reichstag seats: a fringe group almost no one took any notice of. The Depression destroyed the Weimar Republic's middle ground: unemployment climbed toward one worker in three, American loans vanished, and frightened voters turned to the extremes. By July 1932 the Nazis were the largest party in the Reichstag, and it was that mass support — the product of economic collapse — that led conservative politicians to hand Hitler the chancellorship in January 1933. The Treaty of Versailles fed Hitler's message, and the League's weakness let him act, but the Depression is what put the message within reach of power.

Strongest case for another choice: the Treaty of Versailles. Its advocates would argue that the treaty came first in the chain: Article 231, the reparations and the Diktat created the grievance every German nationalist drew on for twenty years, and without Versailles there would have been no grievance for even a Depression to exploit.

Q9.

Model answer. Decision chosen: the Munich Agreement, September 1938.

- (a) From Berlin. To Hitler, Munich was another bloodless victory and another lesson: the democracies would negotiate away their friends' territory rather than fight. The agreement strengthened Germany's military position — the Sudetenland carried Czechoslovakia's border fortresses and much of its arms industry — and it told Hitler that his next move would probably also go unanswered. From Berlin, appeasement looked like an invitation.
- (b) From London. To Chamberlain and most of the British public, Munich was peace preserved. Britain's forces were not ready; the dominions urged peace; the memory of 1914–18 made almost any concession seem better than war. Chamberlain returned speaking of "peace for our time", and crowds cheered him. From London, Munich looked like the responsible choice among terrible options.
- (c) From Prague. To Czechoslovakia, Munich was betrayal by its own allies: its border provinces handed to Germany at a conference to which it was not invited, and within six months the rest of the country occupied. From Prague, the agreement looked exactly like what it was for the Czechs — the sacrifice of a small country's freedom so larger countries could sleep easier.

The same decision looks so different because each government stood in a different place: what reads as prudence in the capital that avoids a war reads as surrender in the capital that pays for it — and as opportunity in the capital that profits from it. That is why historians ask *whose* perspective any source or decision reflects before they judge it.

Q10.

Model answer.

One feature that **continued**: rivalry between the great powers. Before 1914 the rivalry took the form of arms races, alliance blocs and colonial quarrels (M.A.I.N.). The settlement of 1919 did not end that rivalry; it redrew the contestants. By the 1930s the same pattern had returned in new form: a group of powers seeking to overturn the order (Germany, Italy, Japan) against a group defending it (Britain, France, and eventually the USSR and the United States), with rearmament on every side. The rivalry that helped cause the first war was still the engine of the second.

One feature that **changed**: the institutions available to keep the peace. Before 1914 there was no international body with any standing to settle disputes; the alliance blocs were the only machinery, and they made war more likely. In 1919 the League of Nations was created — the first worldwide body charged with preventing war. It was a genuine change, even though its structural weaknesses (unanimity, no forces of its own, the absent great powers) meant the new institution failed. The 1930s were fought over with a tool the 1910s did not have; the failure of that tool is itself part of the cause of the second war.

Q11.

Model answer.

The strongest case against appeasement is the one made at the time by “Cato” in *Guilty Men* (1940): the democracies could have stopped Hitler early, when Germany was still weak — over the Rhineland in 1936, Hitler himself admitted the German army would have had to withdraw if France had marched. Instead, concession after concession armed him: Austria, then the Sudetenland with its fortresses and the Czechoslovak arms industry, until Germany in 1939 was far stronger than in 1938. Munich betrayed a loyal, democratic ally, and “peace for our time” lasted six months. On this view appeasement did not avoid war; it chose the worst possible moment to have one.

The strongest case for appeasement answers with the facts of 1938: Britain’s armed forces were not ready, its military leaders said Czechoslovakia could not be defended, the dominions — including Australia — urged peace, the United States had withdrawn from European affairs, and the USSR was an uncertain ally. The generation in power remembered the Western Front and believed, honestly, that another such war might end civilisation itself. On this view Chamberlain bought the one thing available — time — and Britain rearmament in 1938–39, above all in fighter aircraft, was what allowed it to fight on in 1940.

The two sides judge the same policy by different tests. The critics judge by **outcome**: war came anyway, and bigger. The defenders judge by **options available at the time**: what could reasonably have been done in 1938, given what was known then? Both tests are legitimate; a judgement should say which it applies.

My conclusion (one of several defensible positions): appeasement was defensible as delay in 1937–38 but failed as a theory of peace, because it rested on a mistaken belief — that Hitler’s demands were limited. Once the rest of Czechoslovakia was occupied in March 1939, that belief was dead, and British policy changed at once: guarantees to Poland, and war in September. The error was not in buying time; it was in believing the time had bought anything.

Q12.

Model answer, following the five steps.

Identify. Source 1 is Article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles, signed 28 June 1919 — a clause of the imposed peace ending World War I. Source 2 is an excerpt from the Munich Agreement of 29 September 1938, signed by Germany, Britain, France and Italy without Czechoslovakia.

Content. Article 231 forces Germany to accept responsibility for all the loss and damage of the war, providing the legal basis for reparations. The Munich Agreement fixes the cession of the Sudetenland to Germany: evacuation beginning 1 October, occupation by stages, completed by 10 October.

Context. Article 231 was written by exhausted, angry victors demanding that Germany pay; Munich was signed by frightened democracies trying to stop Hitler without a war. Nineteen years separate them, but they are linked: the grievances Versailles created are exactly the grievances Munich was trying to manage by concession.

Perspective. Article 231 speaks with the victors’ voice alone; from Berlin it read as a forced lie, and it fed the grievance nationalism drew on for two decades. Munich speaks with the great powers’ voices alone; from Prague it read as betrayal, and the absence of any Czechoslovak signature is part of its meaning. Both sources, in different ways, are documents in which the country that pays the price has no voice.

Inference. Together the sources show how the First World War’s settlement contributed to the second. The settlement fixed guilt and demanded payment (Source 1), feeding the resentment that brought to power a government sworn to overturn the treaty; and when that government began to overturn it by force, the victors of 1919 — now weakened and frightened — chose concession over enforcement (Source 2), giving away an ally’s territory for six months of peace. The settlement of 1919 was both resented and unenforced: harsh enough to feed grievance, too weakly held to stop a recovering Germany from acting on it. That combination — visible in these two sources — is one of the deepest causes of World War II.

Answering the call: why Australians went to war

Between 1914 and 1945, two world wars shaped the modern world. In both of them, Australia fought as part of the British Empire, and in both, most of the people who served signed up of their own free choice. This section asks why: what ideas about war did Australians hold in 1914, how did the country's leaders answer the outbreak of war, why did men enlist, and how were Australia's reasons in the Second World War the same as — and different from — the first?

Curriculum key — This section owns **VC2HH10K14**. It draws on **VC2HH10K14.E01**, **VC2HH10K14.E02**, **VC2HH10K14.E03**, **VC2HH10K14.E05** and **VC2HH10K14.E06**. (One elaboration of this content description is excluded from this book — see the exclusion note at the front of the book.)

Theory

1. Australia in 1914: how most people saw war. In 1914 Australia was a young nation. The six colonies had federated — joined into one Commonwealth — only in 1901, and most Australians were of British birth or descent. Being British was a core part of Australian identity, and loyalty to Britain was a value held right across society. So when war broke out in Europe in August 1914, most Australians saw it in favourable terms: war was spoken of as noble and heroic, a test of courage and character, and for many young men it looked like an adventure — a chance to travel and to prove oneself. That is a *perspective*: one way of seeing the same events.

Not everyone shared it. Some Australians — among them some church groups, some women's organisations, and parts of the labour movement — argued against the war. Their strongest case was that this quarrel belonged to European empires, not to Australia, and that ordinary workers would pay its price in lives and money. In 1914 they were a small minority, but their arguments never went away, and they grew louder as the war dragged on (you will meet them again in the conscription debates, Section 3G). Both positions are real historical perspectives; historians ask how widely each was held, and what evidence supports it.

Perspectives on war in Australia, 1914

Many Australians supported war	Some Australians questioned war
Noble and heroic War was spoken of as a test of courage and of character.	Wrong in itself Some church and peace groups said killing could never be justified.
An adventure A chance to travel beyond one's own district and to prove oneself.	Not our quarrel Some workers argued the war served empires, not ordinary people.
A duty to Britain Loyalty to Britain and the Empire was part of being Australian.	The cost in lives Others feared what a great war would cost in men and money.

Both sides are real historical positions; historians weigh the evidence for each.

Two panels comparing supportive and questioning views of war held by Australians in 1914

Words to watch: duty and loyalty. *Duty* and *loyalty* are contested words: people use them differently, and the meaning you choose changes the conclusion you reach. In this section they are used in the sense that Australians of 1914 gave them in their own public words — for example in Andrew Fisher's Colac speech of 31 July 1914 and in the recruiting campaigns of the time. In that sense, *loyalty* meant standing by Britain

because Australia's safety, trade and pride were bound up with the Empire, and *duty* meant the obligation a person owed to that same community. Other Australians gave the words different meanings: for some, a worker's first duty was to his family, or to peace. When you answer the questions below, use the definition above — and if you argue from a different meaning, say what it is.

2. How Australia's leaders answered. In 1914 Australia was a *dominion* of the British Empire: a self-governing country that still recognised the British king and looked to Britain for defence and trade. When Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914, Australia was at war too; no separate Australian decision was needed. The leaders of both major parties answered with promises of full support. The prime minister, Joseph Cook, said on 3 August 1914: "When the mother country is at war, so is Australia." The opposition leader, Andrew Fisher, had already pledged — in an election speech at Colac in Victoria on 31 July 1914 — that Australia would stand by Britain "to the last man and the last shilling". Fisher's Labor government took office in September 1914 and kept that promise. That the two rivals agreed so closely shows how deep loyalty to Britain ran through Australian public life.

How Australia's leaders answered the outbreak of war

Joseph Cook	Andrew Fisher	Robert Menzies
Prime Minister	Leader of the Opposition; Prime Minister from September 1914	Prime Minister
Statement, 3 August 1914, when Britain declared war	Election-campaign speech, Colac, Victoria, 31 July 1914	Radio broadcast to the nation, 3 September 1939
<i>'When the mother country is at war, so is Australia.'</i>	<i>Australia would stand by Britain 'to the last man and the last shilling'.</i>	<i>'... as a result, Australia is also at war.'</i>

Australia entered both wars as part of the British Empire; no separate Australian declaration was made.

Cards for Joseph Cook, Andrew Fisher and Robert Menzies with their dates and quoted words at the outbreak of each war

3. Why men enlisted in the First World War. For overseas service, Australia relied on volunteers. The army raised for the war was the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). From a population of just under five million, about 416,800 men enlisted in the AIF; more than 330,000 served overseas, and 61,513 died. Early rules asked recruits to be aged 18-35 and at least 168 cm tall; the rules were eased as the war went on and recruits grew harder to find.

Why did they go? Historians identify five main reasons, shown in the table below. Because Australian law did not allow conscripts — men forced by law to serve — to be sent overseas, the AIF stayed an all-volunteer force; two *referendums* (nationwide votes on a single question) held in 1916 and 1917 to bring in conscription were both defeated. The conscription story belongs to Section 3G; here the point is that most Australians who fought in the First World War chose to fight, for the reasons below.

Why Australian men joined the AIF (World War I)

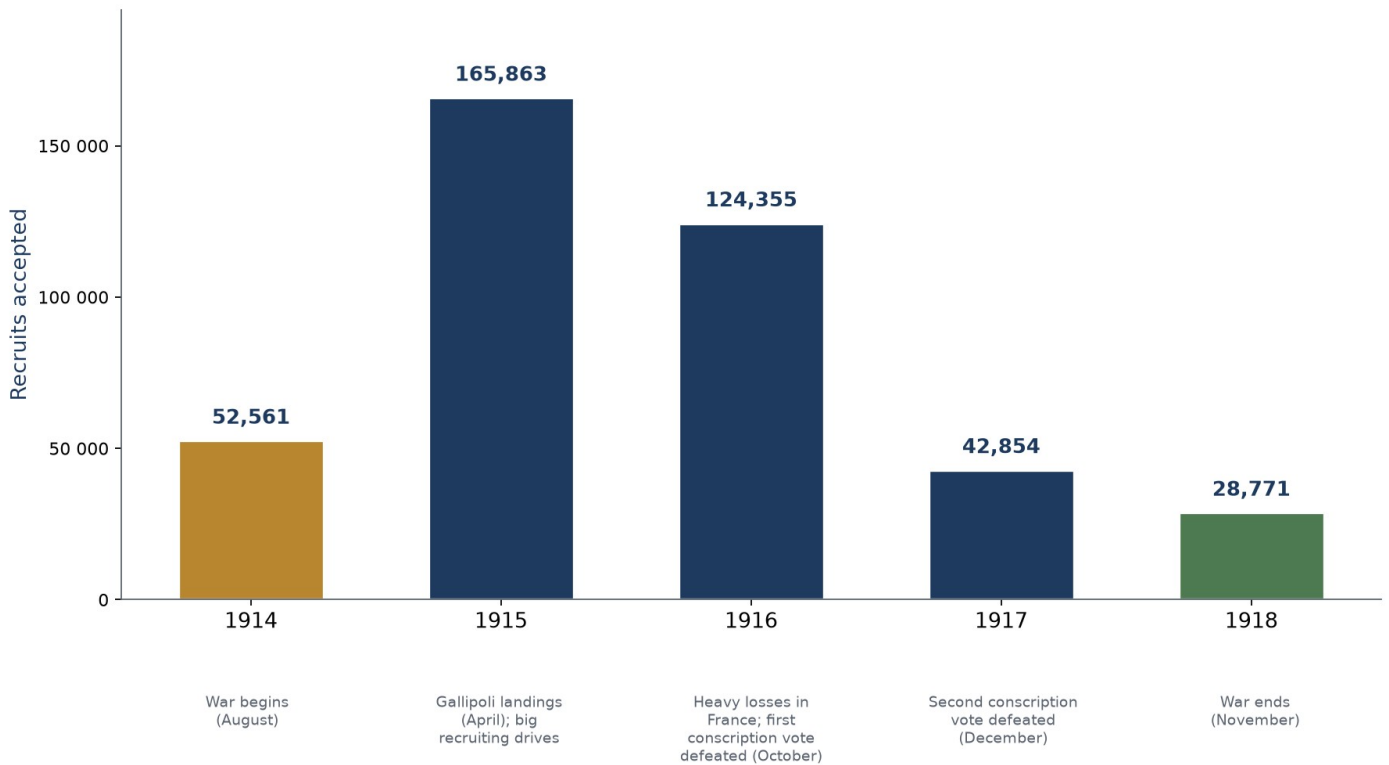
Reason for enlisting	What it looked like
Duty for the British Empire	Many believed Australia owed Britain its help. Speeches and posters spoke of honour and of standing by the 'mother country'.
Adventure	A chance to see the world and to prove oneself. In 1914 most young men had never left their own district.
Regular pay and work	Life on the land was hard and paid work uncertain. A private earned about five shillings a day - a steady wage with food and clothing.
Propaganda: posters, pamphlets and leaflets	Recruiting campaigns made emotional appeals to pride, duty and shame, and promised respect to those who enlisted.
Peer and community pressure	Mates and workmates enlisted together. Men who stayed home could be called cowards, and public meetings urged men to join.

Draws on VC2HH10K14.E03.

Table of the five main reasons for enlistment in the Australian Imperial Force, with what each reason looked like in practice

The chart below shows how many recruits joined in each year of the war. The shape of the chart is itself evidence: recruiting surged in 1915, after the Gallipoli landings and the big recruiting drives, then fell as news of heavy losses in France reached home and the conscription debates divided the country.

Recruits to the Australian Imperial Force, 1914-1918
Australia's population in 1914 was just under 5 million.



Data: official recruiting statistics (Ernest Scott, Australia during the War, official history vol. XI, 1936). 1914 covers August-December only.

Bar chart of recruits to the Australian Imperial Force by year from 1914 to 1918, peaking in 1915, with key war events noted under each year

4. Why Australia fought in the Second World War. Twenty-one years later, the pattern began the same way. Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939; Britain declared war on Germany two days later. On the evening of 3 September 1939 the prime minister, Robert Menzies, told the nation by radio that “as a result, Australia is also at war” (Source B). Once again, the Empire tie did the deciding: Australia entered the war because Britain was in it.

But loyalty was not the whole story in 1939. Many Australians also saw the war as the defence of small countries against conquest. And after Japan entered the war in December 1941, the conflict came close to home: Singapore, the key British base in the region, fell in February 1942, and Darwin was bombed the same month. From then on, many Australians were fighting not only for the Empire but in the direct defence of their own country. At home, the government also used conscription to train the *militia* (the part-time citizen army) for home defence, while overseas service with the Second AIF stayed voluntary. About one million Australians served in the Second World War, and about 39,000 died.

5. Two wars compared. The table below sets out what the reasons for fighting shared across the two wars, and what was stronger in one war than the other. In both wars, the same cause — Britain at war — produced Australia’s entry; but different causes (above all, Japan’s advance) changed how the second war was felt. That is a change in cause and consequence. You can hear the change in tone too: the excitement of 1914 against the “melancholy duty” of 1939.

Reasons for Australia's involvement: World War I and World War II compared

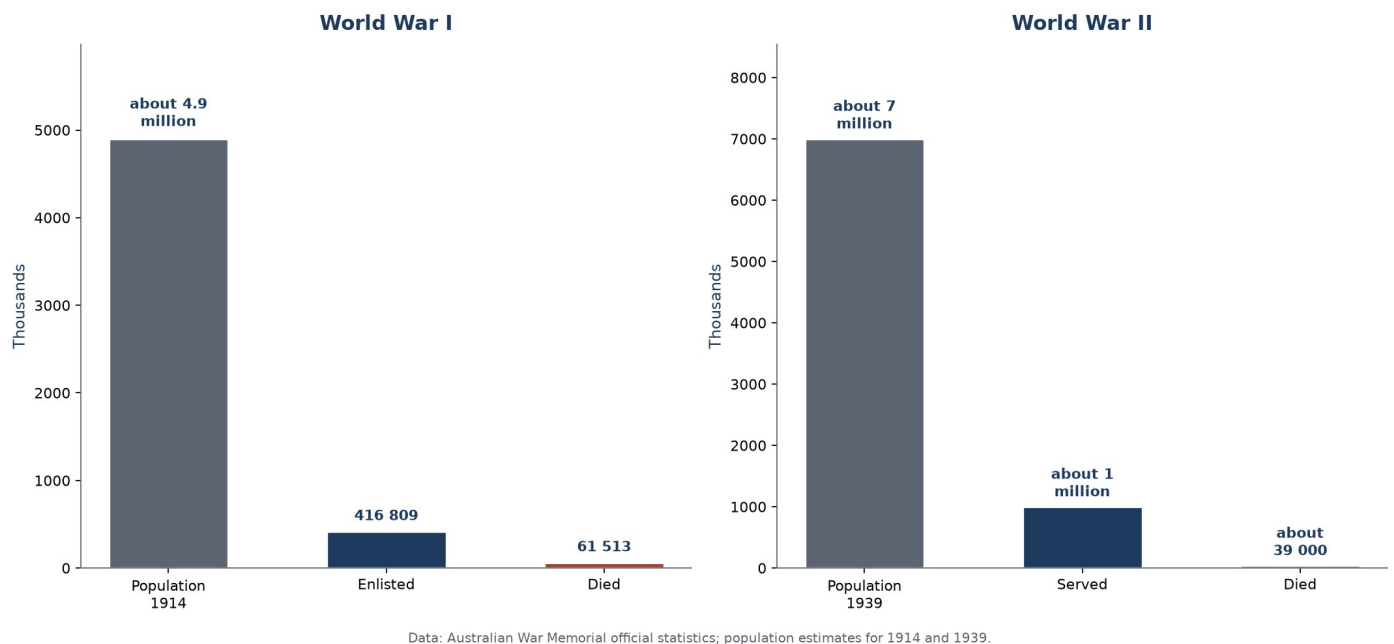
Shared by both wars	Stronger in World War I	Stronger in World War II
Australia entered because Britain was at war (ties to the British Empire) Many felt duty and loyalty to Britain Volunteers were needed and recruiting campaigns ran	War was seen by many as noble, heroic, an adventure The fighting was far away; Australia itself was not threatened The AIF stayed all-volunteer; conscription was rejected twice in referendums	Defence of Australia itself mattered after Japan entered the war (December 1941) Conscripts (the militia) served in home defence Leaders spoke of the war as a fight against conquest of free countries

Draws on VC2HH10K14.E06.

Three-column table comparing the shared reasons for Australia's involvement and the reasons stronger in each of the two world wars

The final figure puts a scale on both wars. In the First World War, roughly nine of every hundred Australians enlisted; in the Second, about fourteen of every hundred served. For a small nation, both were enormous efforts.

The scale of Australian service and loss in the two world wars

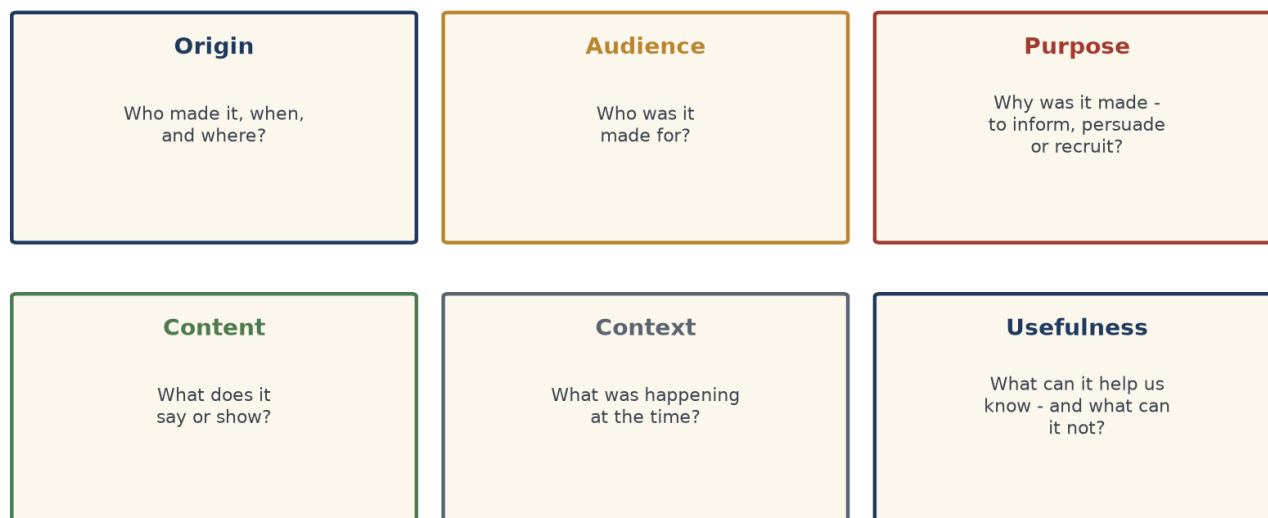


Paired bar charts showing, for each world war, Australia's population, the number who enlisted or served, and the number who died

Worked source analyses

Historians test a source by asking a set of questions of it. The figure below is the set this book uses; the two worked examples that follow show it in action.

Questions to ask of any historical source



Six labelled boxes: the questions to ask of any historical source — origin, audience, purpose, content, context and usefulness

Worked example 1 — Source A: Fisher's pledge, 1914

SOURCE A
A pledge of support, August 1914

'Australia will stand by the mother country to the last man and the last shilling.'

Andrew Fisher, speaking at Colac, Victoria, on 31 July 1914, during the federal election campaign. Fisher became prime minister in September 1914. Reported in Melbourne newspapers the following day (Trove, National Library of Australia). Wording follows contemporary reports.

Source A card: the pledge attributed to Andrew Fisher at Colac in July 1914, with its origin note

Question	Model answer	Why the answer works
Origin	A speech by Andrew Fisher, opposition leader and prime minister	It names who, when, where and what kind of source it is.

Question	Model answer	Why the answer works
	from September 1914, at Colac in Victoria on 31 July 1914, reported in Melbourne newspapers.	
Audience	A campaign meeting at Colac and, through the press, voters across Australia — an election was three weeks away.	It notices who the words were aimed at, not just what they say.
Purpose	To promise that Labor would back Britain as strongly as its rivals — loyalty as a campaign appeal.	It gives the speaker's goal, not just "to inform".
Content	Australia would stand by Britain fully — "to the last man and the last shilling".	It restates the message in its own words and quotes one telling phrase.
Context	Spoken days before war broke out, when loyalty to Britain was a shared value and both major parties competed to show it.	It uses knowledge of 1914 to explain the source.
Usefulness	Strong evidence of what leaders promised and of the public mood they appealed to; but a campaign speech shows promises, not why ordinary men later enlisted — so check it against letters, posters and enlistment records.	It states a value and a limit, and says how to corroborate.

Worked example 2 — Source B: Menzies' broadcast, 1939

SOURCE B

An announcement of war, September 1939

'It is my melancholy duty to inform you officially that, in consequence of the persistence by Germany in her invasion of Poland, Britain has declared war upon her and that, as a result, Australia is also at war.'

Robert Menzies, prime minister, radio broadcast to the nation, 3 September 1939. Transcript and recording held by the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia and the National Archives of Australia.

Source B card: the opening words of Robert Menzies' radio broadcast of 3 September 1939, with its origin note

Question	Model answer	Why the answer works
Origin	A radio broadcast by the prime minister, Robert Menzies, on 3	It names who, when and what kind of source it is.

Question	Model answer	Why the answer works
	September 1939; the recording and transcript are held in national archives.	
Audience	Every household with a radio — the whole nation, not only men of enlistment age.	It sees that a broadcast speaks to a country, not a crowd.
Purpose	To announce that Australia was at war and to call the nation to face that fact with resolve.	It separates announcing from persuading, and names both.
Content	Because Germany kept up its invasion of Poland, Britain declared war; “as a result, Australia is also at war”. The phrase “melancholy duty” mixes grief with obligation.	It restates the message and unpacks one key phrase.
Context	Spoken the day Britain entered the war, to a nation that remembered the cost of the last one — hence the grave tone.	It explains the tone from what Australians had lived through.
Usefulness	First-hand evidence of how the government framed Australia’s reason for war: the Empire tie, plus duty. Set beside Source A it shows continuity (Britain’s war is Australia’s war) and change (a promise in 1914, grief in 1939).	It uses the source for both continuity and change, and corroborates it against Source A.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1. (VC2HH10K14.E01) Identify two perspectives on war held by Australians in 1914.

Q2. (VC2HH10K14.E01) Explain why loyalty to Britain was a strong part of Australian identity in 1914. (Hint: think of 1901, and of who most Australians were.)

Q3. (VC2HH10K14.E02) What did Joseph Cook and Andrew Fisher each say in the first days of August 1914? What do the two statements have in common?

Q4. (VC2HH10K14.E02) Explain why Australia did not need its own declaration of war in 1914 or in 1939. (Hint: dominion.)

Q5. (VC2HH10K14.E03) Match each case to one reason from the reasons table: (a) a farm labourer who wants steady pay; (b) a man who joins because his three mates have joined; (c) a poster asking whether you will do your part; (d) a city clerk who wants to see the world.

Q6. (VC2HH10K14.E03) Use the recruiting chart. (a) In which year did the most recruits join? (b) Suggest one reason for the fall after 1916.

Q7. (VC2HH10K14.E05) Give two reasons Australia entered the Second World War.

Q8. (VC2HH10K14.E05) In your own words, what does the phrase “melancholy duty” tell you about how Menzies felt?

Q9. (VC2HH10K14.E06) Using the comparison table, state one continuity and one change in Australia’s reasons for war.

Un scaffolded

Marking note: marks are awarded for the quality of reasoning — terms defined, evidence used, both sides given fair treatment, a conclusion that follows from your evidence. Two students may reach opposite conclusions and both earn full marks.

- Q10.** (VC2HH10K14.E03) Write a paragraph of about six sentences explaining why Australian men chose to enlist in the AIF. Use at least three different reasons from the reasons table, with one piece of evidence for each.
- Q11.** (VC2HH10K14.E03) “Propaganda made men enlist.” Using this section, give one strong point for this claim and one strong point against it. Which do you find stronger, and why?
- Q12.** (VC2HH10K14.E01) Write one sentence giving the strongest case you can for a 1914 supporter of the war, and one sentence giving the strongest case you can for a 1914 doubter. Give each side its best argument.
- Q13.** (VC2HH10K14.E02, VC2HH10K14.E05) Sources A and B both frame Australia’s entry into war. Compare their tones, and say what the difference suggests about how feelings changed between 1914 and 1939.
- Q14.** (VC2HH10K14.E05) Why did the defence of Australia itself become a reason for fighting after December 1941? Support your answer with two events from 1941-42.
- Q15.** (VC2HH10K14.E06) Write a comparison paragraph of about eight sentences on the reasons Australia fought in the two world wars. Structure it as: what stayed the same, what changed, and your conclusion about which reason mattered most in each war.
- Q16.** (VC2HH10K14.E01, VC2HH10K14.E02, VC2HH10K14.E03, VC2HH10K14.E05, VC2HH10K14.E06) “Loyalty to Britain was the main reason Australia fought in both world wars.” Do you agree? Write a sustained response of 8-10 sentences. Use at least two figures and both sources from this section.
-

Answers

- Q1.** For example: (1) war as noble, heroic, a test of character, and as an adventure; (2) war as wrong, or as a quarrel that was not Australia's and that ordinary people would pay for.
- Q2.** Australia had only just become one nation (1901); most Australians were of British birth or descent; Britain supplied defence and trade, so loyalty to Britain was part of what being Australian meant.
- Q3.** Cook: "When the mother country is at war, so is Australia." Fisher: Australia would stand by Britain "to the last man and the last shilling". Both promised full support for Britain; both treated Australia's entry as automatic.
- Q4.** Australia was a dominion of the British Empire, so when Britain declared war, Australia was at war too — in both 1914 and 1939.
- Q5.** (a) regular pay and work; (b) peer and community pressure; (c) propaganda; (d) adventure.
- Q6.** (a) 1915 (165,863 recruits). (b) Any reasoned suggestion, e.g. heavy losses in France made the war look grimmer, and the defeated conscription votes showed a divided, war-weary public.
- Q7.** Any two of: the Empire tie (Britain's war was Australia's war); defence of small countries (Poland) against conquest; from December 1941, defence of Australia itself against Japan.
- Q8.** He felt grief as well as obligation: announcing the war was a duty he found sad, not an adventure to celebrate.
- Q9.** Continuity: in both wars Australia entered because Britain did, and loyalty and duty were key motives. Change: the First World War never threatened Australia, while from 1941-42 the defence of home became a reason in the second.
- Q10-Q16.** See the fully-worked solutions below.
-

Fully-worked solutions

- Q10.** Australian men enlisted for several reasons that often worked together. Many felt a duty to the British Empire: loyalty to the "mother country" was a core part of Australian identity in 1914, and leaders on both sides pledged full support. For others the pull was adventure — most young men had never left their district, and the AIF offered a chance to see the world. Pay mattered too: work on the land was hard and uncertain, and a private earned about five shillings a day with food and clothing. Propaganda and pressure did the rest: posters appealed to pride, duty and shame, and mates enlisted together, so men who stayed home risked the label of coward. The evidence suggests men rarely gave just one reason; the reasons reinforced each other.
- Q11.** For the claim: recruiting campaigns were everywhere — posters, pamphlets, leaflets, public meetings and marches — and they appealed to strong feelings of pride and shame, which is exactly what propaganda is for; enlistments rose during the big drives of 1915. Against the claim: most men gave reasons of their own — duty, pay, adventure, mates — and enlistment kept falling through 1916-18 even while the propaganda machine kept working, which suggests posters could not make men enlist once the cost of the war was known. Weighing both: propaganda worked best as a trigger on motives that were already there; it amplified duty and shame rather than creating them. That is the stronger reading of the evidence in this section.
- Q12.** Supporter: "Britain keeps Australia safe and trade flowing, and when the mother country fights for small nations like Belgium, standing aside would break the bond that protects us." Doubter: "This is a quarrel between European empires, and it is our workers — not the men who declared the war — who will come home broken or not at all." Each sentence gives the side's case in the strongest form its own speakers used, rather than a weak version.
- Q13.** Source A is eager and promising: Fisher pledges help "to the last man and the last shilling", in the language of loyalty and confidence, days before war began. Source B is grave and grieving: Menzies calls it a "melancholy duty" and simply states that, because Britain is in, "Australia is also at war". The difference suggests that between 1914 and 1939 Australians had learned what a world war costs — 61,513 dead in the first war — so the reasons for fighting (loyalty, duty, the Empire tie) stayed, but the feelings around them changed from excitement to grim resolve.

Q14. Until December 1941 the Second World War was, like the first, a distant war fought for the Empire. Japan’s entry changed that: within weeks Japan had moved through South-East Asia, Singapore — the key British base protecting Australia — fell on 15 February 1942, and Darwin was bombed on 19 February 1942. With the war suddenly close, defence of Australia itself became a reason for fighting, not just loyalty to Britain.

Q15. In both wars, Australia’s entry came from the same cause: Britain’s declaration of war drew its dominion in, and leaders of both parties accepted that tie. In both wars, loyalty and duty were powerful motives for the volunteers who filled the ranks, and recruiting campaigns ran. What changed was the nearness of the threat: the First World War never reached Australian shores, and many saw it in heroic, adventurous terms, while from 1941-42 the Japanese advance made the defence of home a direct reason for fighting. The force mix changed too: an all-volunteer AIF in the first war, volunteers plus conscripted militia for home defence in the second. Weighing the evidence, loyalty was the deciding reason for entry in both wars, but by 1942 self-defence had joined it as the reason ordinary Australians fought.

Q16. I agree in part. Loyalty to Britain was the deciding reason Australia *entered* both wars: in 1914 Cook and Fisher both promised to stand by Britain, and in 1939 Menzies announced that “as a result” of Britain’s declaration, “Australia is also at war” (Sources A and B). The comparison table shows loyalty as a shared reason, and the perspectives figure shows how deep the feeling ran in 1914. But loyalty was not the only reason Australians *fought*: the reasons table shows men also enlisted for pay, adventure, and under peer pressure and propaganda, and the recruiting chart shows those motives weakening as losses grew. In the Second World War, after Japan’s advance and the bombing of Darwin, the defence of Australia itself became a major reason, which the comparison table lists under “stronger in World War II”. So loyalty explains entry in both wars, but by 1942 self-defence had joined it — and for individual enlistment, motives were always mixed. A sustained answer should hold both facts at once: the nation went to war for the Empire, while its people fought for a wider set of reasons.

Sources

- Victorian Curriculum F-10 v2.0, History Levels 9-10: content description VC2HH10K14 and elaborations VC2HH10K14.E01-E03, E05-E06 (VCAA export, via this build’s `_hh910_raw.json`).
- Australian War Memorial (awm.gov.au): official statistics of Australian service and deaths in the First and Second World Wars — consulted 26 August 2026.
- Ernest Scott, *Australia during the War* (official history of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, vol. XI, 1936): official recruiting statistics by year — consulted 26 August 2026.
- Trove, National Library of Australia (trove.nla.gov.au): Melbourne newspaper reports of Andrew Fisher’s Colac speech, 1 August 1914 — consulted 26 August 2026.
- National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (nfsa.gov.au) and National Archives of Australia (naa.gov.au): Robert Menzies’ radio broadcast of 3 September 1939 — consulted 26 August 2026.
- National Archives of Australia (naa.gov.au), prime ministers’ records: Joseph Cook, Andrew Fisher, Robert Menzies — consulted 26 August 2026.

From Gallipoli to Kokoda: Australia's battlefields

Curriculum trace — Victorian Curriculum 2.0 History, Levels 9 and 10

Owns VC2HH10K15

Draws on — VC2HH10K15.E01, VC2HH10K15.E02

Builds on — section 3A (VC2HH10K13) and section 3B (VC2HH10K14). This section asks you to judge the significance of *places*: how much each place mattered — for Australia's war effort, and for the wider war.

Section 3A looked at why the two world wars broke out. Section 3B looked at why Australians enlisted and fought. This section asks **where** they fought. The curriculum names the places: in World War I, Gallipoli, Fromelles and the Somme, Pozières and Passchendaele, Bullecourt and Villers-Bretonneux, and Gaza and Beersheba in the Sinai Peninsula; in World War II, Greece and North Africa (Tobruk among them), Darwin, New Guinea (Kokoda included), Malaya, and Singapore. Those names are the content of this section.

Why place names? Because war happens somewhere, and the somewhere matters. A place shapes the fighting — the ridges at Gallipoli, the mud at Passchendaele, the jungle track over the Owen Stanley Range, the harbour at Darwin. A place concentrates loss — whole brigades were lost in days at a few villages in France. And a place holds memory — long after the fighting, Australians travelled to these places to bury their dead, to remember, and to argue about what it all meant. Figure 1 begins by placing the World War I names in their three theatres.

World War I: three theatres where Australians fought

A theatre is a large region where a war's fighting takes place

Theatre	Places named in the curriculum	When Australians fought	Outcome
 Gallipoli (Ottoman Empire, now Türkiye)	Gallipoli	April to December 1915	Stalemate; Allied troops withdrawn 19–20 December 1915
 Western Front (France and Belgium)	Fromelles, the Somme, Pozières, Bullecourt, Passchendaele, Villers-Bretonneux	1916 to 1918	Fighting went on until the Armistice, 11 November 1918
 Middle East (Egypt, Sinai, Palestine)	Sinai Peninsula, Gaza, Beersheba	1916 to 1917 (and into 1918)	Ottoman forces pushed back; Jerusalem taken December 1917

Dates and outcomes per the Australian War Memorial (awm.gov.au), retrieved 26 August 2026.

Table of the three theatres of World War I where Australians fought — Gallipoli, the Western Front and the Middle East — listing for each theatre the places named in the curriculum, when Australians fought there, and the outcome.

Figure 1. World War I: three theatres where Australians fought (source: Australian War Memorial, awm.gov.au; retrieved 26 August 2026).

By the end of this section you should be able to identify the places named in the curriculum for both wars, locate them in their theatres and in time, and evaluate what each place meant for Australia's war effort and for the war as a whole.

Theory

1. Why places matter in the history of war (VC2HH10K15)

Defining the term. A theatre of war is a large region where a war's fighting takes place — for example, the Middle East or the Pacific. This section and Figure 1 use the word in that sense.

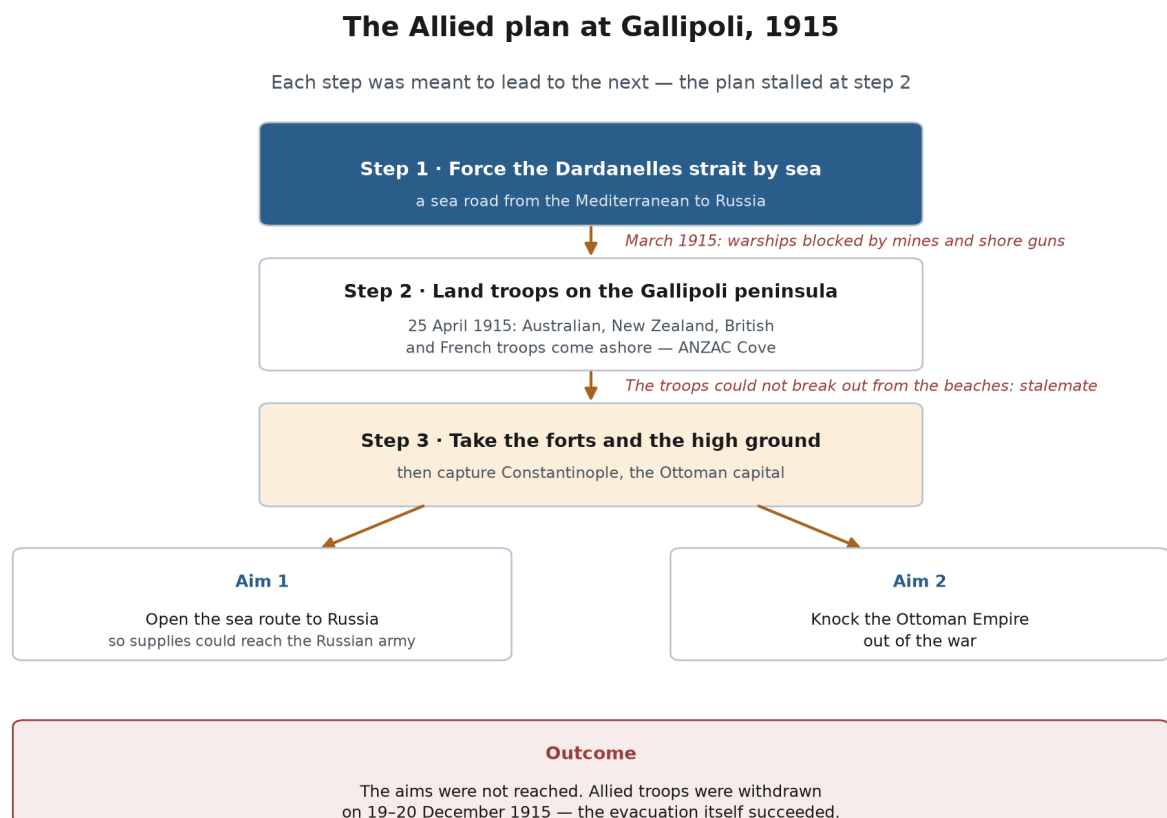
Historians give places this attention for three reasons.

1. **Place shapes the fighting.** The lie of the land decided what was possible: the ridges above ANZAC Cove made breakout nearly impossible; the mud of Passchendaele slowed every advance to a crawl; the wells at Beersheba decided where an army could even survive.
2. **Place concentrates loss and experience.** Casualty numbers attach to place names: about 23,000 Australian casualties at Pozières in six weeks. To know the place is to know where those numbers happened.
3. **Place holds memory.** Cemeteries, memorials, anniversaries and debates attach to places. The Australian National Memorial stands at Villers-Bretonneux; every 25 April, Anzac Day recalls Gallipoli.

So the curriculum's list of places is not a list of trivia. It is a map of where Australia's war experiences happened — and where their memory still sits today.

2. Gallipoli, 1915 (VC2HH10K15, VC2HH10K15.E01)

The first place the curriculum names is the one most Australians know best. On **25 April 1915**, Australian and New Zealand troops — the ANZACs — landed at a small bay on the Gallipoli peninsula that became known as ANZAC Cove, while British and French troops landed at other places on the peninsula. Figure 2 sets out what the Allies planned and why the plan failed.



Objectives per the Australian War Memorial, 'Gallipoli' (retrieved 26 August 2026).

Flow diagram of the Allied plan at Gallipoli in 1915 in three steps — force the Dardanelles strait by sea, land troops on the peninsula, and take the forts and the high ground to capture Constantinople — with the two aims (open the sea route to Russia; knock the Ottoman Empire out of the war) and the outcome (the aims were not reached; troops withdrawn 19–20 December 1915).

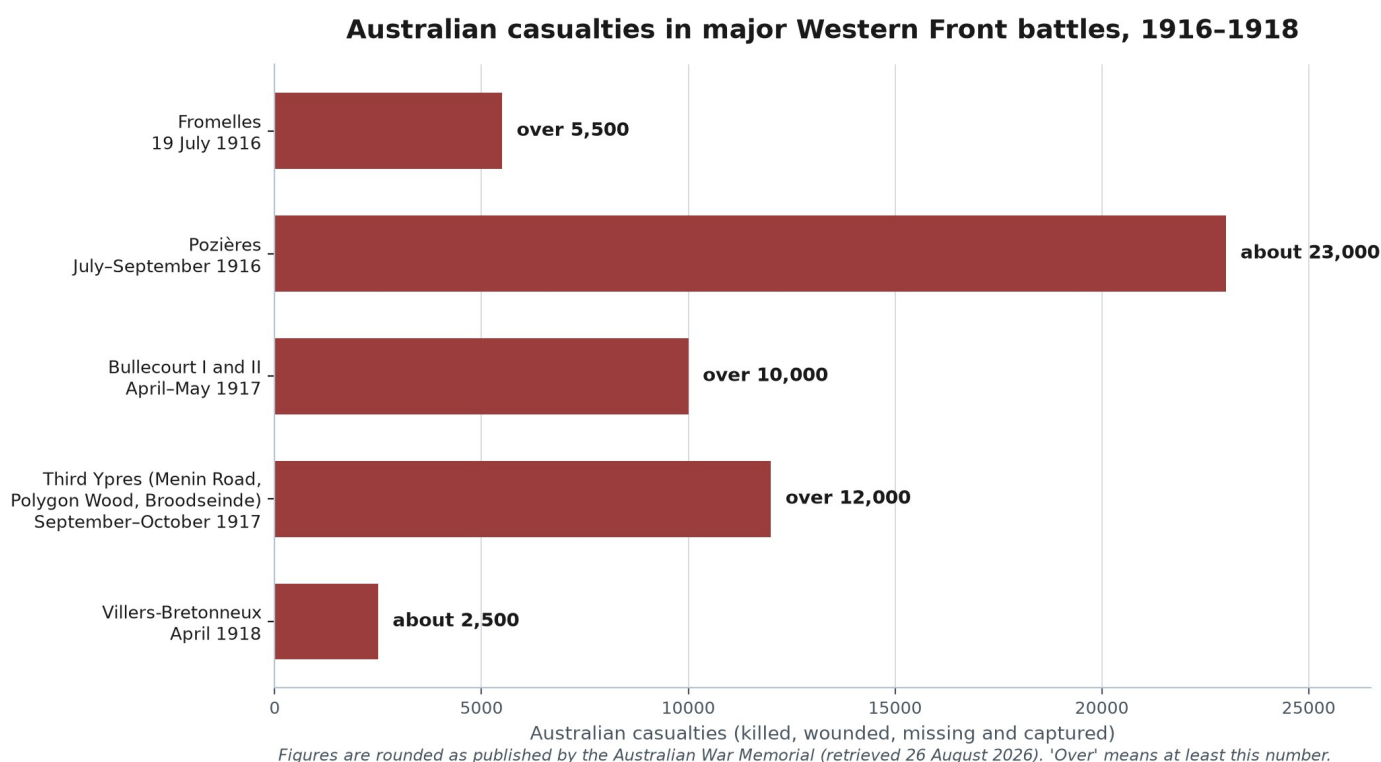
Figure 2. The Allied plan at Gallipoli, 1915 (source: Australian War Memorial, ‘Gallipoli’; retrieved 26 August 2026).

A naval attack on the Dardanelles strait in March 1915 had already failed, blocked by mines and shore guns, so the plan moved to step 2. From the day of the landing, the troops could not break out from the beaches. The Ottoman defenders held the high ground, and the campaign settled into a **stalemate** — a position in which neither side can move the other. For eight months the men lived in trenches and dugouts, and disease killed almost as many as battle. In December the Allies decided to leave. On **19–20 December 1915** the ANZAC troops were withdrawn quietly and safely — the one part of the plan that succeeded.

The cost: **26,111 Australian casualties, including 8,141 deaths**. The aims — opening the sea route to Russia and knocking the Ottoman Empire out of the war — were not reached. And yet Gallipoli became the most remembered place in Australia’s war history: the centre of the Anzac legend, the idea that the nation came of age on those beaches. Whether that memory matches the military facts is exactly the kind of question part 8 returns to.

3. The Western Front, 1916–1918 (VC2HH10K15.E01)

From 1916 the main Australian effort moved to the **Western Front**, the line of trenches that ran through France and Belgium. Figure 3 gives the Australian casualty count at each place the curriculum names.



Horizontal bar chart of Australian casualties at five Western Front places, in order of time: Fromelles over 5,500; Pozières about 23,000; Bullecourt over 10,000; Passchendaele in September–October 1917 over 12,000; and Villers-Bretonneux about 2,500.

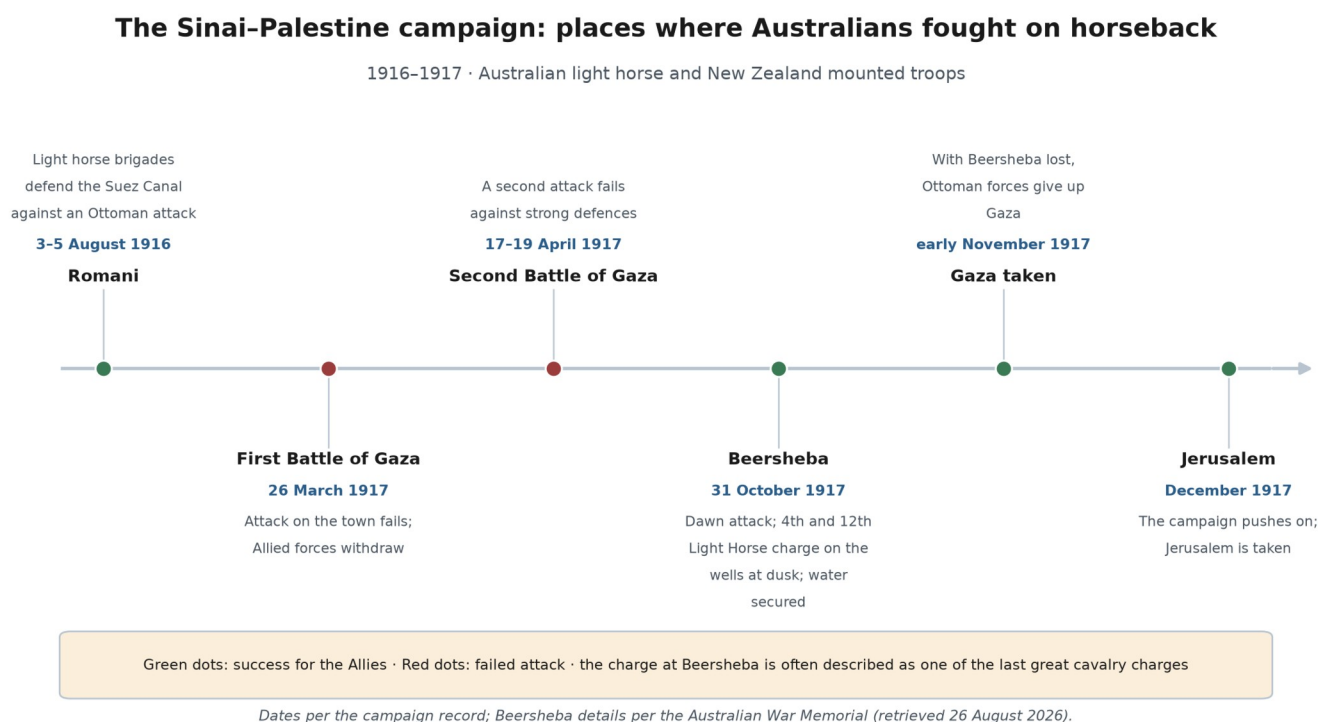
Figure 3. Australian casualties on the Western Front (source: Australian War Memorial battle entries; retrieved 26 August 2026).

- **Fromelles, 19 July 1916.** The 5th Division’s first battle on the Western Front was a diversion to draw German troops away from the Somme. It cost over 5,500 Australian casualties in about 24 hours.
- **The Somme — Pozières, 23 July to 3 September 1916.** The 1st, 2nd and 4th Divisions fought for a ruined village and the ridge around it. About 23,000 Australians became casualties in six weeks. Source 1 (Figure 9) shows how the official historian judged this place.
- **Bullecourt, April–May 1917.** Two battles, the first begun on 11 April and the second from 3 to 17 May, cost over 10,000 Australian casualties between them.

- **Passchendaele, September–October 1917.** The battles of Polygon Wood and Broodseinde were Australia's part of the Third Battle of Ypres. Over 12,000 Australians became casualties in those two months, much of the fighting in deep mud.
- **Villers-Bretonneux, 24–27 April 1918.** The 13th and 15th Brigades helped stop the German spring advance towards the rail centre of Amiens, at a cost of 2,473 casualties. The **Australian National Memorial** was later built here — which makes the place part of the war's memory as well as its history.

4. The Middle East: the Sinai–Palestine campaign, 1916–1917 (VC2HH10K15.E01)

While the Western Front dug in, Australian **light horse** — mounted troops — defended the Suez Canal and then pushed north into Palestine. Figure 4 sequences the campaign.



Timeline of the Sinai–Palestine campaign 1916–1917 with six events: Romani (3–5 August 1916), First Battle of Gaza (26 March 1917), Second Battle of Gaza (17–19 April 1917), Beersheba (31 October 1917), Gaza taken (early November 1917) and Jerusalem (December 1917); green dots mark successes and red dots mark failed attacks.

Figure 4. The Sinai–Palestine campaign (source: Australian War Memorial, ‘Beersheba, attack on’, and the campaign record; retrieved 26 August 2026).

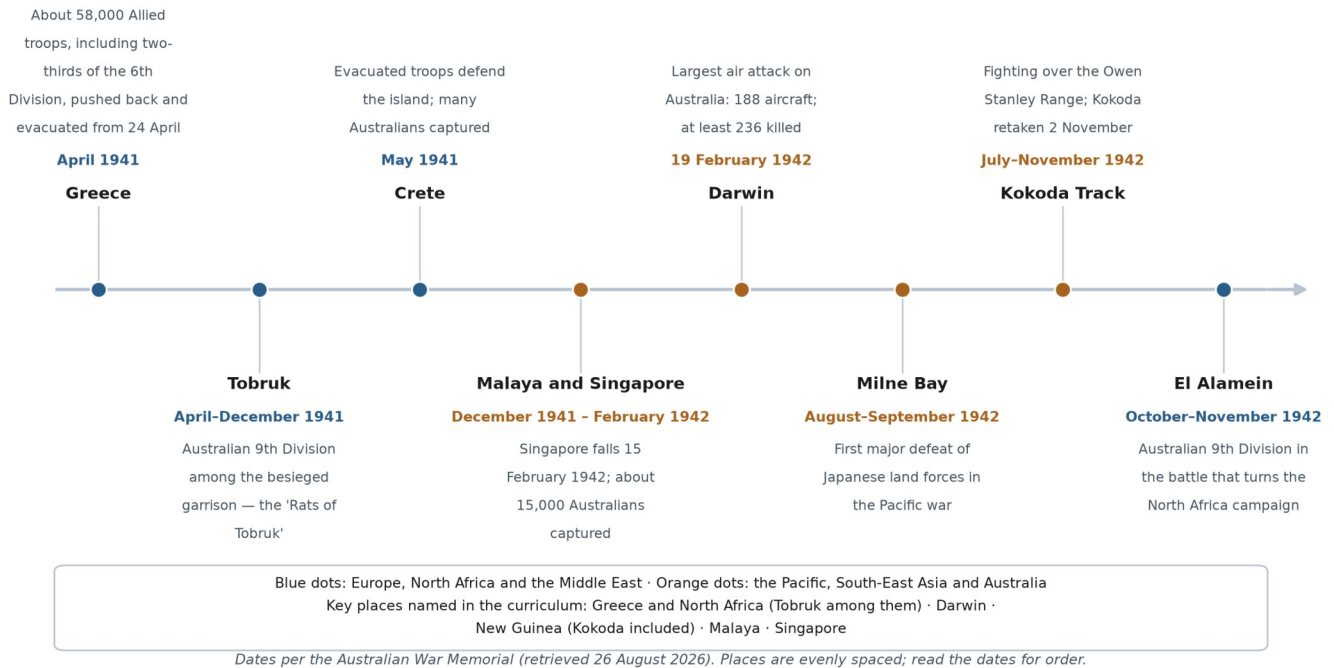
At **Romani** (3–5 August 1916) the light horse helped defeat an Ottoman attack on the canal. Two attacks on **Gaza** in March and April 1917 failed against strong defences. The deadlock broke at **Beersheba** on **31 October 1917**: in a dawn attack, the 4th and 12th Light Horse regiments charged the town at dusk and seized its wells — water for men and horses in a dry land. The charge is often described as one of the last great cavalry charges in history. With Beersheba lost, Ottoman forces gave up Gaza in early November, and in December 1917 the campaign reached **Jerusalem**.

5. World War II: the Mediterranean and North Africa (VC2HH10K15.E02)

Figure 5 places the eight World War II locations named in the curriculum — plus Crete and Milne Bay — on one timeline. Read the dates for order; the places are evenly spaced.

World War II: where Australians fought, 1941–1942

Eight places named in the curriculum, in order of time (VC2HH10K15.E02)



Timeline of eight World War II places where Australians fought, in order of time: Greece (April 1941), Tobruk (April–December 1941), Crete (May 1941), Malaya and Singapore (December 1941 – February 1942), Darwin (19 February 1942), Milne Bay (August–September 1942), the Kokoda Track (July–November 1942) and El Alamein (October–November 1942); blue dots mark Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, orange dots mark the Pacific, South-East Asia and Australia.

Figure 5. World War II: where Australians fought, 1941–1942 (source: Australian War Memorial; retrieved 26 August 2026).

Greece, April 1941. About 58,000 Allied troops, including two-thirds of the Australian 6th Division, were pushed back by the German advance and evacuated from 24 April. Many of the evacuated troops then defended **Crete** in May, where large numbers of Australians were captured.

Tobruk, April–December 1941. The 9th Division, with the 18th Brigade, held the port of Tobruk in North Africa for eight months as a surrounded **garrison** — the troops defending a place. German propaganda mocked the defenders as rats; they answered with pride, as the **Rats of Tobruk**. Between 8 April and 25 October the garrison lost 749 killed, 1,996 wounded and 604 captured. Tobruk tied down Axis forces for months — significant to the war as a whole, not just to Australia.

El Alamein, October–November 1942. The 9th Division fought in the battle that turned the North Africa campaign: after it, Axis forces were pushed back and finally driven from Africa.

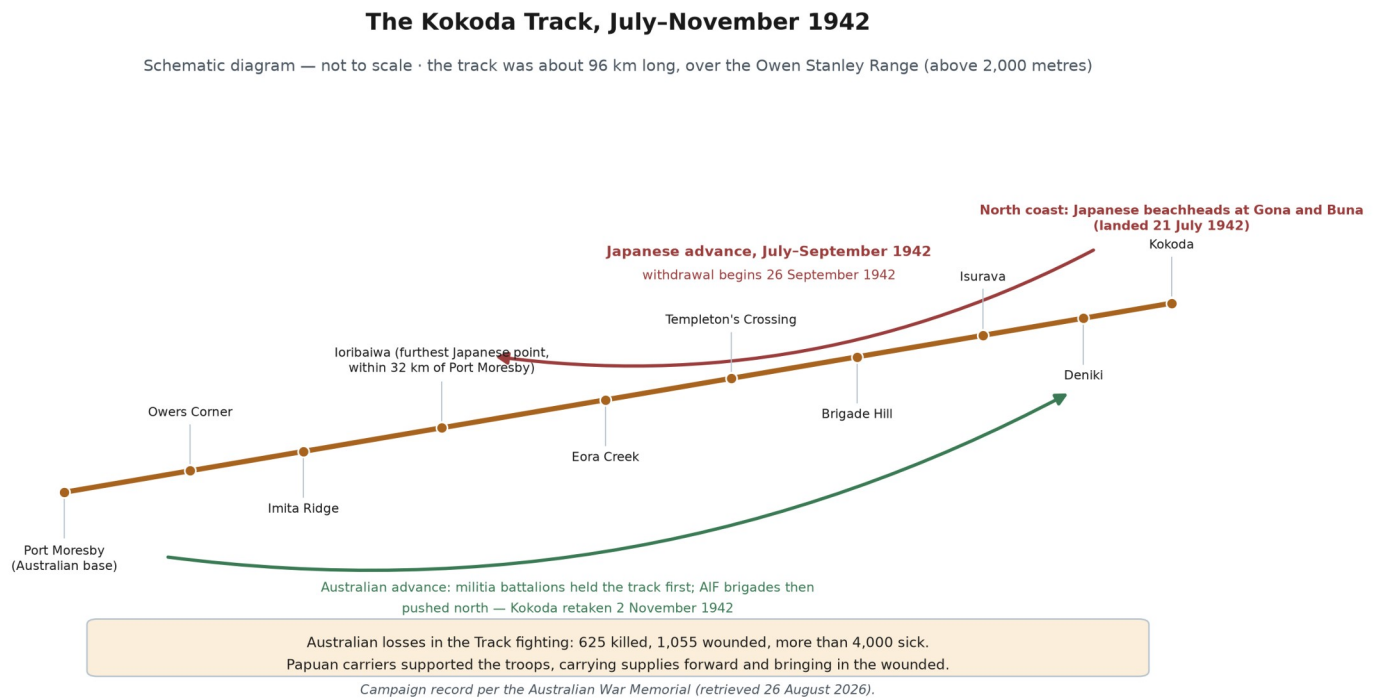
6. Malaya, Singapore and the Pacific (VC2HH10K15.E02)

Japan entered the war in December 1941, and the war came to Australia's region.

Malaya and Singapore, December 1941 – February 1942. Australian troops of the 8th Division defended Malaya and the island fortress of Singapore. On **15 February 1942** Singapore fell. About **15,000 Australians were captured**, and about one in three of them died in captivity — on the Thai–Burma railway and in the prison camps of Japan's war. The British prime minister, Winston Churchill, called the fall of Singapore the worst disaster in British military history — one leader's evaluation, and evidence of how great the shock was.

Milne Bay, August–September 1942. Allied troops, including two Australian battalions and later two brigades, defeated a Japanese landing at Milne Bay in New Guinea — the first major defeat of Japanese land forces in the Pacific war.

The Kokoda Track, July–November 1942. Figure 6 traces the fighting over the Owen Stanley Range.



Schematic map of the Kokoda Track from Port Moresby to Kokoda over the Owen Stanley Range, with named points along the track, arrows showing the Japanese advance and withdrawal and the Australian advance, a note on the Papuan carriers who moved supplies and wounded, and the Australian losses: 625 killed, 1,055 wounded and more than 4,000 sick.

Figure 6. The Kokoda Track, July–November 1942 (source: Australian War Memorial; retrieved 26 August 2026).

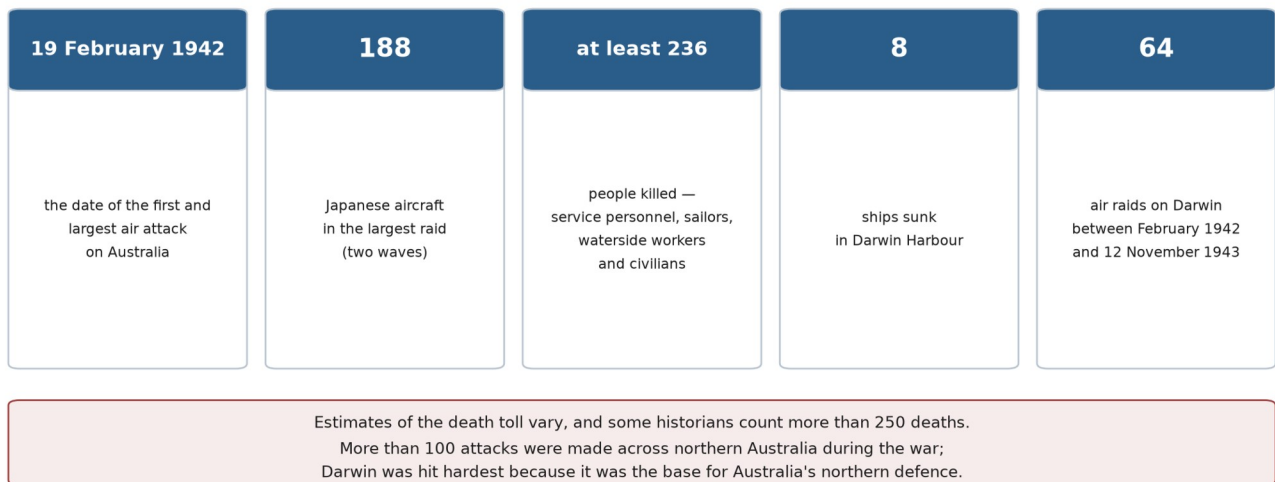
Japanese forces landed on the north coast in July and advanced along the track towards Port Moresby, the base from which Australia defended New Guinea. By 16 September they reached Ioribaiwa, within about 32 kilometres of Port Moresby — the closest the Japanese army ever came to that objective. From 26 September they withdrew, and Australian troops retook **Kokoda on 2 November**. Australian losses on the track were 625 killed in battle and 1,055 wounded, and more than 4,000 were sick. Papuan carriers moved supplies in and carried wounded men out; many Australian soldiers credited them with saving the campaign. The significance of Kokoda is weighed in practice Q6.

7. Darwin: the war reaches Australian soil (VC2HH10K15.E02)

On **19 February 1942**, 188 Japanese aircraft attacked Darwin in two waves — the largest air attack ever made on Australia. Figure 7 gives the key figures.

The bombing of Darwin, 19 February 1942

The war reaches Australian soil



Figures per the Australian War Memorial and the Northern Territory roll of honour summary (retrieved 26 August 2026).

Five statistic tiles for the bombing of Darwin on 19 February 1942: the date of the first and largest air attack on Australia; 188 Japanese aircraft in the largest raid; at least 236 people killed — service personnel, sailors, waterside workers and civilians; 8 ships sunk in Darwin Harbour; and 64 air raids on Darwin between February 1942 and 12 November 1943.

Figure 7. The bombing of Darwin, 19 February 1942 (source: Australian War Memorial, ‘Darwin air raids’, and the Northern Territory roll of honour summary; retrieved 26 August 2026).

At least 236 people were killed — service personnel, sailors, waterside workers and civilians. The bombing of Darwin was the first of more than 100 air attacks across northern Australia during the war; Darwin alone was raided 64 times before 12 November 1943.

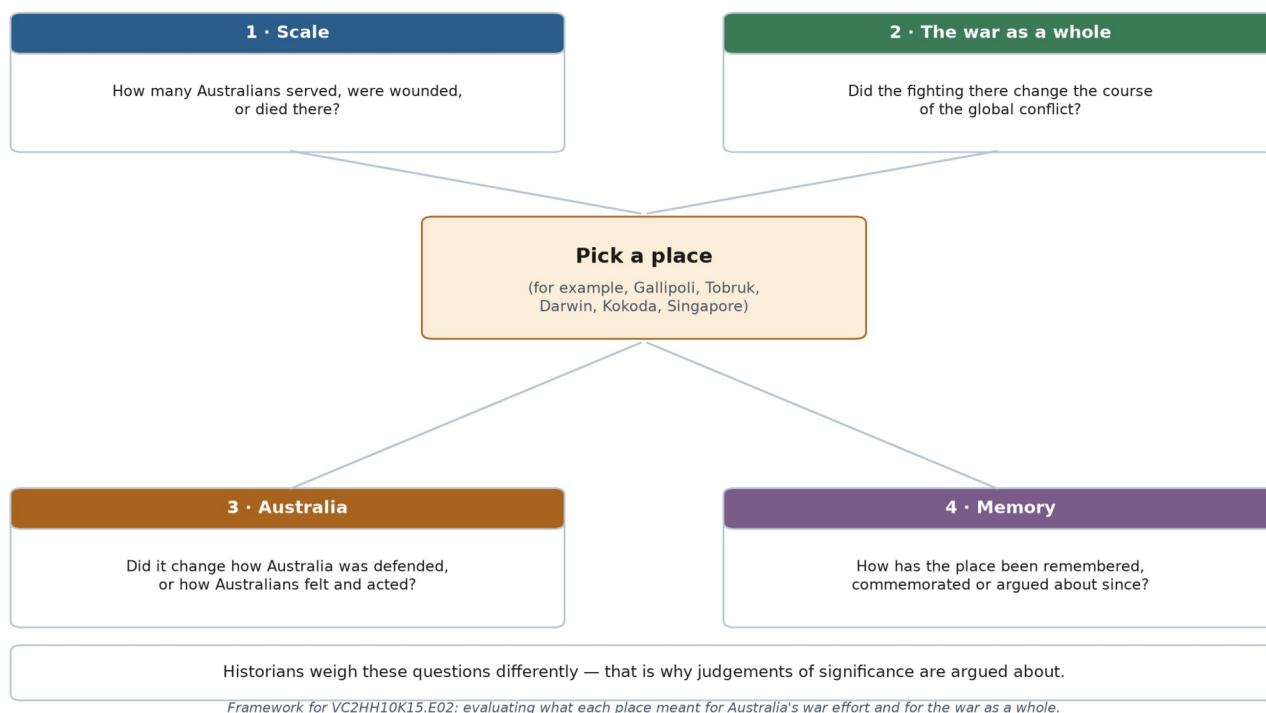
Darwin’s significance is of a different kind from Gallipoli’s or Pozières’. Fewer Australians died there than on any single day of the Western Front. What changed was the **experience of war at home**: the fighting was no longer a distant place reached by ship. It was in Australian skies, over an Australian town. That shock reshaped how Australians thought about their own defence — and, as Source 2 (Figure 10) shows, about which great power Australia should look to.

8. How significant was each place? (VC2HH10K15.E02)

Defining the term. The curriculum asks you to evaluate the **significance** of places, but it does not define the word, and historians do not all weigh the same things. In this section, calling a place *significant* means: it matters for the history we tell, judged by the four questions in Figure 8. Those four questions are this section’s working **criteria** — the questions a judgement is weighed against. A place can rank high on one question and low on another, which is exactly why historians argue about significance.

How significant was this place?

Four questions to weigh when you evaluate a place where Australians fought



Framework of four questions for judging the significance of a wartime place: 1 Scale — how many Australians served, were wounded or died there? 2 The war as a whole — did the fighting there change the course of the global conflict? 3 Australia — did it change how Australia was defended, or how Australians felt and acted? 4 Memory — how has the place been remembered, commemorated or argued about since?

Figure 8. How significant was this place? Four questions to weigh (framework built for this section's use of VC2HH10K15 .E02).

A worked debate shows the framework in action. **How significant was Gallipoli?**

- **One view: small.** The historian Robin Prior, in *Gallipoli: The End of the Myth* (2009), argues that the campaign could never have changed the war's outcome: even if the Allies had taken the peninsula — and even if they had then captured Constantinople — the war would still have been decided on the Western Front. Measured by question 2 (the war as a whole), Gallipoli was a sideshow.
- **The other view: large.** Measured by question 1 (scale: 26,111 Australian casualties), question 3 (Australia: the Anzac legend, Anzac Day, a nation's sense of itself) and question 4 (memory: cemeteries, pilgrimages, a century of books and argument), Gallipoli is among the most significant places in Australia's history.

Both views are defensible, because they weigh different questions in Figure 8. That is what the curriculum's verb *evaluate* means in practice: not finding one fixed answer, but weighing the questions, stating which you relied on, and judging.

9. Bringing it together (VC2HH10K15)

The curriculum's places span three theatres in World War I and a global spread in World War II — the Mediterranean, North Africa, the Pacific, South-East Asia and Australia itself. Some places matter chiefly for scale of loss (Pozières, Singapore); some for the course of the global war (Tobruk, El Alamein, Milne Bay); some for the defence of Australia (Darwin, Kokoda); some for memory above all (Gallipoli, Villers-Bretonneux). Most matter for more than one reason — that is what makes them significant. Section 3D next asks what these places were like for the people who served in them; section 3E asks which events turned the two wars.

Sources for this section

Retrieval date for all online sources: **26 August 2026**.

1. Australian War Memorial, 'Gallipoli' (awm.gov.au) — landing 25 April 1915; objectives; evacuation 19–20 December 1915; 26,111 Australian casualties including 8,141 deaths.
2. Australian War Memorial, 'Fromelles, attack on' — 19 July 1916; 5th Division; over 5,500 Australian casualties.
3. Australian War Memorial, 'Pozières, battle of' — 23 July to 3 September 1916; about 23,000 Australian casualties.
4. Australian War Memorial, 'Bullecourt, battles of', 'Polygon Wood, battle of', 'Broodseinde, battle of' and 'Villers-Bretonneux, battle of' — dates and casualty figures for 1917–18.
5. Australian War Memorial, 'Beersheba, attack on' — 31 October 1917; the 4th and 12th Light Horse charge on the wells.
6. Australian War Memorial, 'Tobruk, siege of' — 749 killed, 1,996 wounded, 604 captured, 8 April to 25 October 1941.
7. Australian War Memorial, 'Darwin air raids' — 188 aircraft in the largest raid; eight ships sunk; 64 raids on Darwin ending 12 November 1943.
8. Northern Territory roll of honour summary — at least 236 people killed on 19 February 1942.
9. Bean, C. E. W., *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918*, Volume IV, 1933 — the words about Pozières reproduced in Figure 9 (consulted 26 August 2026).
10. Curtin, John, public statement published in the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 28 December 1941 — reproduced in Figure 10.
11. Prior, Robin, *Gallipoli: The End of the Myth*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2009 (consulted 26 August 2026).

Worked examples

Both analyses below use the same five moves: identify the source; describe the content; explain the context; read the perspective; state the significance.

Worked source analysis 1 — with help

Question. Read Source 1 (Figure 9): the official historian C. E. W. Bean's words about Pozières. What does this source tell historians about why Pozières became a significant place for Australians?

Source 1

Official historian on the Western Front

Charles Bean, *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918 (Volume IV, 1933)*

*“The ridge at Pozzières ... is more densely sown with
Australian sacrifice than any other place on earth.”*

Bean wrote this after the war, looking back on the fighting of July–September 1916,
in which the 1st, 2nd and 4th Australian Divisions lost about 23,000 men at Pozzières.

The ridge is the high ground the Australians took and held; a 'sacrifice' here means lives given.

Source card quoting C. E. W. Bean, *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918 (Volume IV, 1933)*: ‘The ridge at Pozzières ... is more densely sown with Australian sacrifice than any other place on earth.’

Figure 9. Source 1 — C. E. W. Bean on Pozzières (source: Bean, *Official History*, Vol. IV, 1933).

Working	Comment
Step 1: Identify the source. It is a line from the official history of Australia’s part in World War I, Volume IV, published in 1933 and written by C. E. W. Bean — the official historian, who visited the battlefields and knew the units he wrote about.	A secondary source (a history book) written by an eyewitness. That mix shapes what it can tell us.
Step 2: Describe the content. Bean says the ridge at Pozzières “is more densely sown with Australian sacrifice than any other place on earth” — more Australian blood and death than anywhere else in the world.	Use the source’s own words where you can. <i>Sown</i> is a farming image: the ridge is pictured as a field planted with loss.
Step 3: Explain the context. Pozzières, 23 July to 3 September 1916, cost about 23,000 Australian casualties in six weeks — the figures behind Bean’s sentence.	Context explains why Bean wrote what he wrote: he was weighing a known cost.
Step 4: Read the perspective and purpose. Bean’s purpose was to record and to honour. His sentence judges significance by question 1 of Figure 8 — scale of sacrifice. It does not weigh question 2, the war as a whole.	A source shows you the questions its writer weighed — and the ones they did not.
Step 5: State significance and inference. Historians can use this line as evidence of how Pozzières came to be remembered: a place made significant by loss and memory, not by strategy. The source is itself part of that memory.	A source can be evidence about an event <i>and</i> evidence about how the event was remembered.

Answer: Bean’s sentence shows Pozzières becoming significant through the scale of Australian loss there — and shows the official historian himself helping to build the place’s memory.

Worked source analysis 2 — with help

Question. Read Source 2 (Figure 10): Prime Minister John Curtin’s public statement of 28 December 1941. What does this source show about how the war changed Australia’s thinking about its own defence?

Source 2

The Prime Minister speaks, days before Singapore falls

Prime Minister John Curtin, statement reported in the Sydney Daily Telegraph, 28 December 1941

*“Australia looks to America, free of any pangs
as to our traditional links or kinship
with the United Kingdom.”*

Curtin spoke eight days after Japan entered the war and invaded Malaya,
seven weeks before Singapore fell.

'Pangs' means sharp feelings of distress; 'kinship' means family connection.

Source card quoting Prime Minister John Curtin, Sydney Daily Telegraph, 28 December 1941: ‘Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom.’

Figure 10. Source 2 — John Curtin, 28 December 1941 (source: Sydney Daily Telegraph, 28 December 1941).

Working	Comment
Step 1: Identify the source. It is a public statement by the Australian prime minister, John Curtin, published in the <i>Sydney Daily Telegraph</i> on 28 December 1941 — three weeks after Japan entered the war.	A public, political source: meant to be read widely, at home and abroad.
Step 2: Describe the content. Curtin says Australia “looks to America” for help, “free of any pangs” — without guilt — about “our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom”. (<i>Pangs</i> : sudden feelings of pain or guilt. <i>Kinship</i> : family ties.)	Gloss hard words; the meaning is a shift of reliance from Britain to the United States.
Step 3: Explain the context. Japan had entered the war in early December 1941. Malaya was being overrun, Singapore was under threat, and northern Australia — Darwin above all — now lay open to attack while Britain fought for its life in Europe and Asia.	The statement is a consequence of the war reaching the places this section has mapped.
Step 4: Read the perspective and purpose. Curtin spoke as a prime minister seeking a new great-power shield. British leaders were stung by the words, and many Australians still felt the old ties should hold — the statement was contested at the time, not obvious.	A strong analysis notes who was persuaded and who was not.
Step 5: State significance and inference. The source is evidence of a turning point: the war in the Pacific — at Singapore, Darwin and soon Kokoda — pulled Australia’s gaze towards America, with long-term consequences for Australia’s place in the world.	Connect the source back to the places and changes it grew from.

Answer: Curtin’s statement shows the war in the Pacific changing how Australia thought about its own defence — shifting reliance from Britain towards America — a consequence of the war reaching Singapore, Darwin and New Guinea.

Practice questions

With help

Q1. Places and wars. Sort these places into (i) World War I and (ii) World War II: Gallipoli, Tobruk, the Somme, Kokoda, Beersheba, Darwin, Fromelles, Singapore.

Q2. Gallipoli. Use Figure 2.

- (a) State the two aims of the Allied plan.
- (b) What stopped step 1 of the plan in March 1915?
- (c) How did the campaign end in December 1915?

Q3. The Western Front. Use Figure 3.

- (a) Which place cost the most Australian casualties?
- (b) Put these in order of time: Villers-Bretonneux, Fromelles, Pozières, Bullecourt.
- (c) Which of these places carries the Australian National Memorial?

Q4. The Middle East. Use Figure 4.

- (a) Name the two failed attacks of 1917.
- (b) What did the light horse seize at Beersheba, and why did it matter in that country?
- (c) Which city was taken in December 1917?

Q5. The World War II timeline. Use Figure 5.

- (a) List the places marked with orange dots (the Pacific, South-East Asia and Australia).
- (b) Which came first: Tobruk, Greece, Darwin or El Alamein?
- (c) Why does Darwin — a town inside Australia — belong on a list of places where Australians fought?

On your own

Q6. Significance to Australia's war effort. Using questions 1 and 3 of Figure 8, explain why the Kokoda Track is significant to Australia's war effort. Use at least three facts from part 6 or Figure 6.

Q7. Significance to the war as a whole. Choose **Tobruk** or **El Alamein**. Using question 2 of Figure 8, evaluate its significance to the war as a whole. End with a judgement.

Q8. The historians' debate. Read the worked debate in part 8.

- (a) Which question from Figure 8 does Robin Prior weigh most heavily?
- (b) Which questions does the other view weigh most heavily?
- (c) In two or three sentences, explain why two honest historians can reach different judgements about the same place.

Q9. Cause and consequence. The bombing of Darwin (part 7, Figure 7) changed how Australians thought about the war. Explain one short-term consequence and one longer-term consequence, using Source 2 (Figure 10) in your answer.

Q10. Comparison and judgement. Compare **Singapore** and **Milne Bay** using two questions from Figure 8. Judge which place is more significant to Australia's history, and give your reasons.

Answers

Q1. (i) World War I: Gallipoli, the Somme, Beersheba, Fromelles. (ii) World War II: Tobruk, Kokoda, Darwin, Singapore.

Q2. (a) To open the sea route to Russia, and to knock the Ottoman Empire out of the war. (b) Mines and shore guns blocked the warships in March 1915. (c) The aims were not reached; the ANZAC troops were withdrawn on 19–20 December 1915 — the evacuation itself succeeded.

Q3. (a) Pozières, about 23,000 casualties. (b) Fromelles (July 1916), Pozières (July–September 1916), Bullecourt (April–May 1917), Villers-Bretonneux (April 1918). (c) Villers-Bretonneux.

Q4. (a) The First Battle of Gaza (26 March 1917) and the Second Battle of Gaza (17–19 April 1917). (b) The wells — water for men and horses in a dry land. (c) Jerusalem.

Q5. (a) Malaya and Singapore, Darwin, Milne Bay, the Kokoda Track. (b) Greece (April 1941). (c) Because the war reached Australian soil there: on 19 February 1942 Darwin suffered the largest air attack ever made on Australia, and Australians fought to defend it.

Q6. Answers will vary. Must use at least three facts (for example: the Japanese came within about 32 km of Port Moresby; Kokoda retaken 2 November; 625 killed, 1,055 wounded, over 4,000 sick; Papuan carriers) and weigh questions 1 and 3 of Figure 8.

Q7. Answers will vary. Tobruk: tied down Axis forces for eight months (question 2). El Alamein: the battle that turned the North Africa campaign (question 2). A judgement must be stated.

Q8. (a) Question 2 — the war as a whole. (b) Questions 1, 3 and 4 — scale, Australia, and memory. (c) Because they weigh different questions; significance is judged against criteria, and historians rank the criteria differently.

Q9. Short-term: fear and urgency at home — defence of the north became a priority (raids on Darwin continued to November 1943). Longer-term: the turn to America — Curtin's statement of 28 December 1941 shifted Australia's reliance from Britain towards the United States.

Q10. Answers will vary. A model comparison is in the fully-worked solutions.

Fully-worked solutions

Q1.

World War I places: Gallipoli (1915), the Somme including Pozières (1916), Fromelles (1916), Beersheba (1917). World War II places: Tobruk (1941), Singapore (1942), Darwin (1942), Kokoda (1942). The sorting works because each place belongs to one war's theatre map: Gallipoli, the Somme, Fromelles and Beersheba sit in the World War I theatres of Figure 1; Tobruk, Singapore, Darwin and Kokoda sit on the World War II timeline of Figure 5.

Q2.

- (a) The two aims were to open the sea route to Russia, so supplies could reach the Russian army, and to knock the Ottoman Empire out of the war.
- (b) Step 1 — forcing the Dardanelles strait by sea — was stopped in March 1915 when mines and shore guns blocked the warships.
- (c) The campaign ended in failure of its aims. The troops could not break out from the beaches, and after eight months of stalemate the ANZAC troops were withdrawn on 19–20 December 1915. The quiet success of that evacuation did not cancel the failure of the plan.

Q3.

- (a) Pozières, with about 23,000 Australian casualties in six weeks — the heaviest count in Figure 3.
- (b) Fromelles (19 July 1916) → Pozières (23 July to 3 September 1916) → Bullecourt (April–May 1917) → Villers-Bretonneux (24–27 April 1918).
- (c) Villers-Bretonneux, where the Australian National Memorial was later built. That memorial is why the place belongs to the war's memory (question 4 of Figure 8) as well as to its casualty lists.

Q4.

- (a) The First Battle of Gaza (26 March 1917) and the Second Battle of Gaza (17–19 April 1917) — both failed attacks against strong defences.
- (b) The light horse seized the wells of Beersheba. In a dry land, water decides where an army can move and survive; taking the wells broke the deadlock that had stopped the two Gaza attacks.
- (c) Jerusalem, taken in December 1917 as the campaign pushed on.

Q5.

- (a) Malaya and Singapore, Darwin, Milne Bay and the Kokoda Track.
- (b) Greece, April 1941 — before Tobruk's siege began, and a full year before Darwin and El Alamein.
- (c) Darwin belongs on the list because the war reached Australian soil there. On 19 February 1942, 188 Japanese aircraft made the largest air attack ever on Australia; at least 236 people were killed; and Darwin was raided 64 times before 12 November 1943. Australians fought in defence of their own town — a place where the war was no longer somewhere else.

Q6.

Model answer. The Kokoda Track is significant to Australia's war effort when weighed against questions 1 and 3 of Figure 8.

Question 1 (scale): the fighting cost 625 Australians killed in battle and 1,055 wounded, and more than 4,000 were sick — a heavy price for one track in New Guinea. Question 3 (Australia): the track led over the Owen Stanley Range towards Port Moresby, the base from which Australia defended New Guinea; at Ioribaiwa the Japanese came within about 32 kilometres of it — the closest the Japanese army came to that objective. Defeating them, and retaking Kokoda on 2 November 1942, removed the most direct land threat to Australia's defence in the war. The effort also drew in Papuan carriers, whose work moving supplies and wounded many Australian soldiers credited with saving the campaign. On both questions the place ranks high: heavy Australian loss in defence of Australia's nearest frontier.

Q7.

Model answer (El Alamein chosen). Weighing question 2 — did the fighting there change the course of the global conflict? — El Alamein ranks high. The Australian 9th Division fought in the battle of October–November 1942 that turned the North Africa campaign: after it, Axis forces were pushed back and finally driven from Africa, which removed the threat to the Suez Canal and to the Middle East's oil and shipping lanes. That is a change in the course of the global war, not only in Australia's part of it. (Tobruk also scores on question 2 — the garrison tied down Axis forces for eight months in 1941 — but its significance lies more in delay than in turning the campaign.) Judgement: of the two, El Alamein is the more significant to the war as a whole, because it marks the point where the North Africa campaign turned against the Axis.

Q8.

- (a) Prior weighs question 2 — the war as a whole. His case is that Gallipoli could never have changed the war's outcome, which makes it a sideshow.
- (b) The other view weighs questions 1, 3 and 4 — scale (26,111 Australian casualties), Australia (the Anzac legend and a nation's sense of itself), and memory (cemeteries, pilgrimages, a century of argument).
- (c) Two honest historians can differ because significance is not a fact sitting in the ground at Gallipoli; it is a judgement made by weighing questions. Weighing question 2 hardest gives one answer; weighing questions 1, 3 and 4 hardest gives another. The difference is in the weights, not in the facts — which is why the debate has lasted a century and why the curriculum asks you to evaluate, not just recite.

Q9.

Model answer. Short-term consequence: the war was no longer distant. The raid of 19 February 1942 — 188 aircraft, at least 236 killed, eight ships sunk — made defence of the north an urgent priority, and the raids on Darwin continued until 12 November 1943. Families, towns and services across northern Australia experienced the war directly.

Longer-term consequence: the shock of Darwin and the fall of Singapore changed how Australia thought about its own defence and its great-power ties. Source 2 captures the turn: on 28 December 1941, between the fall of Singapore and the bombing of Darwin in the public mind, Prime Minister John Curtin declared that Australia “looks to America”, free of pangs about its traditional links with the United Kingdom. The war reaching Australian skies helped pull Australia towards a new alliance — a consequence that long outlasted the raids.

Q10.

Model answer. The two questions used: question 1 (scale) and question 3 (Australia).

Singapore, question 1: about 15,000 Australians were captured when it fell on 15 February 1942, and about one in three died in captivity — a scale of loss and suffering among the worst in Australia's war history. Milne Bay, question 1: a smaller battle in numbers, though a clear-cut victory.

Singapore, question 3: the fall shattered the idea that Britain could shield Australia; it is part of the background to Curtin's turn to America. Milne Bay, question 3: the first major defeat of Japanese land forces in the Pacific war lifted Australian confidence at a dark moment and showed the Japanese army could be beaten on land.

Judgement: for Australia's history, Singapore is the more significant place. Its scale of loss was greater, and its consequence — breaking the assumption of British protection — reached deeper into how Australia defended itself afterwards. Milne Bay matters, chiefly as a turning in the Pacific land war; Singapore matters as a turning in Australia's view of the world. (A judgement for Milne Bay is also defensible if the questions are weighed differently — the framework requires the weights to be stated, not a fixed answer.)

What it was like: Australians who served overseas

Curriculum trace — Victorian Curriculum 2.0 History, Levels 9 and 10

Owns VC2HH10K16

Draws on — VC2HH10K16.E01, VC2HH10K16.E03, VC2HH10K16.E04, VC2HH10K16.E05, VC2HH10K16.E06

§2A register — VC2HH10K16.E02 is excluded from this book and the content description's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander referent is dropped; this section teaches the description through E01, E03, E04, E05 and E06. **Builds on** — section 3A (VC2HH10K13), section 3B (VC2HH10K14) and section 3C (VC2HH10K15).

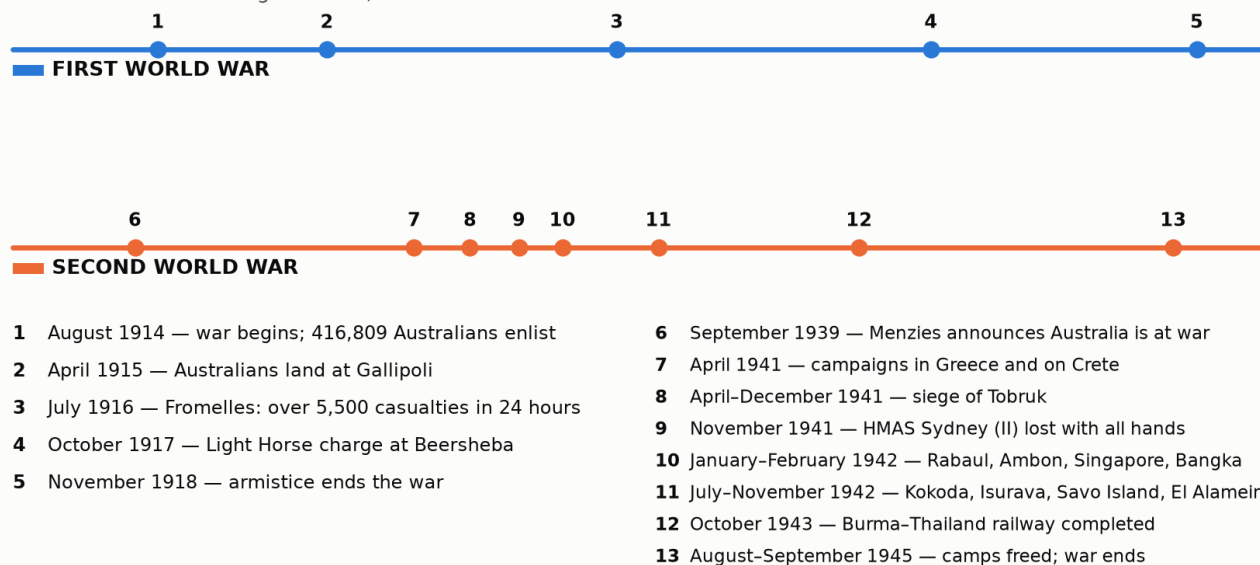
Section 3C mapped the places where Australians fought — the beaches of Gallipoli, the mud of Pozières, the track over the Owen Stanley Range. This section asks what those places were **like** for the people who served in them, and what those people **thought** about what they were doing. That is the difference between the two key words of this section: *experience* and *perspective*.

Defining the terms. The curriculum uses the words *experience* and *perspective* but does not define them. This section therefore treats them as follows, and every question here is answerable on these definitions alone. An **experience** is what happened to a person and what it was like for them — what they saw, did and suffered. A **perspective** is a person's point of view on events — the way they saw and judged them, shaped by who they were, what they knew and when they spoke or wrote. Two soldiers in the same battle can have different experiences; two people describing the same event can have different perspectives. Neither difference is a mistake — they are exactly what this section studies.

The scale of what is being studied is large. Between 1914 and 1918, more than 330,000 Australians served overseas; between 1939 and 1945, about a million Australians served, women as well as men. Some fought in trenches, some rode horses across desert, some sailed, some flew, some nursed the wounded — and more than 30,000 ended the Second World War as prisoners. Figure 1 sets out when the events of this section happened.

Events this section refers to, 1914–1945

Events shown in order along each line; the two lines are not on one shared scale



Sources: as for the individual figures in this section (Australian War Memorial encyclopedia entries; retrieved 26 August 2026).

Timeline of the events this section refers to, 1914–1945. First World War line: 1, August 1914, war begins and 416,809 Australians enlist; 2, April 1915, Australians land at Gallipoli; 3, July 1916, Fromelles, over 5,500 casualties in 24 hours; 4, October 1917, Light Horse charge at Beersheba; 5, November 1918, armistice ends the war. Second World War line: 6, September 1939, Menzies announces Australia is at war; 7, April 1941, campaigns in Greece and on Crete; 8, April to December 1941, siege of Tobruk; 9, November 1941, HMAS Sydney (II) lost with all hands; 10, January to February 1942, Rabaul, Ambon, Singapore and Bangka; 11, July to November 1942, Kokoda, Isurava, Savo Island and El Alamein; 12, October 1943, Burma–Thailand railway completed; 13, August to September 1945, camps freed and the war ends.

Figure 1. Events this section refers to, 1914–1945 (source: as for Figures 2–10; Australian War Memorial encyclopedia entries, retrieved 26 August 2026).

By the end of this section you should be able to compare and contrast what combat was like for Australians from 1914 to 1945, compare what overseas service was like for Australian nurses in the two wars, use sources — diaries, letters, newspapers — to examine the perspectives of those who served, compare how prisoners of war fared under German and Japanese control, and examine the perspectives of particular prisoner-of-war groups.

Theory

1. Two wars, one question (VC2HH10K16)

What was it like to serve overseas — and how do we know? The answer to the second half shapes the first. Almost everything in this section comes from **sources**: objects and words left behind by the past. Letters home, diaries kept in camps, newspapers printed at the time, radio broadcasts, photographs, and the official records of armies and governments are all sources made during the wars. They are the raw material from which historians build their accounts — and, as part 5 shows, each kind of source shows some things and hides others.

Figure 2 gives the two wars at a glance. Keep it beside you as you read: most of this section is about what sits inside those big numbers.

Australians served overseas in two world wars

Scale, places and cost of service, 1914–1945

	FIRST WORLD WAR	SECOND WORLD WAR
Dates	1914–1918	1939–1945
How many served	416,809 enlisted; about 330,000 served overseas	About a million Australians served, men and women
Where Australians served	Gallipoli, the Western Front, the Middle East; sea and air too	Europe, the Mediterranean, North Africa, South-East Asia, the Pacific
Cost	More than 60,000 died; 156,000 wounded, gassed or captured	About 39,000 died; over 30,000 taken prisoner

Sources: Australian War Memorial, 'First World War, 1914–18' and 'Second World War, 1939–45'; 'Statistics: Deaths as a result of service with Australian units' (all ret

Comparison table of the two world wars for Australia. Dates: 1914–1918 and 1939–1945. How many served: First World War, 416,809 enlisted, about 330,000 served overseas; Second World War, about a million Australians served, men and women. Where Australians served: First World War, Gallipoli, the Western Front and the Middle East, plus sea and air; Second World War, Europe, the Mediterranean, North Africa, South-East Asia and the Pacific. Cost: First World War, more than 60,000 died and 156,000 were wounded, gassed or captured; Second World War, about 39,000 died and over 30,000 were taken prisoner.

Figure 2. Australians served overseas in two world wars (source: Australian War Memorial, 'First World War, 1914–18', 'Second World War, 1939–45' and 'Statistics: Deaths as a result of service with Australian units'; retrieved 26 August 2026).

One warning before the detail. The experiences in this section include wounding, sickness, captivity and death, including the killing of prisoners and of nurses after capture. Historians study these things because they happened, and because the people who went through them deserve to have their stories told accurately. This section tells them plainly, as the sources do.

Two dates frame the story. In November 1918 an **armistice** — an agreement between the fighting sides to stop the war — ended the first war; the second war ended in August and September 1945, after the camps were freed.

2. World War I: two very different ways of fighting (VC2HH10K16.E01)

The curriculum asks you to compare and contrast what combat was like from 1914 to 1945. The comparison begins inside the First World War itself, because two Australian forces in that one war lived through almost opposite kinds of fighting.

Infantry on the Western Front. From 1916 the main Australian effort was in France and Belgium, on the **Western Front**. Infantry are soldiers who fight on foot, and here they lived in **trenches** — deep ditches dug into the ground, facing the enemy's trenches across a strip of shell-torn ground called **no man's land**. Attacks meant climbing out and crossing that open ground under fire from **artillery** (large guns) and machine guns; poison gas was used on both sides. Between attacks there was mud, cold, lice and disease. The cost could be enormous in a single day: at the **Battle of Fromelles** on 19 July 1916, the 5th Australian Division suffered more than 5,500 casualties — killed, wounded or captured — in about 24 hours, the greatest loss by a single Australian division in one day.

The Light Horse in the Middle East. At the same time, Australian **light horse** — mounted troops — fought a very different war in Egypt, the Sinai and Palestine. They moved on horseback but usually fought on foot, across desert and rough country. Their enemies were distance, heat, dust and thirst as much as they were Ottoman troops; long rides with little water shaped each day. The famous moment came at **Beersheba** on 31 October 1917, when the 4th Light

Horse Brigade charged unwired trenches at dusk, bayonets in hand, and took the town and its vital wells in under an hour — for 67 Australian casualties. Figure 3 sets the two experiences side by side.

SECTION 3D • VC2HH10K16.E01

One war, two very different experiences: 1914–18

Infantry on the Western Front compared with the Light Horse in the Middle East

Infantry on the Western Front (France and Belgium, 1916–18)

Lived in trenches: ditches dug deep into the ground, facing the enemy across a strip of shell-torn ground called no man's land.

Faced artillery fire, machine guns and poison gas; attacks went over open ground; mud, cold and disease were constant.

Battle of Fromelles, 19 July 1916 — the 5th Australian Division suffered more than 5,500 casualties (killed, wounded or captured) in 24 hours, the greatest loss by a single Australian division in one day.

Light Horse in the Middle East (1915–18)

Moved on horseback but usually fought on foot, across desert and rough country in Egypt, Sinai and Palestine.

Long rides with little water; dust, heat and thirst shaped each day as much as fighting did.

Attack on Beersheba, 31 October 1917 — the 4th Light Horse Brigade charged unwired trenches at dusk, bayonets in hand, and took the town in under an hour (67 Australian casualties).

Sources: Australian War Memorial encyclopedia entries 'Fromelles, battle of' and 'Beersheba, attack on' (retrieved 26 August 2026).

Two panels comparing First World War combat experiences. Left panel, infantry on the Western Front, France and Belgium, 1916–18: lived in trenches facing the enemy across no man's land; faced artillery fire, machine guns and poison gas, attacks over open ground, constant mud, cold and disease; example, the Battle of Fromelles, 19 July 1916, when the 5th Australian Division suffered more than 5,500 casualties in 24 hours, the greatest loss by a single Australian division in one day. Right panel, Light Horse in the Middle East, 1915–18: moved on horseback but usually fought on foot across desert and rough country in Egypt, Sinai and Palestine; long rides with little water, dust, heat and thirst; example, the attack on Beersheba, 31 October 1917, when the 4th Light Horse Brigade charged unwired trenches at dusk and took the town in under an hour, for 67 Australian casualties.

Figure 3. One war, two very different experiences: 1914–18 (source: Australian War Memorial, 'Fromelles, battle of' and 'Beersheba, attack on'; retrieved 26 August 2026).

The point of the comparison is not that one was harder than the other. It is that *experience* depends on circumstances — place, weapons, movement, climate — so one war holds many wars inside it.

3. World War II: five different settings (VC2HH10K16.E01)

The Second World War spread Australians even wider. The curriculum names soldiers in the Greek campaigns and North Africa, soldiers in the Pacific theatres, and naval personnel and aircrews. Figure 4 sets out those five settings.

Second World War: five very different settings

Greece and Crete (April–May 1941) Two-thirds of the 6th Division fought a retreat against the German invasion and was evacuated by sea. 2,065 Australians were captured in Greece; on Crete 3,109 were captured and 242 died as prisoners.	North Africa (1941–42) About 14,000 Australians held the port of Tobruk under siege (April–December 1941) — mocked as 'rats' by enemy radio, they wore the name with pride as the Rats of Tobruk. The 9th Division then played a key role in the battles of El Alamein (July–November 1942).	The Pacific (from 1942) Jungle, mountains and tracks. On the Kokoda Track (July 1942 – January 1943), Australian battalions fought to stop a Japanese advance. At Isurava (August 1942) Private Bruce Kingsbury won the Victoria Cross, charging with a Bren gun; a sniper killed him.
At sea (Royal Australian Navy) Cruisers and destroyers served far from home. HMAS Sydney (II) was lost with all 645 crew off Western Australia (19 November 1941). HMAS Canberra took 24 hits in under two minutes at Savo Island (9 August 1942); 84 crew died, among them Captain Frank Getting.	In the air (Royal Australian Air Force) RAAF aircrew flew bombing missions over Europe with Bomber Command. Lancaster 'G for George' of 460 Squadron flew 90 operational missions in 1942–44 — rare survival, as few crews lived through a full tour. 1,476 RAAF personnel were taken prisoner.	

Sources: Australian War Memorial encyclopedia entries 'Greek campaign, 1941', 'Tobruk siege', 'El Alamein', 'Kokoda Track/Trail', 'Sydney II, HMAS and the Kormoran', 'Savo Island', "'G for George' Avro Lancaster' and 'Prisoners of war: Second World War – Europe'; retrieved 26 August 2026).

Five cards describing Second World War settings for Australians. Greece and Crete, April to May 1941: two-thirds of the 6th Division fought a retreat against the German invasion and was evacuated by sea; 2,065 Australians were captured in Greece, and on Crete 3,109 were captured and 242 died as prisoners. North Africa, 1941–42: about 14,000 Australians held the port of Tobruk under siege from April to December 1941, mocked as rats by enemy radio and wearing the name with pride as the Rats of Tobruk; the 9th Division then played a key role in the battles of El Alamein, July to November 1942. The Pacific, from 1942: jungle, mountains and tracks; on the Kokoda Track, July 1942 to January 1943, Australian battalions fought to stop a Japanese advance; at Isurava in August 1942 Private Bruce Kingsbury won the Victoria Cross, charging with a Bren gun, and was killed by a sniper. At sea, Royal Australian Navy: cruisers and destroyers served far from home; HMAS Sydney (II) was lost with all 645 crew off Western Australia on 19 November 1941; HMAS Canberra took 24 hits in under two minutes at Savo Island on 9 August 1942 and 84 crew died, among them Captain Frank Getting. In the air, Royal Australian Air Force: RAAF aircrew flew bombing missions over Europe with Bomber Command; Lancaster G for George of 460 Squadron flew 90 operational missions in 1942–44, a rare survival, as few crews lived through a full tour; 1,476 RAAF personnel were taken prisoner.

Figure 4. Second World War: five very different settings (source: Australian War Memorial encyclopedia entries, 'Greek campaign, 1941', 'Tobruk siege', 'El Alamein', 'Kokoda Track/Trail', 'Sydney II, HMAS and the Kormoran', 'Savo Island', "'G for George" Avro Lancaster' and 'Prisoners of war: Second World War – Europe'; retrieved 26 August 2026).

Three details from Figure 4 are worth pausing on, because they show how experience changed between the wars.

- **Capture as a mass experience.** In Greece and Crete in April–May 1941, thousands of Australians were taken prisoner in a matter of weeks — 2,065 in Greece and 3,109 on Crete. Being captured was not an accident that happened to a few; whole units were overrun. Prisoners of war are the subject of parts 6–8.
- **One man's day: Isurava.** In August 1942, during the fighting on the Kokoda Track, Private **Bruce Kingsbury** of the 2/14th Battalion charged a Japanese position firing a Bren gun from the hip and was killed by a sniper. He was awarded the **Victoria Cross**, the highest award for bravery in the British Empire's forces. His story is one example of what the word *experience* meant at the level of a single person — and of how a society picks out individuals to remember.

- **The war at sea and in the air had no trenches at all.** Sailors and aircrew lived in ships and aircraft: HMAS *Sydney* (II) was lost with all 645 of her crew in November 1941, and the cruiser HMAS *Canberra* took 24 hits in under two minutes at Savo Island in August 1942, killing 84 of her crew, among them her captain, **Frank Getting**. In the air, a bomber crew's tour was normally 30 missions, and few aircrew survived one; the Lancaster known as *G for George* of 460 Squadron flew 90 missions in 1942–44, which is why it survives today in a museum rather than in a field in Europe.

4. Nurses: women deployed overseas (VC2HH10K16.E03)

The curriculum asks you to compare what overseas service was like for Australian women in the two wars — above all, nurses. In both wars, nursing was the main way Australian women served close to the fighting, and in both wars they served in the **Australian Army Nursing Service**.

First World War. 2,861 nurses joined the service for overseas duty, and 21 died during their war service. They nursed in Egypt and on the island of Lemnos supporting the Gallipoli campaign, and then in England, France, Belgium, Greece, India and Italy. In England, Harefield House became No. 1 Australian Auxiliary Hospital from December 1914 to January 1919. Their work meant wards of wounded and sick men — typhoid, dysentery and gas cases in one ward, surgical cases in the next — often under shellfire, with little rest.

Second World War. About 3,500 nurses served in the Australian Army Nursing Service, of nearly 36,000 women who enlisted in all; 72 nurses died. Nurses went overseas with the army from 1940 — first the Middle East, then Singapore in late 1941. When Singapore fell in February 1942, 65 nurses sailed on the SS *Vyner Brooke* on 12 February; bombers sank the ship two days later. Survivors reached Bangka Island, where on 16 February 1942 Japanese troops shot a group of 22 nurses, killing 21. Sister **Vivian Bullwinkel** survived by lying still after being shot, and later gave a sworn statement — one formally promised to be true — about the killings for the war-crimes trials after the war. Thirty-two nurses were taken prisoner, and eight died in captivity. Of the 65 nurses who sailed on the *Vyner Brooke*, only 24 lived to come home.

Figure 5 sets the two wars side by side. The **continuity** is clear: in both wars, Australian nurses served overseas, close to the fighting. The **change** is just as clear: in the Second World War the war reached the nurses directly — by bombing, shipwreck, massacre (the killing of people who cannot defend themselves) and capture — in ways the First World War mostly did not.

Australian nurses deployed overseas in both wars

Nurses served close to the fighting — hospitals moved as the fronts moved

WWI

First World War: 2,861 women joined the Australian Army Nursing Service for overseas duty; 21 died during their war service.

They nursed in Egypt and on the island of Lemnos (supporting the Gallipoli campaign), then in England, France, Belgium, Greece, India and Italy. Harefield House in England was No. 1 Australian Auxiliary Hospital from December 1914 to January 1919.

Work meant wards of wounded and sick men, often under shellfire, with little rest — typhoid, dysentery and gas cases in one ward, surgical cases in the next.

WWII

Second World War: 3,500 women served in the Australian Army Nursing Service (of nearly 36,000 women who enlisted); 72 nurses died. Nurses went overseas with the AIF from 1940 — Middle East, then Singapore in late 1941.

When Singapore fell in February 1942, 65 nurses sailed on the SS Vyner Brooke (12 February). Bombers sank the ship on 14 February. Survivors reached Bangka Island; on 16 February 1942 Japanese troops shot a group of 22 nurses — 21 died. Sister Vivian Bullwinkel survived by lying still after being shot.

Thirty-two nurses were taken prisoner; eight died in captivity. Of the 65 who sailed on the Vyner Brooke, only 24 lived to come home. Bullwinkel later gave a sworn statement for the war-crimes trials.

Sources: 'Australian Army Nursing Service' (Wikipedia entry, retrieved 26 August 2026); Australian War Memorial, 'Harefield Park Hospital', 'Nurse survivors of the Vyner Brooke', 'Sister Vivian Bullwinkel'.

Two panels comparing Australian nurses deployed overseas. First World War panel: 2,861 women joined the Australian Army Nursing Service for overseas duty and 21 died during their war service; they nursed in Egypt and on Lemnos supporting Gallipoli, then in England, France, Belgium, Greece, India and Italy, with Harefield House in England as No. 1 Australian Auxiliary Hospital from December 1914 to January 1919; their work meant wards of wounded and sick men, often under shellfire, with little rest. Second World War panel: 3,500 women served in the Australian Army Nursing Service, of nearly 36,000 women who enlisted, and 72 nurses died; nurses went overseas from 1940, to the Middle East and then Singapore; when Singapore fell, 65 nurses sailed on the SS Vyner Brooke on 12 February 1942, the ship was bombed and sunk on 14 February, survivors reached Bangka Island, and on 16 February 1942 Japanese troops shot a group of 22 nurses, killing 21; Sister Vivian Bullwinkel survived by lying still after being shot; 32 nurses were taken prisoner and 8 died in captivity; of the 65 who sailed, only 24 lived to come home; Bullwinkel later gave a sworn statement for the war-crimes trials.

Figure 5. Australian nurses deployed overseas in both wars (source: Australian War Memorial, 'Harefield Park Hospital', 'Nurse survivors of the Vyner Brooke' and 'Bullwinkel, Vivian'; Wikipedia entry 'Australian Army Nursing Service'; retrieved 26 August 2026).

5. Diaries, letters and newspapers: reading perspectives (VC2HH10K16.E04)

Everything you have read so far in this section rests on sources. Now to sort them. A **primary source** is one made during the events it shows, by someone who was there or who spoke at the time — a diary, a letter, a photograph, a newspaper report, a radio broadcast, an official record. A **secondary source** is one made later, by people studying the past using primary sources — a history book, a museum display, a documentary. This section's figures are secondary sources; the words quoted inside them, from 1915 and 1939, are primary.

The curriculum asks you to examine perspectives using **diaries, letters and newspapers**. Each kind has its own strengths and limits, and the honest way to study them is to weigh both sides — the strongest case for trusting each kind of source, and the strongest case for doubting it.

- **Diaries and letters** are private words, written close to the events. They carry feelings and daily detail that official records miss. But they show one person's view, from one place — and wartime **censorship** touched them too. Censorship means the government checked and limited what could be said: letters from the front were read by army censors, so soldiers often left out the worst, both to protect the letter and to protect their families.

- **Newspapers and radio** reached everyone at home, and they are evidence of what whole societies knew and felt. But in wartime they printed only what censorship allowed, and they were written to keep morale up. Praise for the troops was honest praise — and it also served a purpose.

So the private source and the public source each correct the other. A diary alone is one person's war; a newspaper alone is the war as it was allowed to appear. Historians read them against each other. That checking of one source against others has a name — **corroboration** — and it is one of the core moves of historical reasoning.

Figure 6 gives two public sources, one from each war; Figure 7 gives the four questions this book uses to analyse any source, worked on the 1939 broadcast.

SECTION 3D • VC2HH10K16.E04

The war through contemporary words: a dispatch and a broadcast

Newspapers and radio shaped what people at home knew and felt

NEWSPAPERS, 1915

Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, a British newspaper correspondent, watched the landing at Anzac Cove on 25 April 1915. His first account was printed in Australian newspapers on 8 May 1915.

Australians read:

"There has been no [greater] feat in this war than this sudden landing in the dark and storming the heights"

— Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, dispatch on the Gallipoli landing, 1915

Perspective check: an outsider praising the troops — written early, before the long stalemate, and shaped by wartime censorship.

RADIO AND NEWSPAPERS, 1939

At 9.15 pm on 3 September 1939, Prime Minister Robert Menzies spoke on the radio. Newspapers printed the words the next day. Australians heard and read:

"Fellow Australians, it is my ... duty to inform you officially that ... Great Britain has declared war upon her, and that, as a result, Australia is also at war."

— Robert Menzies, wartime broadcast, 3 September 1939

Perspective check: a government voice at the moment war began — duty and sadness, not yet the experience of those who served.

Sources: Australian War Memorial, 'Menzies's, Prime Minister Robert Gordon: Wartime broadcast' (retrieved 26 August 2026); Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett entry, Wikipedia

Source card with two panels. Left panel, newspapers, 1915: Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, a British newspaper correspondent, watched the landing at Anzac Cove on 25 April 1915; his first account was printed in Australian newspapers on 8 May 1915; it read, 'There has been no greater feat in this war than this sudden landing in the dark and storming the heights' (in the source card, one word of the original quote is replaced and marked in square brackets); perspective check: an outsider praising the troops, written early, before the long stalemate, and shaped by wartime censorship. Right panel, radio and newspapers, 1939: at 9.15 pm on 3 September 1939 Prime Minister Robert Menzies spoke on the radio and newspapers printed the words the next day; he said, 'Fellow Australians, it is my ... duty to inform you officially that ... Great Britain has declared war upon her, and that, as a result, Australia is also at war'; perspective check: a government voice at the moment war began, duty and sadness, not yet the experience of those who served.

Figure 6. Source 1 — Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett's dispatch on the Gallipoli landing (printed in Australian newspapers, 8 May 1915) and Source 2 — Prime Minister Robert Menzies's wartime broadcast (3 September 1939) (source: Australian War Memorial, 'Menzies's, Prime Minister Robert Gordon: Wartime broadcast'; Wikipedia entry 'Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett'; retrieved 26 August 2026).

How to analyse a source: four questions

Worked model using the Menzies broadcast of 3 September 1939

1. What is it?

Type, author, date, place.

A radio broadcast by the Prime Minister — then printed in newspapers — 3 September 1939, Australia.

2. Who made it, and why?

The maker's role and purpose.

The head of government, telling the nation it was at war. Official words, checked by wartime censorship.

3. What does it show?

Information you can take from it.

Australia entered the war because Germany kept invading Poland and Britain declared war. Many households heard it on the radio at 9.15 pm.

4. What is its perspective?

Whose view — and its limits.

A government's view at the start of the war: duty and sadness. It cannot show what fighting felt like — for that you need diaries and letters of those who served.

Use the same four questions on any source — a soldier's letter, a nurse's diary, a photograph or a newspaper report.

Scaffold of four questions for analysing a source, each with a cue and a worked answer for the Menzies broadcast of 3 September 1939. 1, What is it? Type, author, date, place: a radio broadcast by the Prime Minister, then printed in newspapers, 3 September 1939, Australia. 2, Who made it, and why? The maker's role and purpose: the head of government, telling the nation it was at war; official words, checked by wartime censorship. 3, What does it show? Information you can take from it: Australia entered the war because Germany kept invading Poland and Britain declared war; many households heard it on the radio at 9.15 pm. 4, What is its perspective? Whose view, and its limits: a government's view at the start of the war, duty and sadness; it cannot show what fighting felt like, and for that you need the diaries and letters of those who served.

Figure 7. How to analyse a source: four questions (framework built for this section's use of VC2HH10K16.E04; worked on Source 2).

6. Source study: the war diaries of Weary Dunlop (VC2HH10K16.E04, VC2HH10K16.E06)

The most famous Australian diary of the Second World War belongs to a doctor. **Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop** was an army surgeon, born at Wangaratta in Victoria in 1907, who had played rugby for Australia before the war. He was captured by the Japanese at Bandung on the island of Java in 1942. In January 1943 he was in command of the first Australians sent to work on the Thai end of the **Thai–Burma railway** (also called the Burma–Thailand railway), the line Japan forced Allied prisoners and Asian labourers to build through jungle and mountain.

Dunlop kept diaries through his captivity, 1942–45. They were published in 1989 as *The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop: Java and the Burma–Thailand Railway, 1942–1945*, and are held by the Australian War Memorial. Figure 8 sets the source out as a source card; Worked source analysis 2 reads it in full.

Source study: the wartime diaries of Weary Dunlop

A primary source — written by someone who was there

PRIMARY SOURCE • DIARY

What is it?	Diaries kept by Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop during his captivity, 1942–45. Published in 1989 as <i>The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop: Java and the Burma–Thailand Railway, 1942–1945</i> . Held by the Australian War Memorial.
Who wrote it?	An army surgeon, born at Wangaratta (Vic.) in 1907. A rugby player for Australia before the war, he was captured by the Japanese at Bandung, Java, in 1942. In January 1943 he commanded the first Australians sent to work on the Thai end of the Burma–Thailand railway.
What does it show?	Daily life under Japanese captivity: sickness, poor food, long hours of forced labour — and how prisoners organised care for one another. Dunlop treated the sick with almost no medicine.
Why does it matter?	It is an eyewitness account, written close to the events. As a diary it shows feelings and detail that official records often miss — but it is one man's view, so historians check it against other sources.

Sources: Australian War Memorial, 'Dunlop, Sir (Ernest) Edward "Weary"' and its collection of the wartime diaries; Wikipedia entry 'Weary Dunlop' (all retrieved 26 August 2026)

*Source card for the wartime diaries of Weary Dunlop, a primary source diary. What is it? Diaries kept by Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop during his captivity, 1942–45, published in 1989 as *The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop: Java and the Burma–Thailand Railway, 1942–1945*, held by the Australian War Memorial. Who wrote it? An army surgeon, born at Wangaratta, Victoria, in 1907; a rugby player for Australia before the war; captured by the Japanese at Bandung, Java, in 1942; in January 1943 he commanded the first Australians sent to work on the Thai end of the Burma–Thailand railway. What does it show? Daily life under Japanese captivity: sickness, poor food, long hours of forced labour, and how prisoners organised care for one another; Dunlop treated the sick with almost no medicine. Why does it matter? It is an eyewitness account, written close to the events; as a diary it shows feelings and detail that official records often miss, but it is one man's view, so historians check it against other sources.*

Figure 8. Source 3 — the wartime diaries of Weary Dunlop (source: Australian War Memorial, 'Dunlop, Sir (Ernest) Edward "Weary"' and its collection of the wartime diaries; Wikipedia entry 'Weary Dunlop'; retrieved 26 August 2026).

7. Prisoners of war: two very different captivities (VC2HH10K16.E05)

A **prisoner of war** (POW) is a member of the armed forces who is captured by the enemy while serving. Treatment of prisoners is meant to be governed by international rules: the **1929 Geneva Convention** on prisoners of war was a formal written agreement between countries setting out how prisoners must be treated — housed, fed, medically cared for, and not forced to work on war-related tasks.

More than 30,000 Australians were taken prisoner in the Second World War, and their experiences split by who held them.

Germany and Italy. Germany and Britain had formally agreed to follow the 1929 Convention. Australian prisoners in Europe — captured in Greece, Crete, Tobruk and North Africa, or shot down as aircrew — were held in camps run under military guard, and Red Cross food and medical parcels reached most of them. Most survived: of the 8,591 Australians held by Germany and Italy, and of the 3,109 captured on Crete, 242 died as prisoners.

Japan. Japan signed the same Convention but never formally agreed to follow it, and its forces often ignored it. Prisoners were used as **forced labour** — work they could not refuse — on the Thai–Burma railway and in camps and work parties across Asia. Food was poor, medicine almost none. Of the more than 22,000 Australian prisoners of the Japanese, **36 per cent died in captivity**.

Figure 9 shows the two captivities side by side. One caution: the comparison is about averages, not every camp. Some prisoners of Germany faced forced marches and air raids in the war's last months; under Japan, Changi in early 1942 was far less harsh than the railway. Treatment depended on where and when you were held, and by whom.

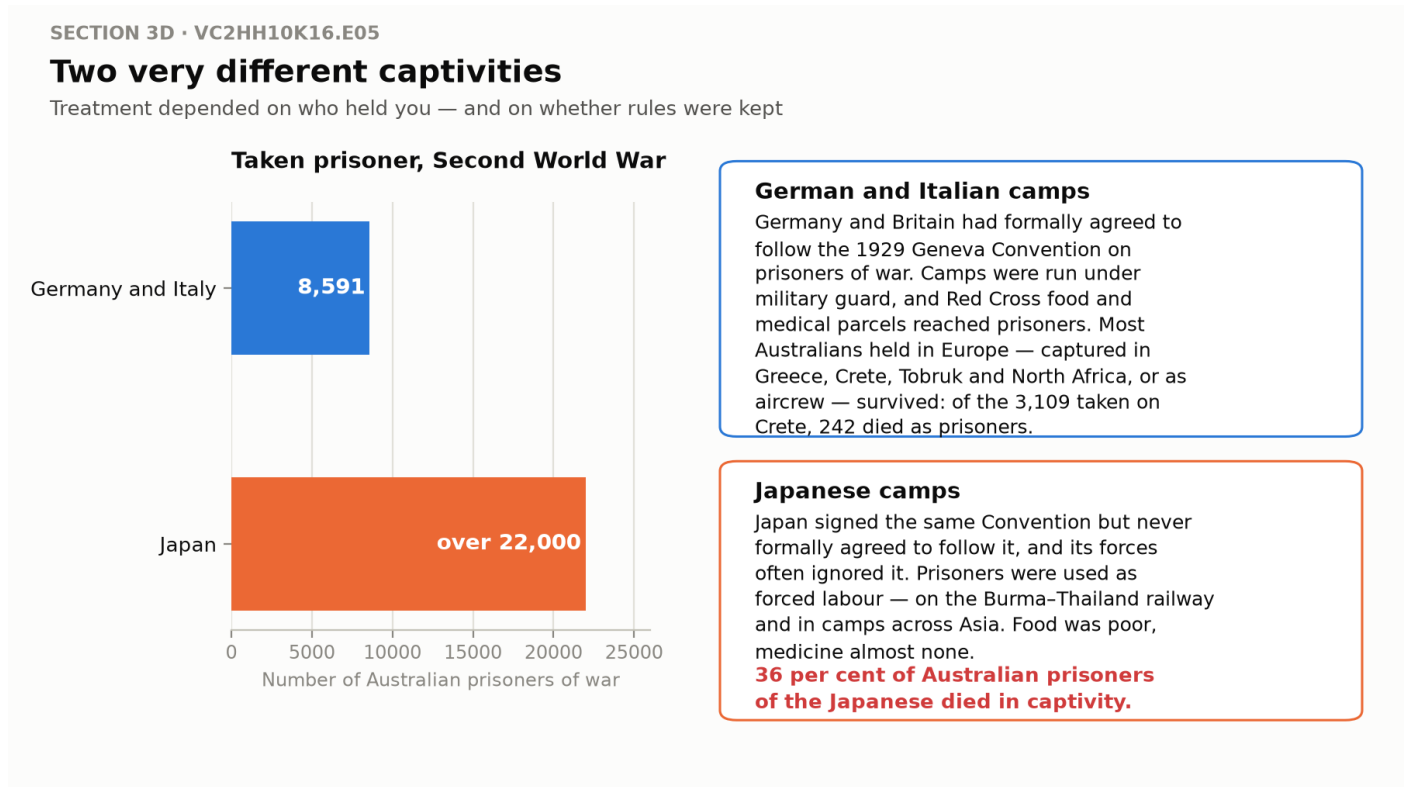


Figure with a horizontal bar chart and two panels. Bar chart: number of Australian prisoners of war in the Second World War — Germany and Italy 8,591; Japan over 22,000. Left panel, German and Italian camps: Germany and Britain had formally agreed to follow the 1929 Geneva Convention on prisoners of war; camps were run under military guard and Red Cross food and medical parcels reached prisoners; most Australians held in Europe, captured in Greece, Crete, Tobruk and North Africa or as aircrew, survived — of the 3,109 taken on Crete, 242 died as prisoners. Right panel, Japanese camps: Japan signed the same Convention but never formally agreed to follow it, and its forces often ignored it; prisoners were used as forced labour building the Burma–Thailand railway and in camps across Asia; food was poor, medicine almost none; 36 per cent of Australian prisoners of the Japanese died in captivity.

Figure 9. Two very different captivities (source: Australian War Memorial, 'Second World War, 1939–45', 'Prisoners of war: Second World War – Europe' and 'Prisoners of war: Second World War – prisoners of the Japanese'; record of which countries formally agreed to the Geneva Convention, per the treaty's Wikipedia entry; retrieved 26 August 2026).

8. Four groups of prisoners in the Pacific (VC2HH10K16.E06)

Inside Japanese captivity, experience differed from group to group. The curriculum names prisoners held in camps at Ambon or Rabaul, those put to forced labour building the Thai–Burma railway, and army nurses captured in Singapore. Figure 10 sets out four groups.

Four groups of Australian prisoners in the Pacific

Each group's experience was shaped by where and how they were held

Ambon (captured February 1942)

Gull Force — built on the 2/21st Battalion — fell with the island on 3 February 1942. More than 300 Australian and Dutch prisoners were killed after capture. Three-quarters of the Australians taken on Ambon died before the war ended; of 582 still held there, 405 died.

Rabaul — Lark Force (captured January 1942)

The Rabaul garrison (Lark Force) was captured when the town fell in January 1942. On 1 July 1942 the ship *Montevideo Maru*, carrying its prisoners to Japan, was sunk by the US submarine *Sturgeon*: 845 servicemen and up to 208 civilians died — none of the prisoners aboard survived. It is Australia's worst disaster at sea.

Burma-Thailand railway (1942-43)

13,004 Australian POWs were forced to build the railway; 2,802 died. Days of hard labour on tiny rations brought cholera, dysentery, malaria and tropical ulcers. Surgeon Weary Dunlop kept a diary of the railway and of prisoners caring for each other.

Changi and the work parties

About 15,000 Australians were held at Changi, Singapore, from February 1942. At first it was the least harsh of the Japanese camps: prisoners ran their own routines, gardens and hospital. By mid-1943 fewer than 2,500 Australians remained — work parties had been sent out, including to the railway.

Sources: Australian War Memorial, 'Prisoners of war: Second World War – prisoners of the Japanese' and 'Montevideo Maru'; Wikipedia entries 'Battle of Ambon', 'Lark Force' and 'Burma Railway'; retrieved 26 August 2026).

*Four cards describing groups of Australian prisoners in the Pacific. Ambon, captured February 1942: Gull Force, built on the 2/21st Battalion, fell with the island on 3 February 1942; more than 300 Australian and Dutch prisoners were killed after capture; three-quarters of the Australians taken on Ambon died before the war ended — of 582 still held there, 405 died. Rabaul, Lark Force, captured January 1942: the Rabaul garrison was captured when the town fell in January 1942; on 1 July 1942 the ship *Montevideo Maru*, carrying its prisoners to Japan, was sunk by the US submarine *Sturgeon*; 845 servicemen and up to 208 civilians died, none of the prisoners aboard survived, and it is Australia's worst disaster at sea. Burma–Thailand railway, 1942–43: 13,004 Australian POWs were forced to build the railway and 2,802 died; days of hard labour on tiny rations brought cholera, dysentery, malaria and tropical ulcers; surgeon Weary Dunlop kept a diary of the railway and of prisoners caring for each other. Changi and the work parties: about 15,000 Australians were held at Changi, Singapore, from February 1942; at first it was the least harsh of the Japanese camps, with prisoners running their own routines, gardens and hospital; by mid-1943 fewer than 2,500 Australians remained, as work parties had been sent out, including to the railway.*

Figure 10. Four groups of Australian prisoners in the Pacific (source: Australian War Memorial, 'Prisoners of war: Second World War – prisoners of the Japanese', 'Montevideo Maru' and 'Changi'; Wikipedia entries 'Battle of Ambon', 'Lark Force' and 'Burma Railway'; retrieved 26 August 2026).

Read the four cards in Figure 10 together and the pattern is plain: **where and how a group was held decided its experience.** The men of Ambon faced killing after capture and a death rate of three in four. The men of Rabaul — the **garrison** there, the troops sent to hold the town, known as Lark Force — mostly vanished at sea in Australia's worst disaster at sea — the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru* on 1 July 1942, with 845 servicemen and up to 208 civilians dead. The prisoners of the railway were worked and starved; 13,004 Australians were forced to build it, and 2,802 died. Changi was hard but organised — until the work parties began to leave.

Two more points complete the picture the curriculum asks for. First, the **army nurses captured in Singapore** belong in this story too: 32 nurses were taken prisoner in February 1942, and eight died in captivity (part 4). Second, perspective: much of what historians know about these groups comes from survivor diaries, sworn statements and post-war investigations — Dunlop's diaries, Bullwinkel's statement, and the records kept secretly in camps. Official Japanese records were incomplete or were destroyed, so the private sources carry more weight here than in any other part of this section.

9. Bringing it together (VC2HH10K16)

Step back from the detail and three things decide what service was like.

1. **Role.** An infantryman on the Western Front, a light horseman in the Sinai, a nurse on Lemnos, a sailor in the *Sydney*, an aircrew member over Europe — each lived a different war.
2. **Place.** Trenches, desert, jungle, sea, air and camp each set the conditions: mud or dust, heat or cold, water or none.
3. **Captivity — and the captor.** For more than 30,000 Australians in the Second World War, the war's final years were spent as prisoners; whether they lived often turned on whether their captors kept the rules they had signed.

And perspective runs through it all. The same war looked different from a trench and from a newspaper office, from a prison camp and from a prime minister's microphone. Those differences are not a problem to solve; they are the evidence historians work with — checking one source against another, weighing who made each source and why, and building the story from all of them. Section 3E next asks which events turned the two wars; section 3G asks what the wars did to the society these people had left behind.

Sources for this section

Retrieval date for all online sources: **26 August 2026.**

1. Australian War Memorial (awm.gov.au), 'First World War, 1914–18' — 416,809 enlisted; about 330,000 served overseas; more than 60,000 deaths; 156,000 wounded, gassed or captured.
2. Australian War Memorial, 'Second World War, 1939–45' — about a million Australians served; about 39,000 deaths; over 30,000 taken prisoner.
3. Australian War Memorial, 'Statistics: Deaths as a result of service with Australian units'.
4. Australian War Memorial, 'Fromelles, battle of' — 19 July 1916; 5th Division; more than 5,500 Australian casualties in about 24 hours.
5. Australian War Memorial, 'Beersheba, attack on' — 31 October 1917; the 4th Light Horse Brigade charge; 67 Australian casualties.
6. Australian War Memorial, 'Greek campaign, 1941' — 2,065 Australians captured in Greece; 3,109 captured on Crete, of whom 242 died as prisoners.
7. Australian War Memorial, 'Prisoners of war: Second World War – Europe' — 8,591 Australian prisoners of Germany and Italy; 1,476 RAAF personnel taken prisoner; survival rates.
8. Australian War Memorial, 'Prisoners of war: Second World War – prisoners of the Japanese' — more than 22,000 Australian prisoners; about 36 per cent died; 13,004 Australians on the Burma–Thailand railway, of whom 2,802 died.
9. Australian War Memorial, 'Tobruk siege' and 'El Alamein' — about 14,000 Australians in the siege, April–December 1941; the 9th Division at El Alamein, July–November 1942.
10. Australian War Memorial, 'Kokoda Track/Trail' and Wikipedia entry 'Battle of Isurava' — July 1942 to January 1943; Private Bruce Kingsbury VC at Isurava, August 1942.
11. Australian War Memorial, 'Sydney II, HMAS and the Kormoran' — lost with all 645 crew, 19 November 1941.
12. Australian War Memorial, 'Savo Island' — HMAS Canberra, 9 August 1942; 24 hits; 84 crew killed, among them Captain Frank Getting.
13. Australian War Memorial, "'G for George" Avro Lancaster' — 460 Squadron; 90 operational missions, 1942–44.
14. Australian War Memorial, 'Harefield Park Hospital'; Wikipedia entry 'Australian Army Nursing Service' — 2,861 nurses for overseas duty in the First World War, of whom 21 died; about 3,500 in the Second World War, of nearly 36,000 women who enlisted, of whom 72 died.
15. Australian War Memorial, 'Nurse survivors of the Vyner Brooke' and 'Bullwinkel, Vivian' — 65 nurses sailed, 24 lived to come home; Bangka Island, 16 February 1942; 22 nurses shot, 21 killed; 32 nurses taken prisoner, 8 died in captivity; Bullwinkel's sworn statement.

16. Australian War Memorial, 'Dunlop, Sir (Ernest) Edward "Weary"' and its collection of the wartime diaries; Wikipedia entry 'Weary Dunlop' — born Wangaratta, 1907; captured at Bandung, 1942; first railway party, January 1943; diaries published 1989.
17. Australian War Memorial, 'Montevideo Maru' — sunk 1 July 1942; 845 servicemen and up to 208 civilians killed.
18. Australian War Memorial, 'Changi' — about 15,000 Australians held from February 1942; fewer than 2,500 remained by mid-1943.
19. Wikipedia entries 'Battle of Ambon' and 'Lark Force' — Gull Force and the fall of Ambon, 3 February 1942; more than 300 prisoners killed after capture; 582 held, 405 dead; the Rabaul garrison captured January 1942.
20. Record of which countries formally agreed to (ratified) the Geneva Convention of 27 July 1929 relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, per the treaty's Wikipedia entry — formally agreed by Germany and Britain; signed by Japan but never agreed to.
21. Ashmead-Bartlett dispatch on the Gallipoli landing, printed in Australian newspapers 8 May 1915 — quoted in Figure 6 (Source 1); Wikipedia entry 'Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett'.
22. Menzies, Robert, wartime radio broadcast, 3 September 1939 — quoted in Figure 6 (Source 2); Australian War Memorial, 'Menzies's, Prime Minister Robert Gordon: Wartime broadcast'.

Worked examples

Both analyses below use the same five moves: identify the source; describe the content; explain the context; read the perspective; state the significance or inference.

Worked source analysis 1 — with help

Question. Read Source 1 (Figure 6, left panel): the dispatch by Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett on the Gallipoli landing, printed in Australian newspapers on 8 May 1915. What does this source tell historians about how the landing was seen at the time — and what can it not show?

Working	Comment
Step 1: Identify the source. A newspaper dispatch by Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, a British newspaper correspondent who watched the landing at Anzac Cove on 25 April 1915, printed in Australian newspapers on 8 May 1915.	A primary source: a public account written by an eyewitness within days of the event.
Step 2: Describe the content. He calls the landing "no [greater] feat in this war" — "this sudden landing in the dark and storming the heights".	Use the source's own words. (One word is replaced in square brackets.) The key idea is praise: courage, surprise, success.
Step 3: Explain the context. Written in the war's first months, before the long stalemate at Gallipoli set in and before Australians knew the campaign's cost (26,111 Australian casualties, as section 3C records). Newspapers were the main way Australians learned the news, and wartime censorship controlled what could be printed.	Context explains why the tone is triumphant: neither the writer nor his readers yet knew how the story ended.
Step 4: Read the perspective and purpose. Ashmead-Bartlett was an outsider — British, not Australian — and his praise of the colonial troops mattered a great deal to Australian readers, who made his words famous. His purpose was to report, but also to keep support for the war strong.	A strong analysis notices who is speaking, to whom, and what the words were meant to do.
Step 5: State significance and inference. The source is evidence of how the landing was first seen — as a fine feat, before it became a byword for loss. It cannot show what the landing felt like for the men on the beach; for that, historians need their diaries and letters.	One source gives the public view; the private sources supply the rest.

Answer: The dispatch shows the landing first being seen as a brilliant feat of arms — a public, patriotic view, written early and shaped by censorship. It cannot show the experience of the men who landed; diaries and letters must supply that.

Worked source analysis 2 — with help

Question. Read Source 3 (Figure 8): the wartime diaries of Weary Dunlop, 1942–45. What does this source tell historians about the experience of Australian prisoners of war on the Thai–Burma railway — and why do historians still check it against other sources?

Working	Comment
Step 1: Identify the source. Diaries kept day by day by Sir Edward ‘Weary’ Dunlop, an army surgeon, during his captivity, 1942–45; published in 1989 as <i>The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop</i> and held by the Australian War Memorial.	A primary source: written close to the events by someone who was there.
Step 2: Describe the content. Daily life under Japanese captivity — sickness, poor food, long hours of forced labour — and how prisoners organised care for one another, with Dunlop treating the sick using almost no medicine.	Note both halves: the suffering <i>and</i> the organising. Diaries record what people did, not only what they endured.
Step 3: Explain the context. Dunlop commanded the first Australians sent to the Thai end of the railway in January 1943. Of 13,004 Australian prisoners forced to build it, 2,802 died; sickness on tiny rations was the main killer.	Context turns the diary’s daily detail into evidence about the railway as a whole.
Step 4: Read the perspective and purpose. Dunlop wrote as a doctor and a leader of men — his view is from inside the camps but shaped by his role, his duties and what he could see from where he stood. A diary is private: he could write what a censored letter could not.	Perspective includes role. A doctor’s war is not a private’s war, though both are real.
Step 5: State significance and inference. The diaries give historians the daily texture of the railway — and evidence that prisoners built systems of care that saved lives. Historians still check them, because they are one man’s view: other diaries, camp records and post-war investigations show whether what he saw held in other places too.	Corroboration: one eyewitness is evidence; many agreeing witnesses are proof.

Answer: Dunlop’s diaries show the daily experience of the railway — sickness, starvation, forced labour — and the care prisoners organised in answer. Historians check them against other sources because they are one man’s eyewitness view, however close to the events.

Practice questions

With help

Q1. Two wars. Sort these into (i) First World War and (ii) Second World War: the Light Horse charge at Beersheba; the siege of Tobruk; the loss of HMAS *Sydney* (II); the Battle of Fromelles; the fall of Changi; the bombing of Darwin (section 3C).

Q2. World War I combat. Use Figure 3.

- State two features of the infantry’s experience on the Western Front.
- How did the Light Horse’s way of fighting differ?
- Which battle cost the 5th Australian Division more than 5,500 casualties in about 24 hours?

Q3. World War II settings. Use Figure 4.

- (a) Name the three land settings shown for soldiers.
- (b) Which ship was lost with all 645 of her crew?
- (c) What did Private Bruce Kingsbury do at Isurava in August 1942?

Q4. Nurses. Use Figure 5.

- (a) How many nurses joined the Australian Army Nursing Service for overseas duty in each war?
- (b) Name two places First World War nurses served.
- (c) What happened after the *Vyner Brooke* was sunk on 14 February 1942?

Q5. Two captivities. Use Figure 9.

- (a) How many Australian prisoners of war were held by Germany and Italy, and how many by Japan?
- (b) What was the difference between how Germany and how Japan stood towards the 1929 Geneva Convention?
- (c) What share of Australian prisoners of the Japanese died in captivity?

On your own

Q6. Apply the four questions. Use the scaffold in Figure 7 to analyse Source 2, the Menzies broadcast of 3 September 1939 (Figure 6, right panel). Write one or two sentences under each question.

Q7. Why both kinds of source? Source 1 (Ashmead-Bartlett's dispatch) is a public newspaper account; Source 3 (Dunlop's diaries) is a private diary. Explain what each kind of source can show historians — and why neither is enough on its own. Use one example from each source in your answer.

Q8. Prisoner-of-war groups. Choose **two** groups from Figure 10. Explain how their experiences differed, using at least two facts about each group.

Q9. Cause and consequence. The fall of Singapore in February 1942 led to about 15,000 Australians being held at Changi. Trace **two** consequences for those prisoners, using Figures 9 and 10.

Q10. Evaluating a witness. Sister Vivian Bullwinkel survived the shooting of nurses on Bangka Island and later gave a sworn statement for the war-crimes trials after the war.

- (a) Why is her statement valuable to historians?
- (b) What are its limits as evidence?
- (c) What other sources could historians check it against?

Answers

Q1. (i) First World War: the Light Horse charge at Beersheba; the Battle of Fromelles. (ii) Second World War: the siege of Tobruk; the loss of HMAS *Sydney* (II); the fall of Changi; the bombing of Darwin.

Q2. (a) Any two from: living in trenches; attacks over open ground under artillery and machine-gun fire; poison gas; mud, cold and disease. (b) The Light Horse moved on horseback across desert and rough country but usually fought on foot; distance, heat, dust and thirst shaped their war as much as the enemy did. (c) The Battle of Fromelles, 19 July 1916.

Q3. (a) Greece and Crete, North Africa, and the Pacific. (b) HMAS *Sydney* (II). (c) He charged a Japanese position firing a Bren gun from the hip and was killed by a sniper; he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

Q4. (a) 2,861 in the First World War; about 3,500 in the Second World War. (b) Any two from: Egypt, Lemnos, England, France, Belgium, Greece, India, Italy. (c) Survivors reached Bangka Island; on 16 February 1942 Japanese troops shot a group of 22 nurses, killing 21; Vivian Bullwinkel survived; 32 nurses were taken prisoner, of whom 8 died in captivity; of the 65 who sailed, only 24 came home.

Q5. (a) 8,591 held by Germany and Italy; over 22,000 held by Japan. (b) Germany and Britain had formally agreed to follow the Convention; Japan signed it but never formally agreed to follow it, and its forces often ignored it. (c) 36 per cent.

Q6. Answers will vary. Must address all four questions of Figure 7; a model answer is in the fully-worked solutions.

Q7. Answers will vary. Must give a strength and a limit for each kind of source and use one example from each; a model answer is in the fully-worked solutions.

Q8. Answers will vary. Must use at least two facts for each chosen group and link the difference to where and how the group was held.

Q9. Answers will vary. Must trace two consequences using Figures 9 and 10 (for example: work parties sent from Changi to the railway; forced labour, sickness and death rates under Japanese captivity).

Q10. Answers will vary. (a) She was an eyewitness, giving an account close to the events, under oath. (b) She was one person, in one place, under terrible strain; memory can fade or shift. (c) Other survivors' accounts, Japanese records where they exist, post-war investigation files and the war-crimes trial records.

Fully-worked solutions

Q1.

First World War: the Light Horse charge at Beersheba (31 October 1917) and the Battle of Fromelles (19 July 1916). Second World War: the siege of Tobruk (April–December 1941), the loss of HMAS *Sydney* (II) (19 November 1941), the fall of Changi (Singapore fell 15 February 1942; Changi was freed in 1945) and the bombing of Darwin (19 February 1942). The sorting works because each event sits on one line of Figure 1's timeline.

Q2.

- (a) Two features of the infantry's experience on the Western Front: they lived in trenches facing the enemy across no man's land, and their attacks went over open ground under artillery and machine-gun fire, with poison gas used on both sides. Mud, cold and disease were constant between attacks.
- (b) The Light Horse moved on horseback across desert and rough country but usually fought on foot. Their war was shaped by long rides with little water — distance, heat, dust and thirst — rather than by trenches and mud.
- (c) The Battle of Fromelles, 19 July 1916: the 5th Australian Division suffered more than 5,500 casualties in about 24 hours, the greatest loss by a single Australian division in one day.

Q3.

- (a) The three land settings shown for soldiers are Greece and Crete, North Africa, and the Pacific. The two remaining settings — at sea and in the air — belong to naval personnel and aircrews.
- (b) HMAS *Sydney* (II), lost with all 645 crew off Western Australia on 19 November 1941.
- (c) At Isurava in August 1942, Private Bruce Kingsbury of the 2/14th Battalion charged a Japanese position firing a Bren gun from the hip and was killed by a sniper. He was awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest award for bravery in the British Empire's forces.

Q4.

- (a) 2,861 nurses joined for overseas duty in the First World War, of whom 21 died during their war service; about 3,500 served in the Second World War, of whom 72 died.
- (b) Any two of Egypt, Lemnos, England, France, Belgium, Greece, India and Italy. In England, Harefield House became No. 1 Australian Auxiliary Hospital from December 1914 to January 1919.
- (c) Survivors reached Bangka Island. There, on 16 February 1942, Japanese troops shot a group of 22 nurses, killing 21. Sister Vivian Bullwinkel survived by lying still after being shot, and later gave a sworn statement for the war-crimes trials. Thirty-two nurses were taken prisoner and eight died in captivity. Of the 65 who sailed on the *Vyner Brooke*, only 24 lived to come home.

Q5.

- (a) 8,591 Australians were held by Germany and Italy; over 22,000 were held by Japan.
- (b) Germany and Britain had formally agreed to follow the 1929 Geneva Convention on prisoners of war, so camps in Europe were run under military guard and Red Cross parcels reached prisoners. Japan signed the Convention but never formally agreed to follow it, and its forces often ignored it — prisoners were used as forced labour, with poor food and almost no medicine.
- (c) 36 per cent of Australian prisoners of the Japanese died in captivity.

Q6.

Model answer.

1. *What is it?* A radio broadcast by the prime minister, Robert Menzies, at 9.15 pm on 3 September 1939, printed in newspapers the next day.
2. *Who made it, and why?* The head of government, telling the nation it was at war. The words were official and checked by wartime censorship.
3. *What does it show?* Australia entered the war because Germany kept invading Poland and Britain declared war — Australia entered alongside Britain, as in 1914. Many households heard it live on the radio.
4. *What is its perspective?* A government's view at the moment war began — duty and sadness. It cannot show what serving and fighting felt like; for that, historians need the diaries and letters of those who went.

Q7.

Model answer. Source 1, Ashmead-Bartlett's dispatch, is a public newspaper account: it can show how the landing was seen at the time by the wider world — “no [greater] feat in this war” — and how praise of the troops was used to keep support for the war strong. Its limit is that it was written under wartime censorship, by an outsider, before the campaign's cost was known; it cannot show what the landing felt like on the beach.

Source 3, Dunlop's diaries, is a private diary: it can show the daily texture of captivity on the railway — sickness, poor food, forced labour — and how prisoners cared for one another, in words no censor ever saw. Its limit is that it is one man's view from one role — a surgeon and leader of men — so what he saw may not have held in every camp.

Neither is enough on its own. The public source shows the war as it was allowed to appear; the private source shows the war as it was lived. Historians read them against each other — corroborating where they agree, and asking why they differ where they do not.

Q8.

Model answer (Ambon and the railway chosen). The men of Ambon — Gull Force, built on the 2/21st Battalion — fell with the island on 3 February 1942. More than 300 Australian and Dutch prisoners were killed after capture, and three-quarters of the Australians taken there died before the war ended: of 582 still held on Ambon, 405 died. Their experience was shaped by killing after capture and by the conditions of one remote island camp.

The prisoners of the Thai–Burma railway were shaped by work: 13,004 Australians were forced to build the line in 1942–43, and 2,802 died. Days of hard labour on tiny rations brought cholera, dysentery, malaria and tropical ulcers, as Weary Dunlop's diaries record. Both groups suffered under Japanese captivity — but one was defined by massacre in a camp, the other by forced labour across hundreds of kilometres of jungle. Where and how a group was held decided its experience.

Q9.

Model answer. Consequence one: dispersal into work parties. Changi held about 15,000 Australians from February 1942, and at first was the least harsh of the Japanese camps, with prisoners running their own routines, gardens and hospital. But by mid-1943 fewer than 2,500 Australians remained, because work parties had been sent out — including to the Thai–Burma railway, where 13,004 Australians were forced to labour and 2,802 died.

Consequence two: captivity under a captor that ignored the rules of war. Japan signed the 1929 Geneva Convention but never formally agreed to follow it, so prisoners faced forced labour, poor food and almost no medicine; 36 per cent of Australian prisoners of the Japanese died in captivity. The fall of Singapore was the cause; for thousands of the captured, the railway and the camps were the consequence.

Q10.

Model answer.

- (a) Her statement is valuable because she was an eyewitness: she was among the nurses on Bangka Island and survived the shooting of 16 February 1942. Her account was given under oath for the war-crimes trials, close to the events, and it is one of very few accounts of the killings from someone who was there.
- (b) Its limits are the limits of any single eyewitness account. She was one person, in one place, under terrible strain; she saw what happened where she lay, not everything that happened across the island; and memory under such conditions can fade or shift over time. Her account also speaks for one moment of the nurses' war, not for the 32 nurses taken prisoner or the nurses who served in other places.
- (c) Historians could corroborate it with other survivors' accounts from Bangka Island, records of the 32 nurses taken prisoner (of whom 8 died in captivity), Japanese records where any survive, and the files of the post-war investigations and war-crimes trials. Where independent sources agree, the account stands firm; where they differ, historians weigh why.

When the tide turned: the events that shaped both wars

Curriculum: owns VC2HH10K17 · draws on K17.E01, K17.E02, K17.E03, K17.E04.

Between 1914 and 1945, Australians fought in two world wars that touched almost every part of the globe. Some events in those wars were huge for Australia but small in the world story; others changed the whole war far away from home. This section looks at the significant events of the two world wars — the battles of the First World War, the great turning points in Europe, and the war that came to the Asia-Pacific and to Australia itself — and asks a historian’s question about each: significant to whom, and did it turn the war? Other sections in this chapter study the causes of the wars (3A), why Australians fought (3B), the places they fought (3C) and what serving felt like (3D). This one weighs the events.

Before we begin: what do these words mean?

Some words in this section are **contested** — people do not all agree on one fixed meaning. We will state clearly how they are used here, so every question can be answered on that meaning alone.

- **Turning point.** The Victorian Curriculum uses the term *turning points* for both world wars but does not define “turning point”. This section therefore treats a **turning point** as an event after which a war — or one campaign within it — ran in a different direction from before: the side that had been advancing stops advancing, or loses the lead, and the other side gains it. Whether an event truly turned a war is something historians judge with evidence, and they sometimes disagree.
- **Significant.** The curriculum also leaves *significant* undefined. This section judges significance with four criteria that historians and history educators commonly use (after Peter Seixas and Tom Morton, *The Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts*, 2013): **scale** (how many people were affected), **depth** (how much lives changed), **duration** (how long the effects lasted) and **causation** (what later events it caused).
- **Theatre.** A **theatre** of war is a region where fighting takes place — for example, the Western Front, the Middle East, or the Pacific.
- **Frame.** Because significance depends on point of view, this section always names the **frame**: are we judging an event in the *Australian frame* (what it meant for Australia) or the *world frame* (what it meant for the war as a whole)? The same event can be large in one frame and smaller in the other.

Keep these meanings in mind as you read. When a question asks whether an event was significant, or turned a war, notice which frame the question is using. As you read, also track three historical ideas: **cause and consequence** (why did each event happen, and what flowed from it?), **continuity and change** (what stayed the same and what changed as the wars ran?), and **perspective** (different people — soldiers, commanders, civilians, different nations — saw the same events differently).

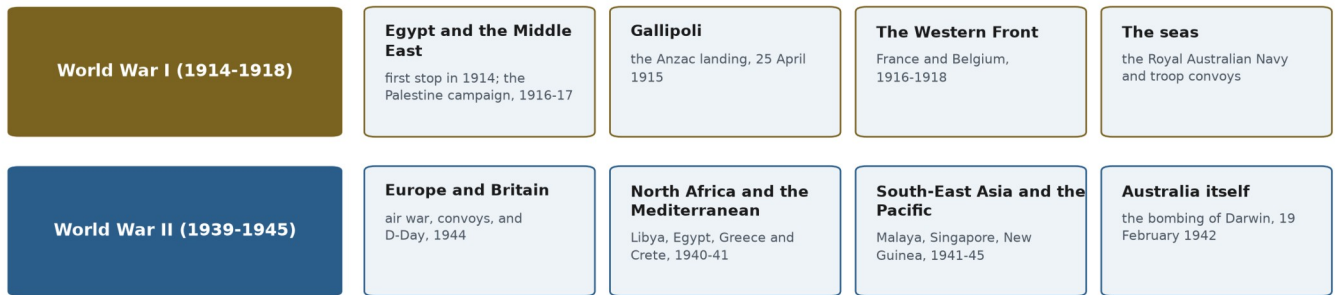
1. Two wars, many theatres

Australians fought in both world wars far from home, in several theatres at once. Figure 3E.1 maps them. In the First World War (1914–1918) the main ones were Egypt and the Middle East, Gallipoli, and the Western Front in France and Belgium. In the Second World War (1939–1945) Australians fought in Europe and Britain, in North Africa and the Mediterranean, and — after Japan entered the war in December 1941 — in South-East Asia and the Pacific, and over northern Australia itself. For the first time, war reached Australian soil.

Because no one can study every event, historians weigh events before choosing which to study. Figure 3E.11 shows the four criteria this section uses — scale, depth, duration and causation — adapted from the questions historians and history educators ask about significance (after Seixas and Morton, 2013). Use them as a tool, not a calculator: and always ask first, significant **to whom**?

Theatres of war - where Australians fought

A theatre is a region where fighting takes place



In both wars Australians fought far from home. In the Second World War, for the first time, war also reached Australian soil - so events far away and events at home both mattered.

Figure 3E.1 The two world wars touched different parts of the world - this section follows the events that mattered most.

Diagram of the theatres where Australians fought in the First and Second World Wars

How do historians judge significance?

Four common criteria - use them as a tool, not a calculator

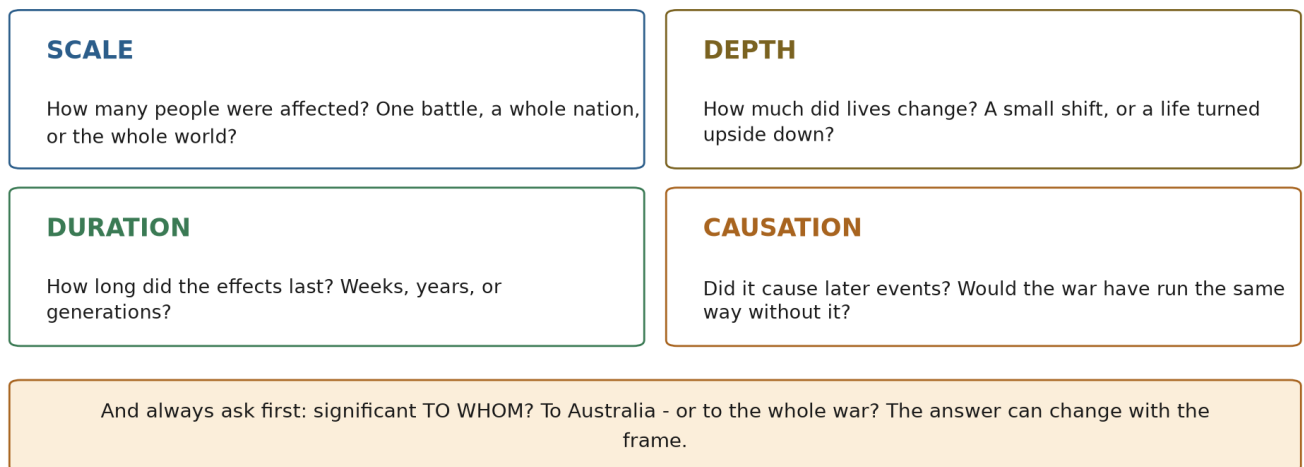


Figure 3E.11 Criteria adapted from the historical-significance questions used by historians and history educators (after Seixas and Morton, *The Big Six*, 2013).

Diagram of the four criteria historians use to judge significance: scale, depth, duration and causation

2. The First World War: Australia's battles

The curriculum names seven events for Australia's First World War (Figure 3E.2). In the **Australian frame** they are the heart of the story: the Anzac landing at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915; Fromelles on 19–20 July 1916, called Australia's worst day in war, with about 5,533 Australian casualties in 24 hours; the grinding battles of the Western Front — the Somme and Pozières (1916), Bullecourt (1917) and Passchendaele (1917); the light horse charge that took Beersheba in Palestine (31 October 1917); and the night counter-attack that retook Villers-Bretonneux on Anzac Day 1918 (Australian War Memorial casualty figures).

Then zoom out to the **world frame**. These seven events were parts of a much bigger war: a war of fronts in France, Belgium, Russia, Italy, the Middle East and Africa, and of battles at sea. In it, the Ottoman Empire, Austria-Hungary and Germany faced Britain, France, Russia and their allies, including Australia. Seen from the world frame, even a

battle Australia remembers strongly may be one of dozens in a single year of fighting — which is exactly why naming the frame matters.

The First World War: battles and campaigns involving Australians

Key events for Australia on the Western Front, at Gallipoli and in the Middle East

Battle / campaign	When	Where	What happened	Why it is remembered in Australia
Gallipoli	Apr 1915 - Jan 1916	Gallipoli peninsula (Ottoman Empire, now Turkey)	Anzacs land on 25 April 1915; eight months of stalemate in trenches; Allied forces slip away quietly	First great test for Australian troops; birth of the Anzac story; Anzac Day
Fromelles	19-20 July 1916	Western Front, France	First big Australian attack on the Western Front; the attack fails	About 5,533 Australian casualties in 24 hours - called Australia's worst day in war
The Somme and Pozieres	July - Nov 1916	Western Front, France	A huge British-led offensive; Australian troops take the village of Pozieres in fierce fighting	Heavy losses in mud and shellfire; a symbol of the cost of wearing the enemy down
Bullecourt	April and May 1917	The Hindenburg Line, France	Two attacks on strong German defences; the first fails, the second takes the village	Both attacks cost thousands of Australian casualties
Passchendaele	July - Nov 1917	Ypres salient, Belgium	Slow attacks through rain, mud and shell holes; tiny gains of ground	A byword for awful conditions; many Australians killed and wounded
Beersheba	31 October 1917	Palestine	The Australian 4th Light Horse Brigade charges the town and takes its vital water wells	Opens the way for the Allied advance into Palestine
Villers-Bretonneux	24-25 April 1918	Western Front, France	Australian brigades counter-attack by night and retake the town from German troops	Shields the rail centre of Amiens; won on Anzac Day, 1918

Figure 3E.2 Seven events named by the curriculum for study (VC2HH10K17.E01). Casualty figures: Australian War Memorial.

Table of seven First World War battles and campaigns involving Australians, with dates, places, what happened and why each is remembered

Quick check (draws on K17.E01). Using Figure 3E.2 only: (a) name the battle described as Australia's worst day in war, and give its date and casualty figure; (b) name the two events dated in 1918 and 1917 that ended in Australian successes; (c) which event began Australia's war story, and on what date?

3. Worked evaluation: Gallipoli in two frames

Gallipoli is the clearest test of the two frames, so let us evaluate it together (Figure 3E.3).

Worked evaluation. In the **Australian frame**, Gallipoli scores high on every criterion: it was the first great campaign fought by Australian troops as one force (scale, for a young nation); 8,141 Australians died and more than 26,000 became casualties (depth); its stories shaped the Anzac legend and it has been remembered every Anzac Day since 1916 (duration); and it caused a new sense of national pride (causation). In the **world frame**, the picture changes: the goal was to knock the Ottoman Empire out of the war and open a sea route to Russia; it failed, ending in an Ottoman victory and an Allied withdrawal; and on the world scale it was one side-campaign among much bigger fronts. Same event, different weight. A good historian names the frame before judging.

Now a shorter model, on Villers-Bretonneux. **Australian frame:** retaken by Australian brigades on Anzac Day 1918, still commemorated in France today — deep and long-lasting for Australia. **World frame:** it shielded the rail centre of Amiens during Germany's last great push of 1918 — significant, but one battle on a front of millions. Two frames, two honest weighings, one event.

Worked evaluation: Gallipoli - significant to whom?

The same event, judged in two different frames (VC2HH10K17.E01)

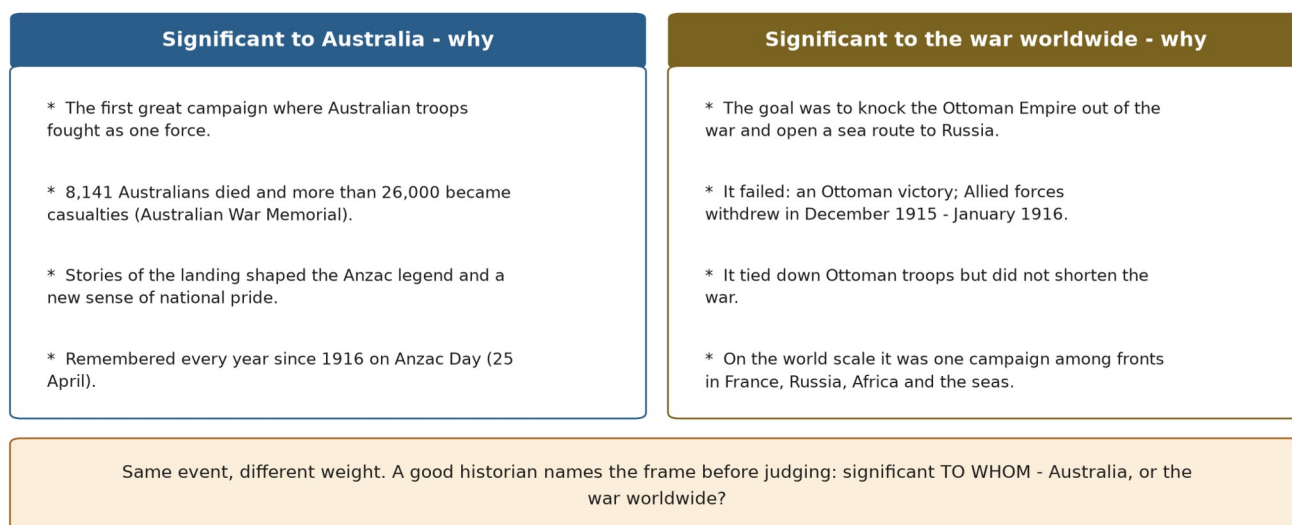


Figure 3E.3 A model of how one event can be weighed in two frames.

Two-panel diagram evaluating the significance of Gallipoli in an Australian frame and in a worldwide frame

Quick check (draws on K17.E01). Choose Passchendaele or Beersheba from Figure 3E.2. Write two short paragraphs — one per frame — weighing its significance with at least two of the four criteria each. Finish with one sentence stating in which frame the event weighs more, and why.

4. The war in Europe, 1939–1945

The Second World War in Europe ran in two clear phases (Figure 3E.4): from 1939 to early 1943 the German army advanced; from 1943 to 1945 the Allies pushed back. Five events give it shape.

It began on 1 September 1939, when Germany, led by Adolf Hitler, invaded Poland; Britain and France declared war two days later, and Australia followed. In June 1941 Germany invaded the Soviet Union — Operation Barbarossa, an attack of more than 3.8 million troops that opened a vast eastern front. The war turned at **Stalingrad**: after months of fighting in the ruined city, the German 6th Army surrendered in February 1943, the first great German defeat on land. From then on, the Soviet Union pushed west. On 6 June 1944 — D-Day — 156,000 Allied troops landed in Normandy in the largest seaborne invasion in history, opening a western front under the Supreme Commander, Dwight D. Eisenhower. In May 1945 Soviet forces captured Berlin; Germany surrendered, and the war in Europe ended.

Perspective. Which event turned the war most? Russian accounts point to Stalingrad, where the biggest armies of the war bled the German army dry. Western accounts often point to D-Day, which opened the front that freed France and split Germany's forces. Historians still debate the balance — the honest answer names the perspective giving it.

The war in Europe, 1939-1945: five events that mattered

Why each event is significant - and which ones turned the war (VC2HH10K17.E02)

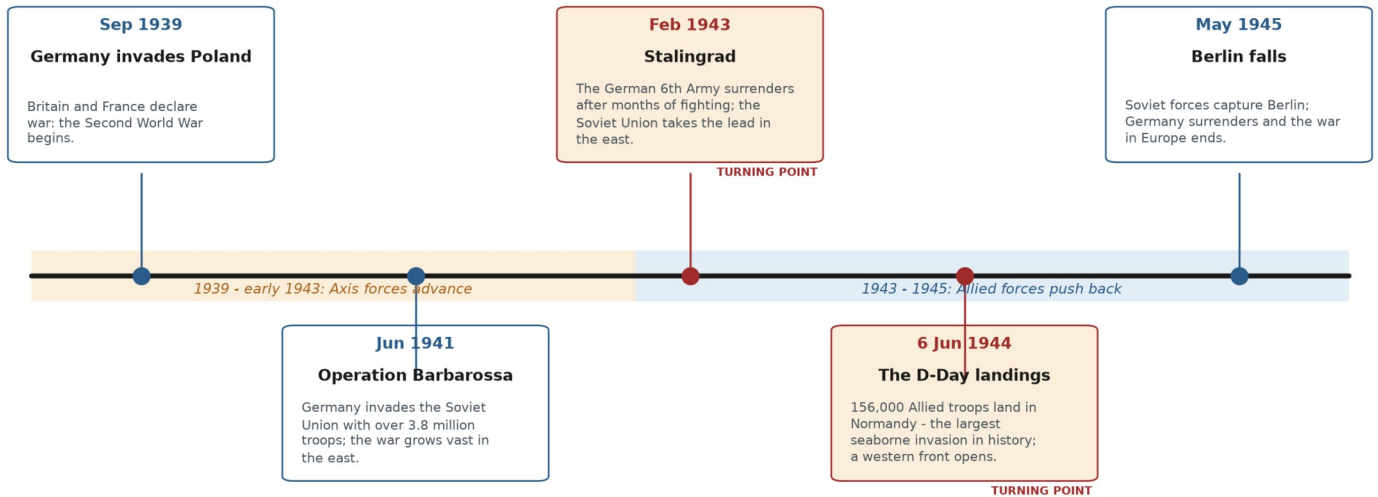


Figure 3E.4 Historians still debate which single event turned the war most; Stalingrad and D-Day are the two most often named.

Timeline of the war in Europe from 1939 to 1945 with five events, two of them marked as turning points

Quick check (draws on K17.E02). (a) Put the five events of Figure 3E.4 in order and give one consequence of each. (b) Using scale, depth, duration and causation, explain why many historians call Stalingrad a turning point. (c) In one sentence, say why a Russian historian and a French historian might weigh Stalingrad and D-Day differently.

5. Worked source analysis 1: Eisenhower's Order of the Day

Historians use **sources** — evidence from the past — to weigh events. A **primary source** comes from the time being studied; a **secondary source** is made later by someone studying the past. Let us analyse a primary source from D-Day together.

Source A. Extract from the Order of the Day issued to the Allied troops on 6 June 1944.

‘The tide has turned! The free men of the world are marching together to Victory! ... We will accept nothing less than full Victory! Good luck!’

— Dwight D. Eisenhower, Order of the Day, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, 6 June 1944. Original held by the Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, United States; abridged here with ‘...’ marks; text retrieved 26 August 2026.

SOURCE A

Order of the Day to the Allied Expeditionary Force, 6 June 1944 (D-Day)

'Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force! You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you. ... Your enemy is well trained, well equipped and battle hardened. ... The tide has turned! The free men of the world are marching together to Victory! I have full confidence in your courage and devotion to duty and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full Victory! Good luck!'

Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force. Order of the Day, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, issued on D-Day, 6 June 1944. Original held by the Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, United States. Abridged with '...' marks; text retrieved 26 August 2026.

Figure 3E.5 A primary source written on the day of the Normandy landings. The worked analysis in the section shows how to read it as evidence.

Facsimile-style card of Dwight D. Eisenhower's Order of the Day, 6 June 1944, with source citation

Worked analysis. Here is how a historian works through this source.

1. **What kind of source is it?** A primary source — a written order from the Supreme Commander to his own troops, issued on the day of the landings.
2. **Context.** D-Day, 6 June 1944: the largest seaborne invasion in history was beginning in Normandy, opening a western front against Germany.
3. **Content.** Eisenhower tells his troops that 'the tide has turned', that the free world is 'marching together to Victory', and that only 'full Victory' will do.
4. **Perspective.** This is a commander speaking to his own side, to steady and inspire them before battle. It is a promise and a claim, not a neutral account.
5. **Message.** The war is now winnable, and it must be fought through to total victory.
6. **Usefulness and limits.** The source is highly useful for the mood, purpose and confidence of the Allied side on D-Day. Its limit is that it was written to persuade, on the day, by one side's leader: it cannot tell us what would actually happen, or what the German side saw. To check the claim that 'the tide has turned', a historian would bring in other sources — such as the events in Figure 3E.4.

Notice the shape of the reasoning: identify, give context, describe content, name the perspective, state the message, then weigh usefulness and limits. Use this shape for any source.

6. The war in the Asia-Pacific, 1941–1945

The war came to the Asia-Pacific on 7 December 1941, when Japan attacked the United States Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, bringing the United States into the war. Within weeks, Japan's forces were advancing everywhere. For Australia, the shock came early in 1942: on 15 February the great British base at Singapore fell to Japan, and about 80,000 Allied troops became prisoners, among them 14,972 Australians; four days later, on 19 February, 242 Japanese aircraft bombed Darwin, killing more than 230 people — the first of many attacks on Australian soil.

The tide at sea turned at the Battle of Midway (4–7 June 1942), where the United States Navy sank four Japanese aircraft carriers. On land, Australian troops halted the Japanese advance towards Port Moresby along the Kokoda Track (July–November 1942). Later Pacific battles — Iwo Jima (February–March 1945), for example — carried the war to Japan’s doorstep. Then, on 6 and 9 August 1945, the United States dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Tens of thousands of people, most of them civilians, died at once, and many more died later of radiation sickness. It is one of the hardest events in this section to study, and historians still debate whether the bombs were needed to end the war. Japan surrendered on 2 September 1945.

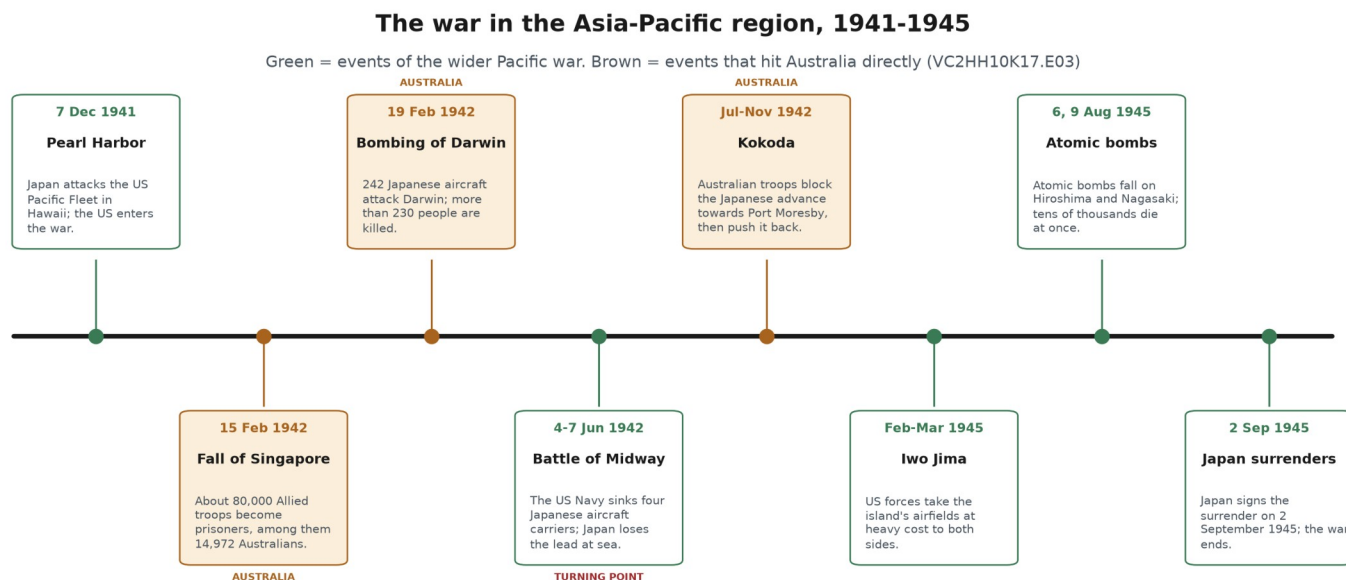


Figure 3E.6 Eight events for ranking practice. Notice how quickly the war reached Australia once it began in the Pacific.

Timeline of the war in the Asia-Pacific region from 1941 to 1945 with eight events, including those that hit Australia directly

Quick check (draws on K17.E03). (a) Which two events in Figure 3E.6 brought the war to Australian soil, and in what month? (b) Why is Midway often called the turning point of the Pacific war? (c) Rank the attack on Pearl Harbor and the bombing of Darwin for significance **to Australia**, giving one reason per event.

7. Worked source analysis 2: Curtin looks to America

The fall of Singapore changed how Australia saw the world. One source shows the change in a single paragraph.

Source B. Extract from a statement by Australia’s Prime Minister, John Curtin, published in the *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney) on 28 December 1941.

‘Without any inhibitions, I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom.’

— John Curtin, ‘Australia Looks First to U.S.’, *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 28 December 1941. National Library of Australia (Trove), article 248715857; retrieved 26 August 2026. Curtin wrote this weeks after Pearl Harbor and the sinking of the British warships *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*; two months later, the fall of Singapore and the bombing of Darwin made the turn urgent.

SOURCE B

Australia's prime minister turns to the United States, December 1941

'Without any inhibitions, I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom.'

John Curtin, Prime Minister of Australia, 'Australia Looks First to U.S.', Daily Telegraph (Sydney), 28 December 1941. National Library of Australia (Trove), article 248715857; retrieved 26 August 2026. Curtin wrote this weeks after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor brought the war to the Pacific.

Figure 3E.7 A primary source showing how the start of the Pacific war turned Australia toward the United States within weeks.

Facsimile-style card of John Curtin's December 1941 statement that Australia looks to America, with source citation

Worked analysis. The same six steps, in short.

1. **What kind of source is it?** A primary source — a public statement by a serving prime minister, printed in a newspaper during the events.
2. **Context.** Weeks after Japan entered the war; Britain, Australia's traditional protector, was fighting for its life in Europe and could not send help to the Pacific.
3. **Content.** Curtin says plainly that Australia 'looks to America', 'without any inhibitions' and 'free of any pangs' about the old ties with Britain.
4. **Perspective.** A national leader speaking for his country's survival, choosing a new great friend and ally in public — a deliberate break, worded to be unmistakable.
5. **Message.** Australia's defence would from now on lean on the United States, not only on Britain.
6. **Usefulness and limits.** The source is direct evidence of a change in Australia's outlook at the highest level, and it is dated, so we can tie it to the events of December 1941. Its limit: it is one man's public position at one moment; it does not, by itself, show what ordinary Australians felt, nor what Britain thought, nor what actually happened next. Pair it with the events of Figure 3E.6 to test it.

8. Worked ranking: which events mattered most?

Ranking significance is a core historian's skill, and the Asia-Pacific list is the best place to practise it, because the frame changes the answer. Here is one model (Figure 3E.8), ranked in the frame 'significance for Australia and its defence': the fall of Singapore first, then Kokoda, the bombing of Darwin, Midway, Pearl Harbor, and the atomic bombs.

Worked ranking. Notice the reasoning in each row: the frame is stated once, then every row applies the criteria — scale, depth, duration, causation — to that frame. Singapore tops the list because the threat to Australia became direct and 14,972 Australians went into captivity; Kokoda ranks high on depth and causation although its scale was small. Now notice what the caption points out: in a **world frame**, Pearl Harbor and Midway climb the list, because they decided which side could win the Pacific war at all. There is no single true ranking — there are rankings with good reasons. State your frame, use the criteria, and back your order with evidence.

A worked ranking: which Asia-Pacific events mattered most?

One model answer, using the frame 'significance for Australia and its defence' (VC2HH10K17.E03)

Rank	Event	Reason (using scale, depth, duration and causation)
1	Fall of Singapore, Feb 1942	Biggest defeat in the region; the threat to Australia became direct; 14,972 Australians captured; pushed Australia closer to the United States.
2	Kokoda campaign, Jul-Nov 1942	Small in scale but deep: it stopped an advance that could have reached the mainland, and it became central to Australia's war story.
3	Bombing of Darwin, Feb 1942	The first big attack on Australian soil; over 230 people killed; it changed daily life and defence at home.
4	Battle of Midway, Jun 1942	Changed the balance of sea power in the Pacific and made Allied advance possible - huge worldwide, less direct for Australia.
5	Pearl Harbor, Dec 1941	Brought the United States into the war, without which Japan could not be beaten - but the attack itself was far from Australia.
6	Atomic bombs, Aug 1945	Ended the war and began the atomic age; the effects last to this day, though they did not hit Australia directly.

Figure 3E.8 A model for ranking significance. A different frame changes the order: in a worldwide frame, Pearl Harbor and Midway climb the list. There is no single true ranking - there are rankings with good reasons. State your frame, use the criteria, and back your order with evidence.

Table showing a worked ranking of six Asia-Pacific events by significance for Australia, with reasons using the four criteria

9. Kokoda and the Anzac legend

The curriculum gives Kokoda a special place (K17.E04), so let us look closely at why. In July 1942 Japanese troops landed at Gona and Buna on the north coast of New Guinea and pushed south along the Kokoda Track, over the steep, jungle-covered Owen Stanley Range, aiming at Port Moresby (Figure 3E.9). Australian troops — militia battalions first, then veterans of the Middle East — fought delaying actions with Papuan soldiers at places like Isurava. In September the Japanese advance halted at Ioribaiwa Ridge, its furthest point; on 26 September the Japanese turned back, and by November the Australians had pushed the fighting to the north coast. The significance of Kokoda is twofold: it halted the Japanese advance towards Port Moresby, and it reinforced the **Anzac legend** — the story of the Australian soldier's character (courage, mateship, endurance under hardship) that grew from the First World War writings of Charles Bean, Australia's official war historian, and was now retold for a new war, on Australian-led ground, close to home.

But a legend is a story a nation tells, and historians test stories against evidence. Figure 3E.10 gives both sides a fair hearing. **For keeping the legend alive:** it describes real qualities seen in battle, recorded by witnesses such as Bean; it gave comfort and pride to families and to the nation; and it keeps remembrance alive today. **For questioning the legend:** it simplifies — not every soldier fitted the image, and stories grew in the retelling; it can leave people out, such as women and those who served in ways other than fighting; and a legend is not evidence on its own. Strong history does not cheer for the legend or tear it down. It tests the story against the letters, records and accounts of the time — and says where the story holds and where it does not.

The Kokoda situation, July-November 1942

A simple model of the fighting for Port Moresby - not an exact map

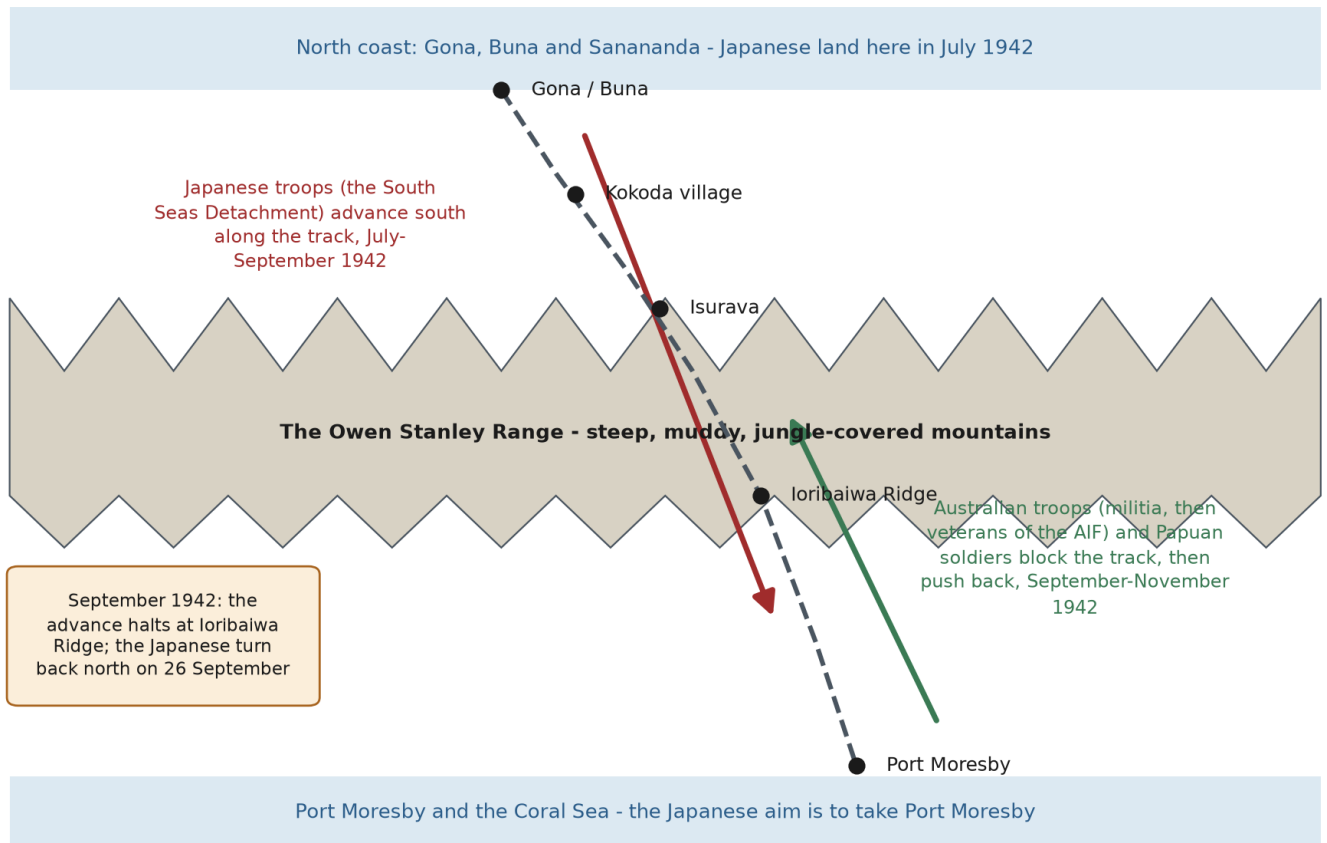


Figure 3E.9 A labelled model of the Kokoda campaign (VC2HH10K17.E04). Distances and shapes are simplified for study.

Diagram of the Kokoda campaign as a simple labelled model: the track over the Owen Stanley Range, the Japanese advance and the Australian push back

The Anzac legend: a fair hearing for both sides

The legend is part of Australian memory - historians still test it against the evidence

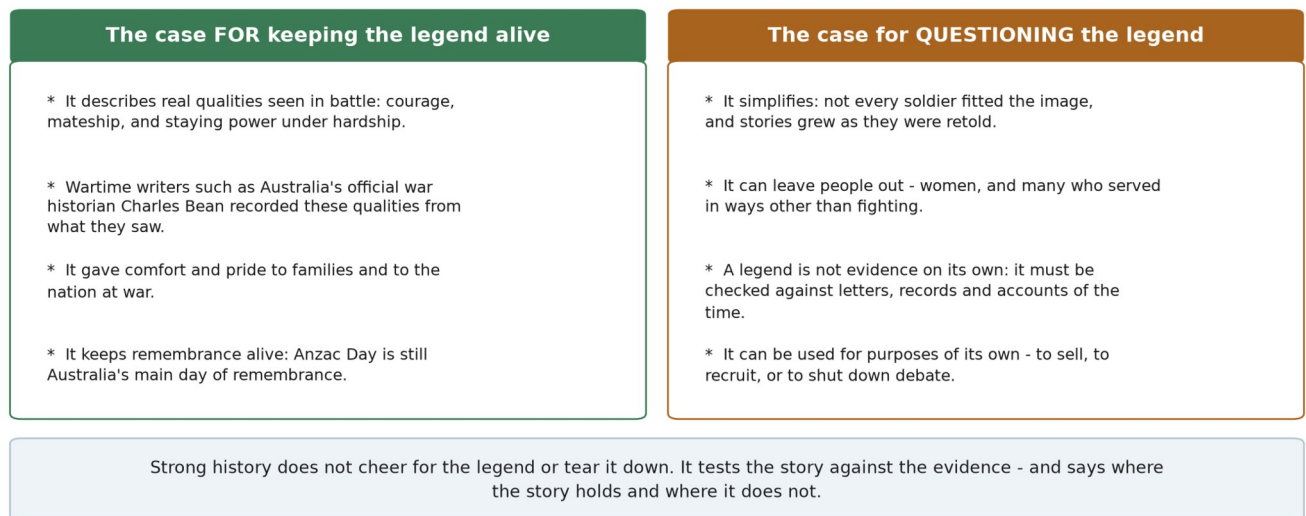


Figure 3E.10 Two steel-manned positions about the Anzac legend. Your task is to weigh the evidence, not to pick a side by habit.

Two-panel diagram giving a fair hearing to the case for keeping the Anzac legend alive and the case for questioning it

Quick check (draws on K17.E04). (a) In your own words, state the two reasons the curriculum gives for Kokoda's significance. (b) Using Figure 3E.9, describe the Japanese advance and the Australian response in two sentences each. (c) Give one reason the Anzac legend matters to Australia, and one reason historians question it.

Practice tasks

A. Recall and understanding

1. Define **turning point**, **significant**, **theatre** and **frame**, using the definitions from "Before we begin".
2. Name four of the seven events in Figure 3E.2 and give one fact about each (K17.E01).
3. List the five events of Figure 3E.4 in order, and name the two the figure marks as turning points (K17.E02).
4. Which two events of Figure 3E.6 brought the war to Australian soil in February 1942? Give one fact about each (K17.E03).
5. State the two reasons Kokoda is significant, and name the ridge where the Japanese advance halted (K17.E04).

B. Source skills

6. Read Source A again. Write two sentences of context for the order, one sentence on its usefulness, and one sentence on its limit.
7. Read Source B again. Whose perspective is this, and what change in Australia's outlook was Curtin announcing? Tie the statement to one dated event from Figure 3E.6.

C. Explanation and analysis

8. "Stalingrad turned the war in Europe more than D-Day did." Do you agree? Weigh both sides with evidence from this section before you decide (K17.E02).
9. Choose one event from Figure 3E.6. Rank it against the fall of Singapore for significance **to Australia**, using two of the four criteria, and say whether your ranking would change in a world frame (K17.E03).
10. Explain how the Kokoda campaign reinforced the Anzac legend, and give one reason historians question the legend. Use the idea of perspective in your answer (K17.E04).

D. Extended response

11. "Some events of the world wars mattered more to Australia than to the world, and some mattered more to the world than to Australia." Discuss this claim using at least two events from this section and both frames (K17.E01, K17.E03).

How these are marked. Marks are given for the quality of your reasoning, not for reaching a particular conclusion. A strong answer: uses the defined terms correctly, names the frame, gives specific dated evidence, applies the criteria, considers more than one perspective, and states a limit or counterpoint. Two students who reach different conclusions can both do well if both reason well from evidence.

Model paragraph (for task 11). Some events of the world wars mattered more to Australia than to the world, and some mattered more to the world than to Australia. Gallipoli, in the Australian frame, was a first great test that shaped the Anzac legend and is still remembered each 25 April; in the world frame it was a failed side-campaign that did not shorten the war. The reverse is true of the Battle of Midway: for Australia it was far away and touched no Australian soil, yet in the world frame it turned the Pacific war by sinking four Japanese carriers and handing the United States the lead at sea. In both cases the event is the same; only the frame changes its weight. This is why a good historian always asks, significant to whom?

Key terms

Term	Meaning used in this section
Turning point	An event after which a war or campaign ran in a different direction: the advancing side stops advancing

Term	Meaning used in this section
	or loses the lead
Significant / significance	Judged by four criteria: scale, depth, duration and causation — and always relative to a frame
Scale, depth, duration, causation	How many were affected; how much lives changed; how long effects lasted; what later events were caused
Frame	The point of view used to weigh an event — here, the Australian frame or the world frame
Theatre	A region where fighting takes place
Campaign	A series of battles fought for one goal, in one theatre
Western Front	The line of trenches and battlefields in France and Belgium in the First World War
Anzac / Anzac legend	Australian and New Zealand Army Corps; the story of the Australian soldier's character (courage, mateship, endurance) that grew from Charles Bean's First World War writings
Militia	Part-time citizen soldiers, called up for home defence in the Second World War
AIF	Australian Imperial Force — the volunteer force sent overseas in the First World War; many of its veterans also served in the Second World War
Casualty	A person killed, wounded, missing or captured in war
Primary / secondary source	Evidence from the time studied / a later account of the past
Surrender	Giving up the fight and accepting defeat; the act that ended each war (November 1918; May and September 1945)

How warfare itself changed, 1914–1945

Curriculum trace — Victorian Curriculum 2.0 History, Levels 9 and 10

Owns VC2HH10K18

Draws on — VC2HH10K18.E01, VC2HH10K18.E02, VC2HH10K18.E03, VC2HH10K18.E04, VC2HH10K18.E05

Builds on — sections 3A (VC2HH10K13), 3C (VC2HH10K15) and 3E (VC2HH10K17). **Leads to** — section 3G (VC2HH10K19), Chapter 4 and section 8A.

In section 3A you looked at *why* the two world wars began. In section 3C you saw *where* Australians fought, and in 3E *when* the fighting turned. This section asks a different question: *what were these wars like to fight and to survive?* Between 1914 and 1945 the way war was fought changed more than it ever had before — from armies stuck in mud trenches to a single bomb that could erase a city.

This section is about two things at once: the **changes** in how war was fought (new weapons, new speed, new reach, new destruction) and the **continuity** (the things that stayed the same). Historians use the phrase **continuity and change** to describe exactly this double view, and this section is your chance to practise it.

By the end of this section you should be able to:

- describe trench warfare and the new technologies of World War I, and explain how they shaped the war;
- compare how civilians were targeted in the two world wars, and explain why the difference matters;
- describe how warfare changed in World War II: Blitzkrieg, air power, mass mobilisation of society, the bombing campaigns, and atomic weapons;
- give an account of the atomic-bomb race, and analyse the arguments about why the bombs fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki;
- describe the short- and long-term consequences of the atomic bombs, for human health and for the two cities and their surroundings;
- weigh what changed and what continued in the nature of warfare between 1914 and 1945.

Theory

1. What do we mean by the nature of warfare? (VC2HH10K18)

Defining the term. The Victorian Curriculum uses the phrase *the nature of warfare* but does not define it. This section therefore treats it as **the way war is fought**: the weapons and technology used, the tactics, who fights, where war reaches (battlefield, city or home front), and the scale of death and destruction. Other definitions exist — some historians focus on the ideas and rules of war instead of its tools — and are not interchangeable with this one. Every question in this section is answerable on the definition above alone.

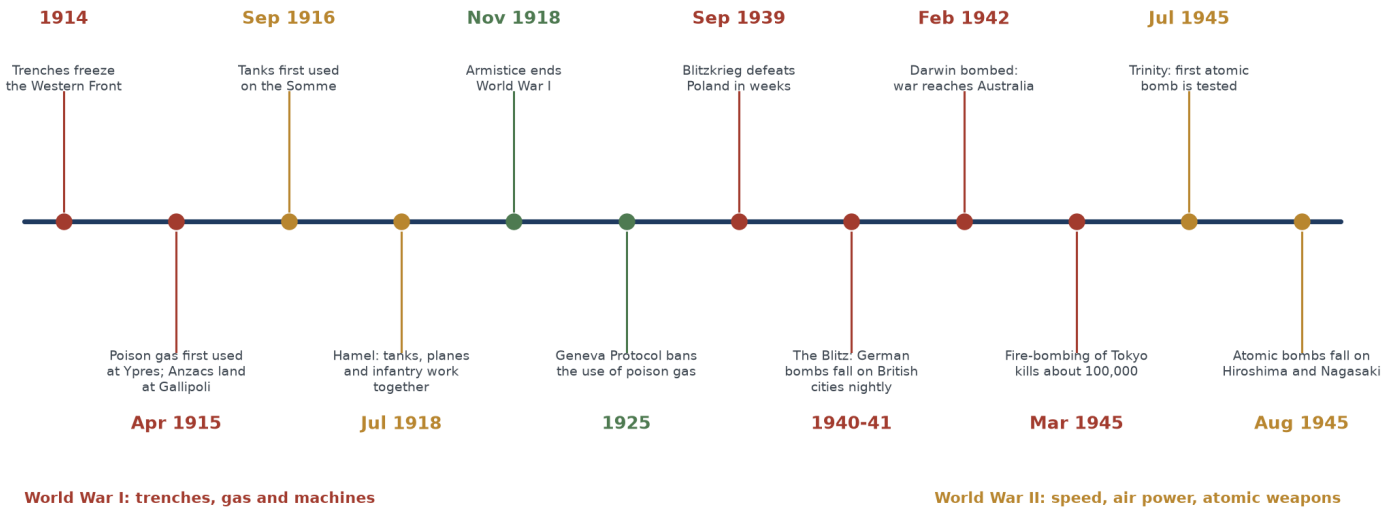
One more word needs defining at first use, because you will meet it constantly: **casualties** is the military word for the people killed, wounded, missing or taken prisoner in a war or battle. When a source says “heavy casualties”, it does not only mean deaths.

With those two meanings fixed, here is the shape of the period. Two world wars:

- **World War I**, 1914–1918: fought between the Allies (including Britain and its empire, France, Russia, and from 1917 the United States; Australia fought as part of the British Empire) and the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire).
- **World War II**, 1939–1945: fought between the Allies (including Britain and its empire, the USSR, China and the United States, and Australia from 1939 against Germany and from 1941 against Japan) and the Axis (Germany, Italy and Japan).

In both wars Australia sent its people to fight far from home. In both wars the fighting reached ordinary people as well as soldiers. Figure 1 places the key moments of this section on one timeline.

The changing face of warfare, 1914-1945



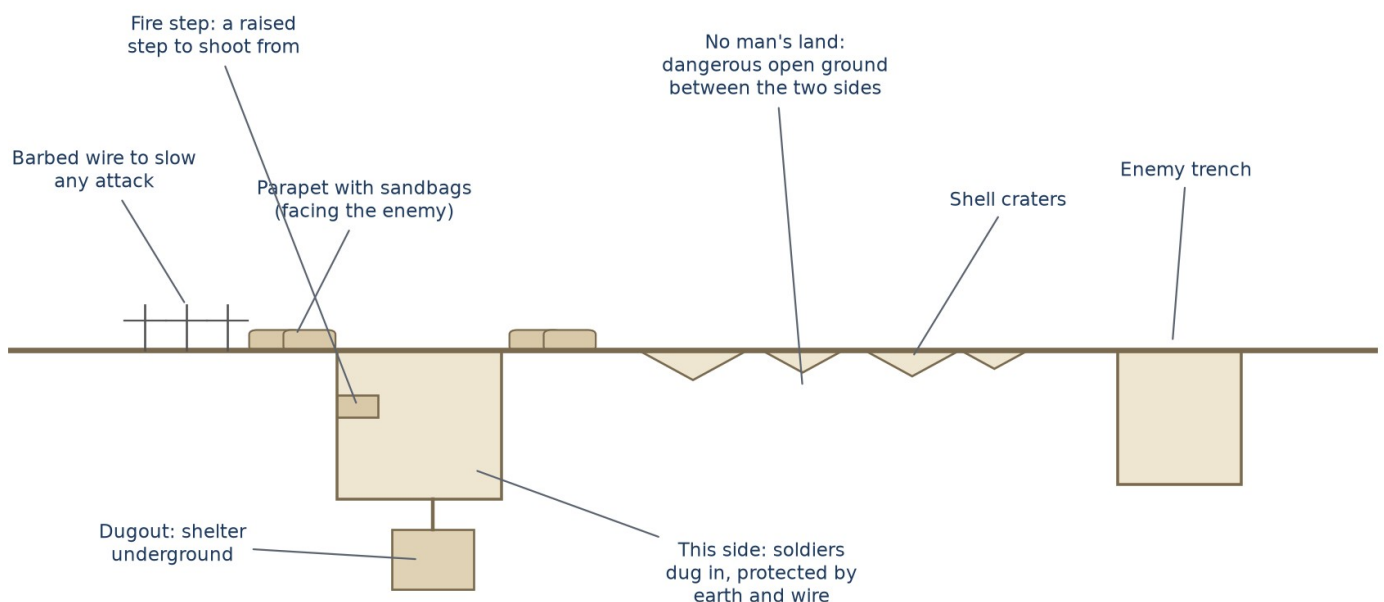
Timeline of the changing face of warfare from the trenches of 1914 to the atomic bombs of 1945

2. World War I: the trench war (VC2HH10K18.E02)

By late 1914 the armies on the Western Front — the main front in France and Belgium — had dug in. Machine guns and masses of artillery made it deadly to cross open ground, so neither side could move the other. Each attack gained a few hundred metres and lost it again. Historians call this a **stalemate** — a position in which neither side can win or move — and it lasted, with terrible exceptions, from late 1914 until 1918.

To survive the shellfire, both sides built deep networks of trenches, shown in cross-section in Figure 2.

A Western Front trench system (World War I) - labelled cross-section



Trenches like these stretched about 700 kilometres, from the North Sea to the Swiss border.

Labelled cross-section of a Western Front trench system showing the fire step, parapet, barbed wire, no man's land, shell craters, dugout and enemy trench

Soldiers rotated between the front line, support trenches and rest; life meant mud, lice, rats, sudden bombardments and attacks across **no man's land** — the open ground between the two trench lines. Australians met the trench war at

Gallipoli in 1915, and on the Western Front from 1916: at Fromelles on 19–20 July 1916 the 5th Australian Division suffered 5,533 casualties in about a day — described by the Australian War Memorial as the worst twenty-four hours in Australia’s history — and at Pozières that same summer over 23,000 Australians were killed or wounded in six weeks of fighting.

What made the trenches unbreakable was technology. Figure 3 sets out the new weapons of the war and the change each one brought.

New technologies of World War I and how they changed fighting

Technology	Where it mattered	How it changed the war
Machine guns	Defended every front from 1914; one gun could fire hundreds of bullets a minute.	Made attacks across open ground deadly, helping to freeze the Western Front into trenches.
Artillery	Massed guns fired shells for days before attacks, as at the Somme in 1916.	Caused most of the wounds of the war; shell-fire, not rifle-fire, dominated battle.
Chemical weapons (poison gas)	First large use: chlorine at Ypres, April 1915; later phosgene and mustard gas.	Added fear and new wounds; gas masks became part of the soldier's kit. Banned for use in war in 1925.
Tanks	First used by the British on the Somme, 15 September 1916.	Could cross trenches and wire; slow and unreliable at first, but pointed to the fast armoured wars ahead.
Aircraft	From scouting (1914) to fighters and bombers the Australian Flying Corps served from 1915.	Armies could now watch and bomb from the sky; war reached behind the front line.
Submarines (U-boats)	German U-boats attacked ships around Britain; sank the Lusitania in May 1915.	War at sea turned to starving whole nations of food and supplies - and reached civilian passengers.

Gas casualties in World War I are estimated at more than one million across all armies.

Draws on VC2HH10K18.E02.

Table of the new technologies of World War I - machine guns, artillery, chemical weapons, tanks, aircraft and submarines - with where each mattered and how each changed the war

Notice a pattern in Figure 3: every new weapon called up a defence, and every defence called up a new weapon — gas brought gas masks, trenches brought tanks, and so on. Historians call this kind of race between weapons and defences one of the defining features of modern war, and it continued right through World War II.

One Australian showed where the technology was heading. On 4 July 1918, at the Battle of Hamel, the Australian general **Sir John Monash** planned an attack in which infantry, tanks, artillery and aircraft all moved to one timetable — aircraft even dropped supplies to the troops by parachute. The battle was won in about 93 minutes. Hamel was small, but it pointed to the future: the war of machines working together.

The war ended with an **armistice** — a formal agreement to stop fighting — on 11 November 1918. And one of the war’s new horrors was then outlawed: the Geneva Protocol of 1925 banned the *use* of chemical weapons in war, an agreement that most countries still keep today.

3. Civilians in war, part one: World War I (VC2HH10K18.E01)

In 1914 most people expected a war of soldiers. Instead, civilians were soon caught up too. In World War I this happened mostly **in ways that did not aim at civilians directly**:

- **Blockades.** A **blockade** is the use of naval power to stop goods reaching a country. The British navy blockaded Germany, and shortages of food and fuel caused great suffering among German civilians; historians still argue about exactly how many died. Germany answered with a blockade of Britain by U-boats (submarines).

- **The Lusitania.** On 7 May 1915 a German U-boat torpedoed the passenger liner *Lusitania* off Ireland. Of the people on board, 1,198 died, including 128 Americans — a shock that turned opinion against Germany in neutral countries.
- **Shelling of towns.** In December 1914 German warships shelled the English seaside towns of Scarborough, Hartlepool and Whitby, killing more than 130 civilians.
- **Bombing from the air.** German airships (Zeppelins) and then aeroplanes dropped bombs on British towns through the war, killing about 1,500 people. It was the first time civilians far behind the lines were bombed in a war between industrial powers.
- **Violence in occupied lands.** In the Ottoman Empire, from April 1915, the state arrested, deported and killed its own Armenian subjects in huge numbers; historians estimate that more than one million Armenian people died. Most historians call these events a **genocide** — a word coined during World War II to mean the deliberate destruction of a national or ethnic group (the United Nations later gave it that legal meaning in 1948). The government of Turkey accepts that many died but disputes the label and the numbers, so the term is contested; historians' use of it is what is taught here.

Even so, in World War I most of the dead were still soldiers. That balance was about to change.

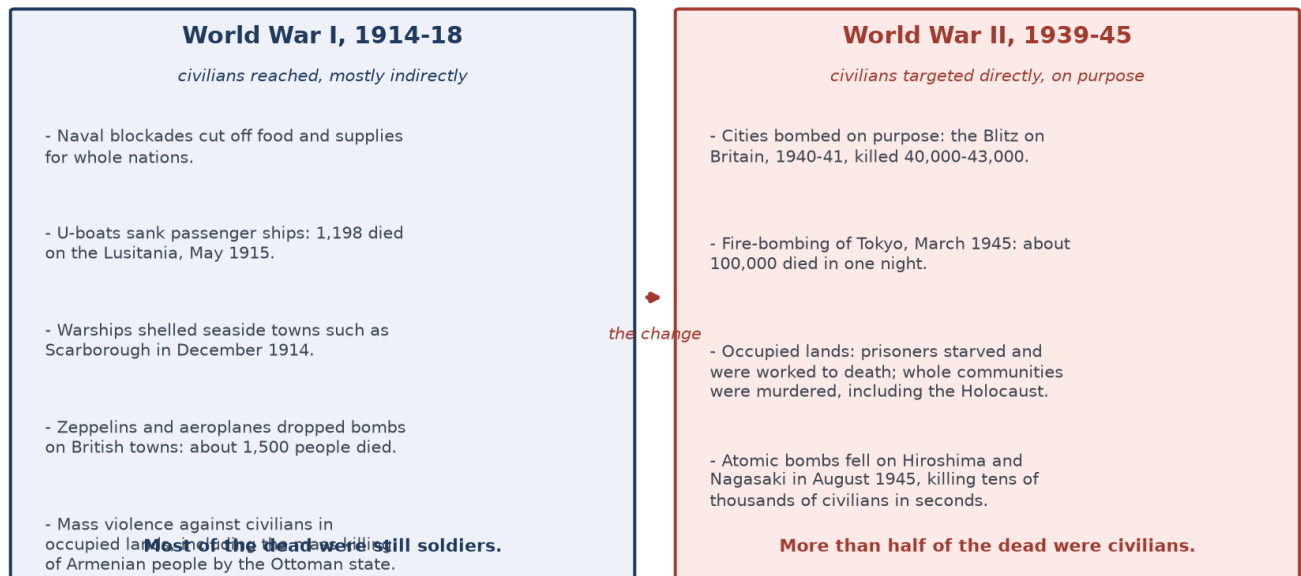
4. Civilians in war, part two: World War II (VC2HH10K18.E01, VC2HH10K18.E03)

In World War II civilians were targeted **directly, on purpose**, from the air.

- **The Blitz.** From 7 September 1940 to 16 May 1941 German bombers attacked British cities; London was bombed for 57 nights in a row. About 40,000–43,000 civilians were killed in Britain during the Blitz, half of them in London.
- **The bombing of Germany.** British Bomber Command attacked German cities by night and American bombers by day. The raids on Hamburg (July–August 1943) and on Dresden (February 1945) caused firestorms that killed tens of thousands of civilians in each city. Bombing cut both ways: RAF Bomber Command lost 55,573 aircrew killed, one of the war's most dangerous jobs, and thousands of Australians were among them.
- **The bombing of Japan.** American B-29s fire-bombed Japanese cities; the raid on Tokyo on the night of 9–10 March 1945 killed about 100,000 people, the deadliest single air raid of the war.
- **War reaches Australia.** On 19 February 1942 Japanese aircraft bombed Darwin, killing at least 236 people in the largest single attack on Australia by a foreign power; Darwin was bombed many more times, and in May 1942 Japanese midget submarines attacked Sydney Harbour.
- **The extreme case.** In the lands Germany occupied, targeting reached its worst form: whole peoples were starved, worked to death and murdered, above all in the Holocaust, studied in Chapter 4.

Figure 4 compares the two wars side by side and states the significance of the difference.

How civilians were targeted: World War I and World War II compared



Significance: by 1945 the line between the battlefield and the home front had largely disappeared.

Draws on VC2HH10K18.E01.

Comparison diagram of how civilians were targeted in World War I, mostly through blockades, ship attacks and raids rather than directly, and in World War II, directly through city bombing, occupation and atomic weapons

Why the difference matters (significance). When war mostly killed soldiers, its horror fell on the men sent to fight. By 1945, more than half of the dead in a world war were civilians — the line between the battlefield and the home front had largely disappeared. That is one of the biggest changes in the character of warfare in the whole of history, and it is why the laws of war were rewritten after 1945.

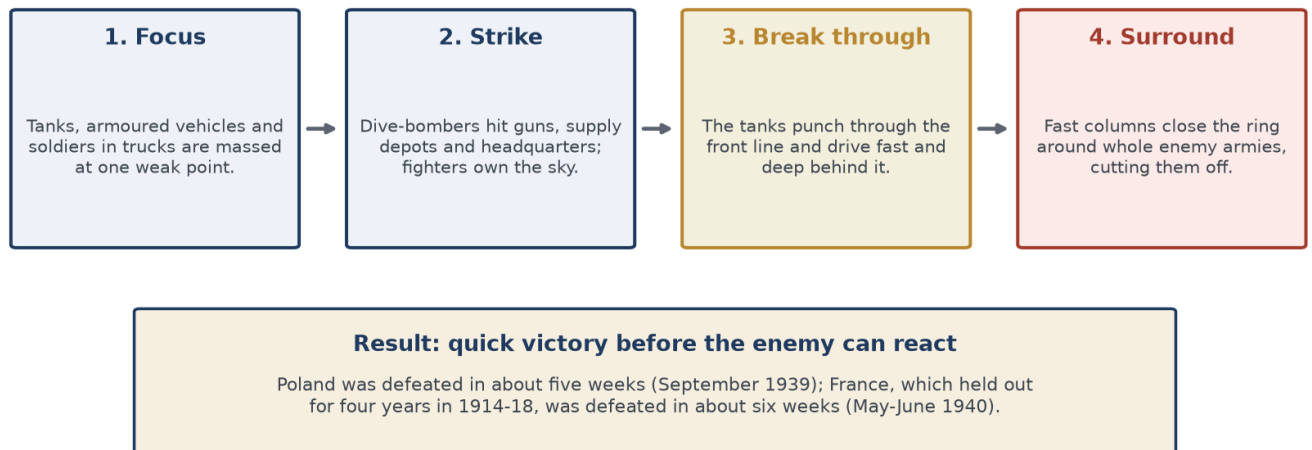
5. Speed and air power: Blitzkrieg and the war of movement (VC2HH10K18.E03)

Defining the term. *Blitzkrieg* is the German for “lightning war”. Historians use it for the German way of fighting in 1939–1941: massed tanks, motorised infantry and dive-bombers concentrated at one point, breaking through and driving deep behind the enemy’s lines to surround whole armies. The word was popularised by journalists at the time rather than invented by the German army, so historians debate how planned it really was — but the pattern it names is real, and that is the sense used here.

The contrast with 1914–18 is the point. France, which had held out for four years in World War I, was defeated in about six weeks in May–June 1940. Movement had replaced stalemate. Figure 5 shows the stages of a Blitzkrieg attack.

How Blitzkrieg ("lightning war") worked

Germany's way of fighting, seen in Poland (September 1939) and France (May-June 1940)



Continuity check: movement replaced the stalemate of the trenches - but the goal (breaking the enemy's will and army) was the same as in 1914-18.

Draws on VC2HH10K18.E03.

Diagram of the four stages of Blitzkrieg: massing tanks at one point, air strikes on defences, breaking through deep behind the lines, and surrounding the enemy, with the result of quick victory in Poland and France

Air power was now central in defence as well as attack. In the Battle of Britain (July–October 1940) the RAF's fighter pilots stopped the German air force from winning control of the sky, so an invasion of Britain never came. The British prime minister Winston Churchill told the House of Commons on 20 August 1940 that “never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few” — “the few” were the fighter pilots. As the war went on, the air war became a war of cities, summarised in Figure 6.

The bombing war, 1940-1945

Campaign	When	What happened	Civilian cost
The Blitz (Germany bombs Britain)	Sep 1940 - May 1941	German bombers attacked British cities; London was bombed for 57 nights in a row. Cities such as Coventry, Liverpool and Plymouth were also hit.	About 40,000-43,000 civilians killed in Britain; half of them in London.
Bomber Command (Britain bombs Germany)	1942-45	British bombers attacked German cities by night; American bombers attacked by day. Hamburg (July-August 1943) and Dresden (February 1945) suffered firestorms.	Tens of thousands killed in single raids; up to 25,000 in Dresden.
Bombing of Japan (United States bombs Japan)	1944-45	B-29 bombers fire-bombed Japanese cities. The raid on Tokyo on 9-10 March 1945 was the deadliest air raid of the war. Atomic bombs ended the bombing war: 6 and 9 August 1945.	About 100,000 killed in one night in Tokyo; roughly 150,000-246,000 across the two atomic bombings by the end of 1945.

Bombing cut both ways: RAF Bomber Command lost 55,573 aircrew killed - one of the war's most dangerous jobs. Thousands of Australians served and died in Bomber Command.

Draws on VC2HH10K18.E01 and VC2HH10K18.E03. Darwin was bombed by Japan on 19 February 1942: at least 236 people were killed - the largest single attack on Australia by a foreign power.

Table of the bombing campaigns of World War II - the Blitz on Britain, the Allied bombing of Germany, and the bombing of Japan - with dates, what happened and the civilian cost of each

6. Mass mobilisation of society (VC2HH10K18.E03)

Both world wars became what historians call **total war** — war in which whole societies, not just armies, are organised for the fight. This term is the historians' term used here: it describes how completely a society's people, factories, food and money are turned to the war.

- **Conscription** — the law that makes people serve in the armed forces — was used by all the major powers. In Australia, it split the country twice in World War I: votes (referendums) in 1916 and 1917 refused to send conscripts to fight overseas. In 1942 a further vote allowed limited overseas service. Section 3G follows the home-front arguments in detail.
- **Women's work** changed the home front. In World War I women took factory, farm and office jobs; in World War II the change was far bigger and better organised, with women's services such as the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF, from 1941) and the Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS, from 1941), and the Women's Land Army from 1942.
- **Rationing** — official limits on what each person could buy — covered clothes, tea, sugar, petrol and more in Australia from 1942.
- **Money and minds.** War loans raised money from citizens in both wars, and **propaganda** — messages designed to shape what people think and feel about the war — reached every home through posters, radio and film.

Figure 7 compares the two wars across these five areas so you can see the change and the continuity together.

Mass mobilisation of society: two world wars compared

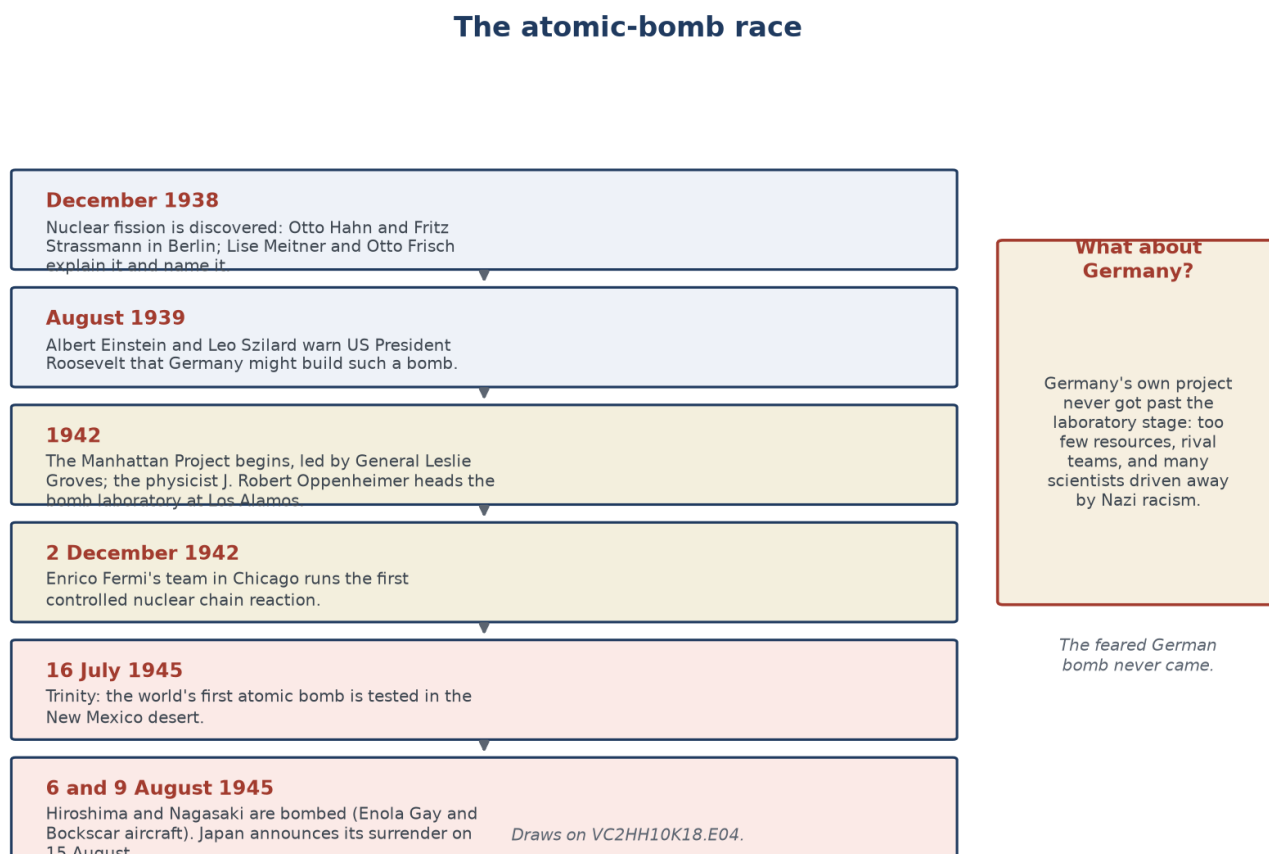
What governments did	World War I	World War II
Raising armies	Volunteers first; in Australia, votes in 1916 and 1917 refused to force men to serve overseas.	From 1939, volunteers again; a 1942 vote allowed limited service outside Australia.
Women's war work	Women took factory, farm and office jobs while men served; most were pushed out of these jobs in 1918-19.	Far larger and more organised: services such as the WAAAF and AWAS from 1941, the Women's Land Army from 1942, plus factories and farms.
Food and supplies	Shortages grew under blockade; governments managed prices and some goods.	Full rationing of clothes, tea, sugar, petrol and more in Australia from 1942.
Paying for war	War loans: citizens lent money to the government.	War loans again, plus higher income taxes and higher wages frozen for the war effort.
Winning minds	Posters, speeches and newspapers kept up support; enemy 'atrocities' stories spread.	Radio and film reached every home; censorship controlled news of defeats.

Change: World War II mobilised whole societies more completely than 1914-18 ever did. Continuity: both wars asked civilians to sacrifice - and both split communities over forcing men to serve overseas.

Table comparing mass mobilisation of society in the two world wars across raising armies, women's war work, food and supplies, paying for war, and winning minds

7. The atomic-bomb race (VC2HH10K18.E04)

The biggest change in the nature of warfare came from science. Figure 8 traces the race step by step.



Flowchart of the atomic-bomb race, from the discovery of nuclear fission in December 1938 through the Einstein-Szilard letter, the Manhattan Project, Fermi's first chain reaction and the Trinity test to the bombings of August 1945, with a side note on Germany's failed program

The key people and moments: in Berlin in December 1938, **Otto Hahn** and **Fritz Strassmann** found that splitting the uranium atom released huge energy; **Lise Meitner** and **Otto Frisch**, both driven out of Germany by Nazi racism, explained and named the process (**nuclear fission** — the splitting of an atomic nucleus, which releases energy). In August 1939, **Albert Einstein** and **Leo Szilard** warned President Roosevelt that Germany might build such a bomb. The American answer became the **Manhattan Project**, run by General **Leslie Groves** with the physicist **J. Robert Oppenheimer** in charge of the bomb laboratory at Los Alamos. On 2 December 1942, **Enrico Fermi's** team in Chicago produced the first controlled nuclear chain reaction; on 16 July 1945 the first atomic bomb was tested in the New Mexico desert (the Trinity test). Germany's own effort, at the same time, never got past the laboratory stage.

By the time of the Trinity test, the war in Europe was over, but Japan still fought on. On 26 July 1945 the Allies issued the **Potsdam Declaration**, demanding Japan's surrender and warning of "prompt and utter destruction" if it refused. Japan's leaders did not accept it. On 6 August 1945 the B-29 *Enola Gay*, flown by Colonel **Paul Tibbets**, dropped the uranium bomb "Little Boy" on Hiroshima. On 9 August the *Bockscar*, flown by Major **Charles Sweeney**, dropped the plutonium bomb "Fat Man" on Nagasaki. Japan announced its surrender on 15 August, and signed it on 2 September 1945.

On the day of the bombing, President Truman told the American people what had happened. His words are Source A.

SOURCE A

The President announces a new kind of weapon

'Sixteen hours ago an American airplane dropped one bomb on Hiroshima ... It is an atomic bomb. It is a harnessing of the basic power of the universe. The force from which the sun draws its power has been loosed against those who brought war to the Far East.'

Harry S. Truman, President of the United States, radio statement announcing the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, 6 August 1945. Excerpt. Original held by the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri.

Source A: excerpt from President Truman's radio statement of 6 August 1945 announcing the atomic bombing of Hiroshima

Why were the bombs dropped? This is one of the biggest debates among historians, and it turns on contested words — *necessary* and *justified* mean different things to different people, so this section states each position in its strongest form instead of pretending there is one settled answer. Figure 10 sets the two main positions out, and names historians who hold them, together with a middle view.

Historians' debate: was dropping the atomic bombs necessary?

Position 1: the bombs were needed

(held by President Truman and historians such as Richard B. Frank)

- Japan had rejected the Potsdam Declaration of 26 July 1945, which warned of 'prompt and utter destruction'.
- Japanese forces had fought to the death on islands such as Okinawa; kamikaze pilots crashed planes into Allied ships.
- An invasion of the Japanese home islands would have cost many lives on both sides, including Japanese civilians.
- The bombs shocked Japan's leaders into surrender, ending the war in days rather than months.

Position 2: the bombs were not needed

(held by critics and historians such as Gar Alperovitz)

- The United States Strategic Bombing Survey (1946) judged that Japan was likely to have surrendered even without the bombs.
- The naval blockade and fire-bombing had already cut Japan's supplies and industry.
- Some historians argue the bombs were also a warning to the USSR as the Cold War began.
- Critics add a moral claim: weapons that kill tens of thousands of civilians in seconds are wrong, whatever the cause.

A middle view (historian Barton Bernstein): ending the war was Truman's main aim, but both the expected invasion costs and the wish to impress the USSR shaped the decision.

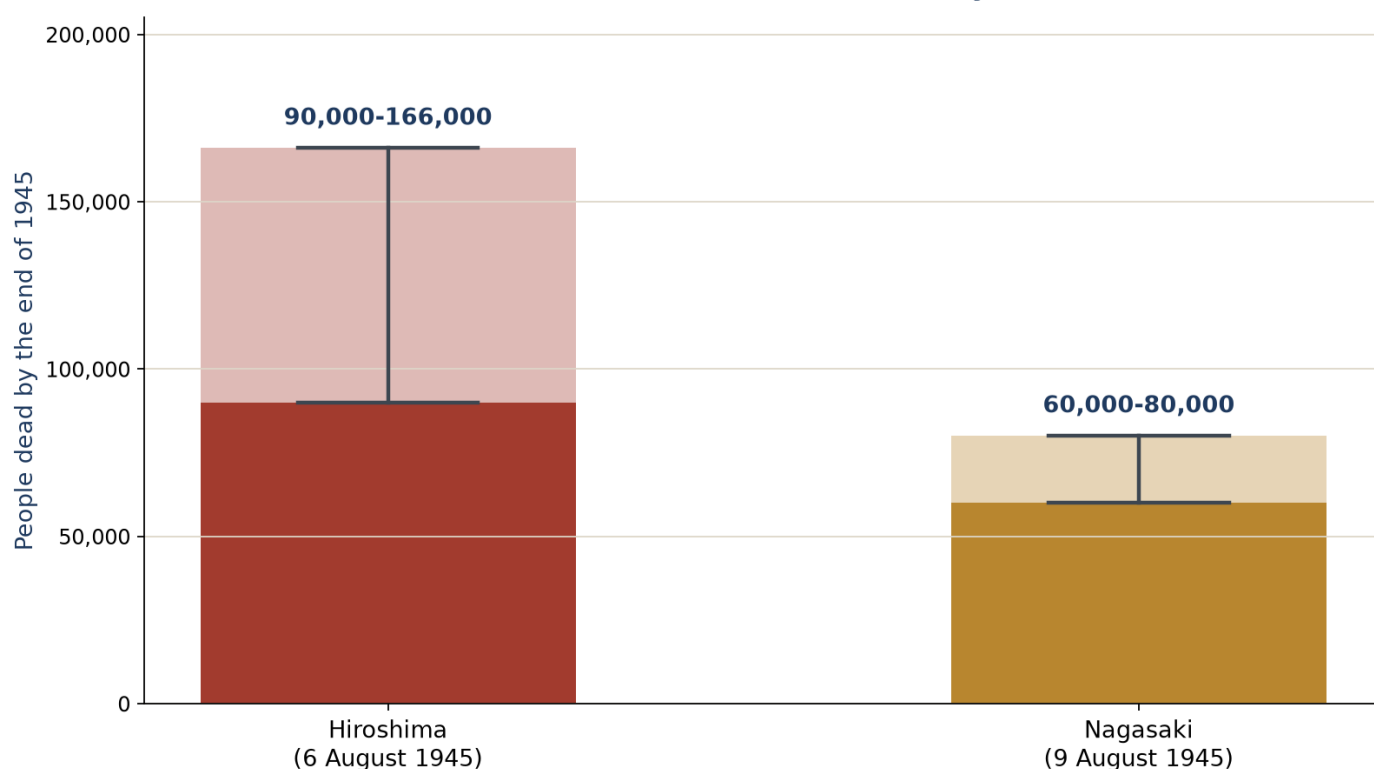
Both positions above are given in their strongest form. Marks go to the quality of your reasoning, not the side you reach.

Two-panel diagram stating the strongest form of each position in the historians' debate over whether dropping the atomic bombs was necessary, with a middle view attributed to a named historian

8. Aftermath of the atomic bombings (VC2HH10K18.E05)

Human consequences, short-term. In both cities, the blast, heat and immediate radiation killed tens of thousands of people in seconds to days; most were civilians, including children at school or at home. Figure 11 shows the estimated deaths in each city by the end of 1945.

Estimated deaths from the atomic bombs by the end of 1945



Ranges from published estimates: most of those killed were civilians. Deaths from wounds and radiation-related illness kept rising for years afterwards, so later totals are higher.

Bar chart with range bars showing estimated deaths from the atomic bombs by the end of 1945: 90,000 to 166,000 in Hiroshima and 60,000 to 80,000 in Nagasaki

Human consequences, long-term. Survivors — called **hibakusha** in Japanese, “bomb-affected people” — suffered burns and injuries that took years to heal, and later faced higher rates of cancers such as leukaemia (a cancer of the blood). Some faced fear and unfair treatment in work and marriage. Scientists in Japan and the United States have followed the health of the survivors ever since, in one of the longest medical studies in history; the work continues today through the Radiation Effects Research Foundation.

Environmental consequences, short-term. Both city centres were flattened — buildings burned and fell for kilometres around the blast point — and fires added to the destruction. In the days after each bombing, a “black rain” of soot and dust mixed with radioactive material fell on the cities and their surroundings, spreading fallout and dirtying water.

Environmental consequences, long-term. Radiation levels in soil and rubble fell away over the following months and years, and both cities were rebuilt; Hiroshima chose to rebuild as a city of peace, and its Genbaku Dome — a building left standing as a ruin near the blast point — is now a world heritage site kept as a warning. The survivors’ own testimony became part of the world’s record of the bombs; Source B, below, is one famous example of that record.

SOURCE B

One moment, told from the ground

'At exactly fifteen minutes past eight in the morning on August 6, 1945, Japanese time, at the moment when the atomic bomb flashed above Hiroshima ...'

John Hersey opens his account Hiroshima by following six people who were in the city that morning: two doctors, a widowed mother, a minister, a young clerk and a priest. Published as a whole issue of The New Yorker magazine on 31 August 1946, then as a book. It brought the survivors' experience to millions of readers. Opening words excerpted.

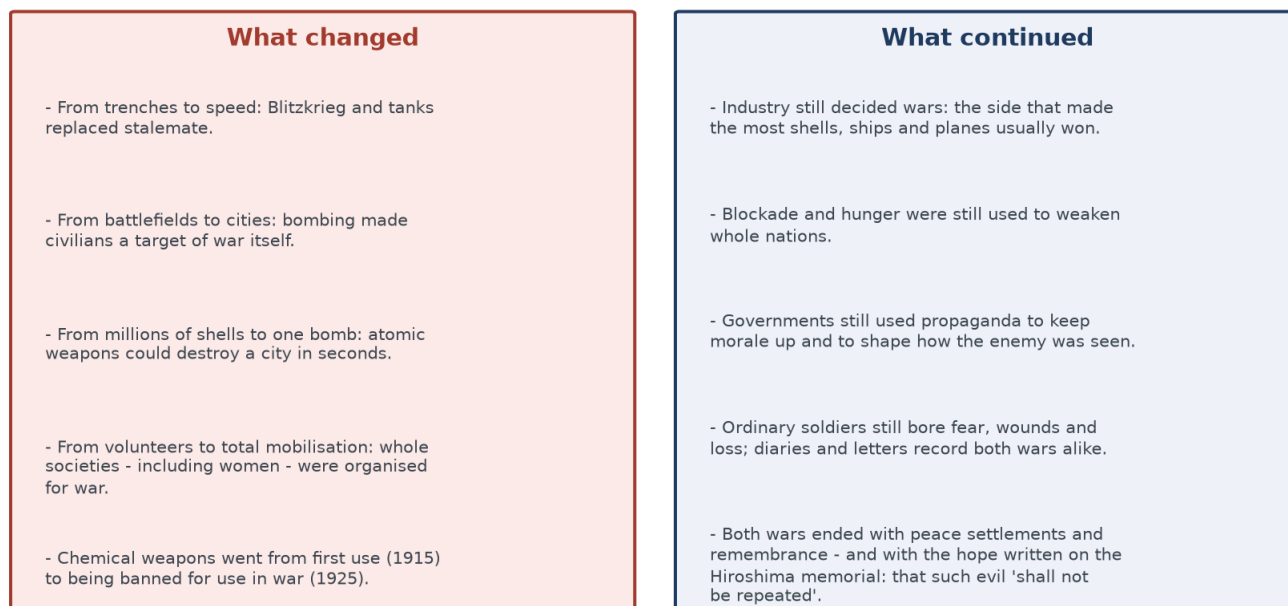
Source B: the opening words of John Hersey's Hiroshima, published in The New Yorker magazine on 31 August 1946

Wider consequences for the nature of warfare. From 1945, war carried the risk of ending civilisation itself. The USSR tested its own atomic bomb in 1949, and the arms race of the Cold War (section 1C) was built on atomic weapons. Treaties followed — banning most nuclear tests (1963), limiting the spread of the bomb (the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, 1968), and in 2017 the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. In 2017 the Nobel Peace Prize went to ICAN, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, accepted with the hibakusha; in 2024 it went to Nihon Hidankyo, the Japanese organisation of atomic-bomb survivors. Whether deterrence (the idea that fear of the bomb prevents war) has kept peace or stored up danger is itself a historians' debate — the positions in Figure 10 carry into it.

9. Bringing it together (VC2HH10K18)

Figure 13 gathers the whole section into the two lists every student of this content description should be able to produce: what changed in the nature of warfare between 1914 and 1945, and what continued.

The nature of warfare, 1914-1945: what changed, what continued



Draws on VC2HH10K18 (the whole content description).

Two-panel summary diagram listing what changed and what continued in the nature of warfare between 1914 and 1945

The section's answer to its own question: the tools, the speed, the reach and the scale of destruction all changed, and changed utterly; the dependence on industry, the use of hunger and propaganda, the burden on ordinary people, and the hope that war could be ended for good all continued. Holding both lists in your head at once is what analysing continuity and change means.

Sources for this section

Retrieval date for all online sources: **26 August 2026**.

1. Harry S. Truman, radio statement announcing the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, 6 August 1945 (Source A; original held by the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri).
2. John Hersey, *Hiroshima*, published as the entire issue of *The New Yorker* magazine of 31 August 1946, then as a book (Knopf, 1946); opening words and the six survivors' names (Source B).
3. Potsdam Declaration, 26 July 1945, including the warning of "prompt and utter destruction" (a treaty document held in national archives, including the US National Archives).
4. Australian War Memorial (Gallipoli; Fromelles, 19–20 July 1916, 5,533 Australian casualties; Pozières; Darwin, 19 February 1942; Bomber Command), awm.gov.au.
5. United States and Japanese city estimates for the atomic bombings (Hiroshima 90,000–166,000 and Nagasaki 60,000–80,000 dead by the end of 1945), as published by the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and the city of Nagasaki; long-term health follow-up by the Radiation Effects Research Foundation, rerf.or.jp.
6. The Nobel Prize, Nobel Peace Prize 2017 (ICAN, with the testimony of the hibakusha Setsuko Thurlow) and 2024 (Nihon Hidankyo), nobelprize.org.
7. United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, the Geneva Protocol of 1925 and the nuclear treaties of 1963, 1968 and 2017, un.org.
8. United States Strategic Bombing Survey, *Japan's Struggle to End the War*, 1946 (its judgement that Japan was likely to have surrendered without the bombs is quoted in Figure 10).
9. Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam* (1965); Barton Bernstein, essays on the atomic-bomb decision (e.g. in *Pacific Historical Review*, 1990s); Richard B. Frank, *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire* (1999) — the three named positions in Figure 10.

10. Imperial War Museums, London, on the Blitz (7 September 1940–16 May 1941; about 40,000–43,000 civilians killed), the first gas attack at Ypres (22 April 1915), the first tanks on the Somme (15 September 1916), and the Zeppelin and Gotha raids, iwm.org.uk.

Worked examples

Worked source analysis 1 — with help

Question. Read Source A (President Truman’s radio statement of 6 August 1945, reproduced in Figure 9). What was Truman telling his listeners, and what does the source show about how the United States wanted the bomb to be seen?

Working	Comment
Step 1: Identify the source. It is a radio statement by the President of the United States, made on the day Hiroshima was bombed. It is a primary source — made at the time, by a decision-maker.	Start with what the source <i>is</i> : an official announcement, not a private note. That shapes what it can tell us.
Step 2: Describe the content. Truman announces that one American bomb fell on Hiroshima; he names the weapon (“It is an atomic bomb”) and describes it as “a harnessing of the basic power of the universe” and “the force from which the sun draws its power”.	Use the source’s own words where you can.
Step 3: Explain the context. The statement followed the Manhattan Project, the Trinity test of 16 July 1945, and the Potsdam Declaration of 26 July 1945, which Japan had not accepted. The war with Japan still continued.	Context explains <i>why</i> the words were chosen.
Step 4: Read the perspective and purpose. Truman speaks as the leader of the side that used the bomb. His purpose is to announce a victory, to warn Japan, and to present the bomb as science mastered and as punishment on “those who brought war to the Far East”. Notice what the statement does not say: nothing about civilian casualties, and nothing about doubt.	Perspectives include what a source leaves out.
Step 5: State significance and inference. Historians can infer that the United States wanted the bomb seen as legitimate, scientific and war-ending from its first hour. The source is significant because it fixed the official story — the same story as Position 1 in Figure 10 — at the moment the atomic age began.	An inference must rest on evidence in the source plus its context.

Answer: Source A shows a leader presenting the atomic bomb to the world as a triumph of science that would end the war, and it gives historians the official American view at the very start of the atomic age.

Worked source analysis 2 — with help

Question. Read Source B (the opening of John Hersey’s *Hiroshima*, 1946, reproduced in Figure 12). Why did this account change how people saw the atomic bomb?

Working	Comment
Step 1: Identify the source. It is the opening of a book-length account by John Hersey, an American writer, published in August 1946, a year after the bombing, built from interviews with six survivors.	Knowing the form matters: it is testimony gathered and shaped by a writer — primary evidence from the survivors, published as a secondary account.
Step 2: Describe the content. Hersey begins at “fifteen minutes past eight in the morning” and follows six ordinary people — two doctors, a widowed mother, a minister, a young clerk, a priest — at the exact moment	The opening turns a weapon’s story into six people’s story.

the bomb flashed.

Step 3: Explain the context. In 1946 most people outside Japan knew the bomb as a military and scientific event — the story of Source A. Survivor accounts had almost never been heard.

Context shows what was new.

Step 4: Read the perspective and purpose. The perspective is the ground, not the government: what the bomb did to ordinary bodies, homes and days. Hersey's purpose is to make readers see that.

A source from below balances a source from above.

Step 5: State significance and inference. *Hiroshima* made millions of readers meet the bomb as a human experience, and it became one of the most reprinted works of the twentieth century. Historians can infer why the debate of Figure 10 runs so deep: from the start, the bomb had two stories — the President's and the survivors'.

Link the source to the historical debate it feeds.

Answer: Hersey's account changed the story of the bomb from a weapon's triumph to a human catastrophe, giving the survivors' perspective a permanent place in the history of the atomic age.

Practice questions

With help

Q1. The trench war (VC2HH10K18.E02).

- (a) Using Figure 2, name four features of a Western Front trench system.
- (b) Explain in your own words what a stalemate was on the Western Front.
- (c) Which two new technologies made crossing no man's land so deadly?

Q2. New technology (VC2HH10K18.E02). Use Figure 3.

- (a) Match each technology to its first notable use: tanks; large-scale chemical weapons.
- (b) What agreement of 1925 responded to chemical weapons, and what did it do?
- (c) How did the Battle of Hamel (4 July 1918) point to the future of warfare?

Q3. Civilians in the two wars (VC2HH10K18.E01). Use Figure 4.

- (a) Give one way civilians were caught up in World War I and one way they were targeted in World War II.
- (b) Name the ship sunk in World War I in which 1,198 people died, and the Australian city bombed from the air in 1942 in which at least 236 people were killed.
- (c) Explain the significance of the change in *who* died in the two wars.

Q4. Blitzkrieg and air power (VC2HH10K18.E03). Use Figures 5 and 6.

- (a) Put these in order: France defeated in six weeks; Blitzkrieg defeats Poland; the Blitz on British cities; fire-bombing of Tokyo.
- (b) Compare France's war of 1914–18 with its war of 1940. What does the difference show about the nature of warfare?
- (c) Why could Churchill say of the Battle of Britain that “never ... was so much owed by so many to so few”?

Q5. The atomic bomb decision (VC2HH10K18.E04). Use Figures 8 and 10.

- (a) Name three key people or steps in the atomic-bomb race shown in Figure 8.
- (b) What did the Potsdam Declaration of 26 July 1945 demand, and what did it warn of?
- (c) State Position 1 and Position 2 from Figure 10 in one sentence each.

Q6. Consequences (VC2HH10K18.E05). Use Figure 11.

- (a) Give the estimated death range for each city by the end of 1945.
- (b) Name one short-term and one long-term consequence for human health.
- (c) What was the “black rain”, and why is it an *environmental* consequence?

On your own

Q7. Continuity and change. Using at least three pieces of evidence from this section, explain one way the nature of warfare **changed** between 1914 and 1945 and one way it **continued**. Finish with a sentence on which mattered more, and why.

Q8. Perspectives. The same event — the atomic bombing of Hiroshima — is described in Source A and Source B. Explain how and why the two sources see the event differently, using one quotation or detail from each.

Q9. The historians’ debate. Choose Position 1 or Position 2 from Figure 10. Give the strongest case for it (two reasons), then the strongest case against it (one reason), and say which evidence you find more persuasive and why. Remember: marks go to the quality of reasoning, not the side you reach.

Q10. Mass mobilisation. Using Figure 7, explain one change and one continuity in how Australian society was organised for war between the two world wars.

Answers

Q1. (a) Any four of: fire step, parapet with sandbags, barbed wire, no man's land, shell craters, dugout, enemy trench. (b) A position in which neither side could win or move: attacks across open ground were cut down by machine guns and artillery, so the front line almost never moved from late 1914 to 1918. (c) Machine guns and artillery.

Q2. (a) Tanks — the Somme, 15 September 1916; large-scale chemical weapons — Ypres, 22 April 1915. (b) The Geneva Protocol of 1925; it banned the use of chemical weapons in war. (c) At Hamel, John Monash moved infantry, tanks, artillery and aircraft to one plan — machines working together on a timetable — the pattern of later modern war.

Q3. (a) World War I example: blockade hunger in Germany, the sinking of the *Lusitania*, the shelling of Scarborough, Zeppelin raids. World War II example: the Blitz, the bombing of Hamburg/Dresden/Tokyo, the atomic bombs. (b) The *Lusitania*; Darwin. (c) In World War I most of the dead were soldiers; in World War II more than half were civilians — war's horror moved from the battlefield to the home.

Q4. (a) Blitzkrieg defeats Poland (September 1939); France defeated in six weeks (May–June 1940); the Blitz on British cities (September 1940–May 1941); fire-bombing of Tokyo (March 1945). (b) France endured four years of stalemate in 1914–18 but was beaten in about six weeks in 1940 — concentration of tanks and air power had replaced stalemate with speed. (c) Because a small number of fighter pilots held off the German air force and so prevented an invasion of Britain; the many (the country) owed their safety to the few.

Q5. (a) Any three of: Hahn and Strassmann (fission, 1938); Meitner and Frisch (explanation); Einstein and Szilard (letter, 1939); Groves and Oppenheimer (Manhattan Project); Fermi (first chain reaction, 1942); Trinity test (1945); Tibbets/*Enola Gay* and Sweeney/*Bockscar* (the missions). (b) It demanded Japan's surrender and warned of "prompt and utter destruction". (c) Position 1: the bombs were needed to end the war quickly and avoid a costly invasion. Position 2: Japan was already near surrender, so the bombs were unnecessary (and some argue they also warned the USSR).

Q6. (a) Hiroshima 90,000–166,000; Nagasaki 60,000–80,000 (by the end of 1945). (b) Short-term: deaths and injuries from blast, burns and radiation sickness within weeks. Long-term: higher rates of cancers such as leukaemia among survivors for years afterwards. (c) Rain mixed with soot and radioactive material from the bomb that fell on the cities and surroundings, spreading fallout and dirtying water.

Fully-worked solutions

Q7.

Model answer. One change: war reached civilians directly. In World War I civilians were caught up mostly without being targeted directly — by blockade, by the sinking of the *Lusitania*, by Zeppelin raids that killed about 1,500 people in Britain. In World War II cities themselves became targets: the Blitz killed 40,000–43,000 in Britain, the fire-bombing of Tokyo about 100,000 in one night, and the atomic bombs killed tens of thousands in seconds, so that by 1945 more than half of the war's dead were civilians. One continuity: war still rested on whole societies' industry and morale — rationing, conscription debates and propaganda appear in both wars (Figure 7), and machine guns and artillery still killed and wounded most soldiers in both. Which mattered more: the change mattered more, because once cities and civilians became the target, war could end a society in days — the atomic bomb is the extreme proof — and that fact has shaped international law and every great-power decision since 1945.

Q8.

Model answer. Source A is President Truman's official announcement, made on the day of the bombing, speaking for the government that used the bomb. It describes the weapon in scientific and triumphant language — "a harnessing of the basic power of the universe" — and presents the bombing as punishment on "those who brought war to the Far East". Its purpose is to announce victory and warn Japan; it says nothing of the dead. Source B is John Hersey's survivor-centred account, published a year later. It begins not with the weapon but with the moment — "fifteen minutes past eight in the morning" — and with six ordinary people going about their day. Its purpose is to make readers feel what the bomb did to human beings. The two sources differ because their makers stand in different places: one looks down from power and wants the bomb seen as legitimate and war-ending; the other looks up from the

ground and records the bomb as a human catastrophe. Used together they give historians both halves of the event — the decision and the experience — which is why the debate of Figure 10 runs so deep.

Q9.

Model answer (choosing Position 2; choosing Position 1 with equal care would earn the same marks). Strongest case for Position 2: first, the United States' own Strategic Bombing Survey of 1946 judged that Japan was likely to have surrendered even without the atomic bombs, because blockade and bombing had already broken its supplies and its ability to fight; second, some historians, such as Gar Alperovitz, argue that the bombs also served as a warning to the USSR as the rivalry of 1945 turned into the Cold War, which suggests the bombs were doing political work beyond ending the war. Strongest case against Position 2: in August 1945 Japan had rejected the Potsdam Declaration and had fought to the death on islands such as Okinawa, so its leaders showed no sign of surrendering soon; an invasion would have cost many lives on both sides, and Truman's first duty (Position 1) was to end the war his country was fighting. Which evidence is more persuasive: the Survey's judgement is persuasive about *military* necessity, because it is the United States' own study made within a year of the war, using Japanese records; but it cannot settle the *moral* question of whether a weapon that kills tens of thousands of civilians in seconds can be justified. My conclusion is that the bombs were likely not *needed* in the strict military sense the Survey describes, and that this is precisely what makes the moral case against them strong — while recognising that Truman, facing an unfinished war, had reasons that Position 1 states honestly.

Q10.

Model answer. One change: the organisation of women's war work. In World War I women took factory, farm and office jobs in an unplanned way and were largely pushed out of them after 1918; in World War II the change was official and far bigger — the WAAAF and AWAS from 1941 and the Women's Land Army from 1942 put women into uniformed services and war industry at a scale the first war never reached, and rationing from 1942 managed daily life far more completely than in 1914–18. One continuity: conscription remained a fight Australia had with itself. In both wars Australia raised its armies from volunteers first, and in both wars the question of forcing men to serve overseas split the country — the defeated referendums of 1916 and 1917 in the first war, and the narrow 1942 vote allowing limited overseas service in the second. The machinery of total war grew bigger between the wars, but the argument about who must fight stayed the same.

The wars at home: how Australian life changed

Curriculum trace — Victorian Curriculum 2.0 History, Levels 9 and 10

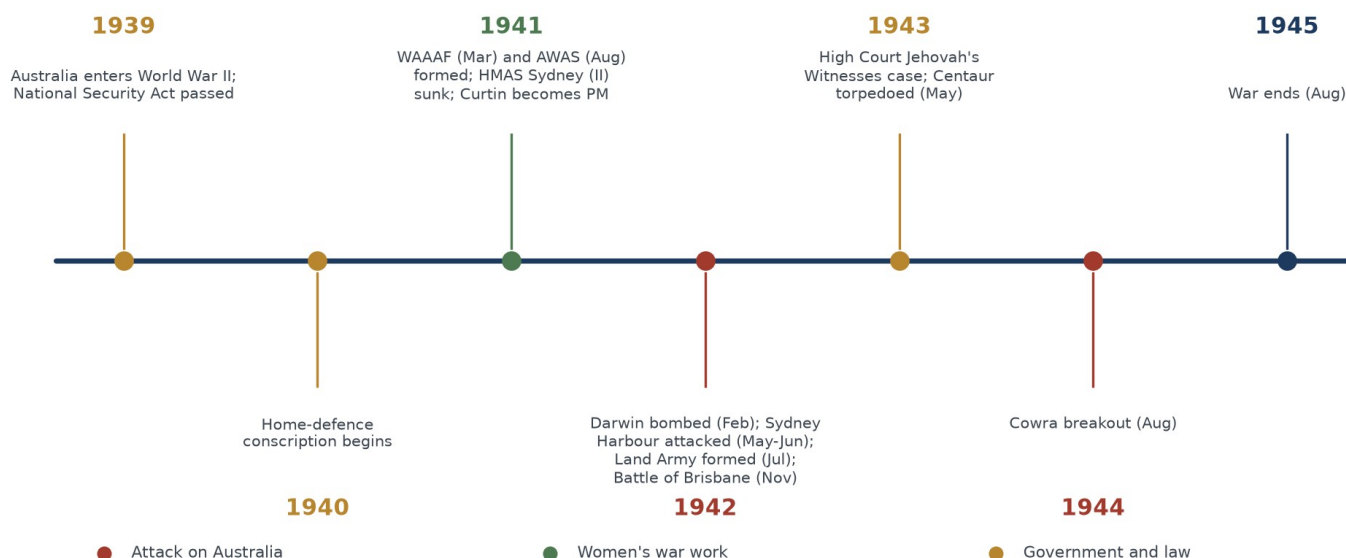
Owns VC2HH10K19

Draws on — VC2HH10K19.E01, VC2HH10K19.E02, VC2HH10K19.E03

§2A register — VC2HH10K19.E04–E06 are excluded from this book and the content description's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander referent is dropped; this section teaches the description through E01, E02 and E03. **Builds on** — sections 3A–3F (VC2HH10K13, VC2HH10K14, VC2HH10K15, VC2HH10K16, VC2HH10K17, VC2HH10K18).

Sections 3A to 3F followed the war to its causes, its battlefields and the Australians who served overseas. This section stays at home. It studies the **home front** — the civilians, workers, families and governments of a country at war — and the **consequences** of the world wars for Australian society. Between 1939 and 1945 the war touched almost every Australian household: women took up work once done by men, the government gained new powers over daily life, and for the first time in the country's history enemy forces attacked Australian towns and waters. Figure 1 places these changes on one timeline.

The Australian home front, 1939–1945



Horizontal timeline of the Australian home front from 1939 to 1945, with colour-coded events: Australia enters World War II and the National Security Act passed (1939), home-defence conscription begins (1940), the WAAAF and AWAS formed and HMAS Sydney (II) sunk (1941), Darwin bombed, Sydney Harbour attacked, the Land Army formed and the Battle of Brisbane (1942), the High Court Jehovah's Witnesses case and the Centaur torpedoed (1943), the Cowra breakout (1944), and the war ends (1945).

Figure 1. The Australian home front, 1939–1945 (source: section 3G, parts 1–5).

By the end of this section you should be able to describe how World War II changed women's roles in Australia, investigate the war's impact at local and national level, describe the National Security Act 1939's consequences for rights and freedoms, and explain why people on the home front experienced and judged the war differently.

Theory

1. A nation at war: the home front (VC2HH10K19)

Defining the term. The *home front* means the people, work and daily life of a country at war, away from the battlefields — and the way war shapes them. The term is used by historians and by governments of the time; this section uses it in that sense.

On 3 September 1939 the Prime Minister, **Robert Menzies**, told the nation by radio that Australia was at war. Figure 2 reproduces the core sentence of that broadcast as Source 1.

SOURCE 1

A nation goes to war

'Fellow Australians: It is my sad duty to tell you officially that, because Germany has kept up her invasion of Poland, Britain has declared war on her - and that, as a result, Australia is also at war.'

Prime Minister Robert Menzies, radio broadcast to the nation, 3 September 1939, announcing Australia's entry into World War II. Abridged and lightly modernised.

Source card titled '*A nation goes to war*' reproducing the core sentence of Prime Minister Robert Menzies's radio broadcast of 3 September 1939: '*Fellow Australians: It is my sad duty to tell you officially that, because Germany has kept up her invasion of Poland, Britain has declared war on her - and that, as a result, Australia is also at war.*'

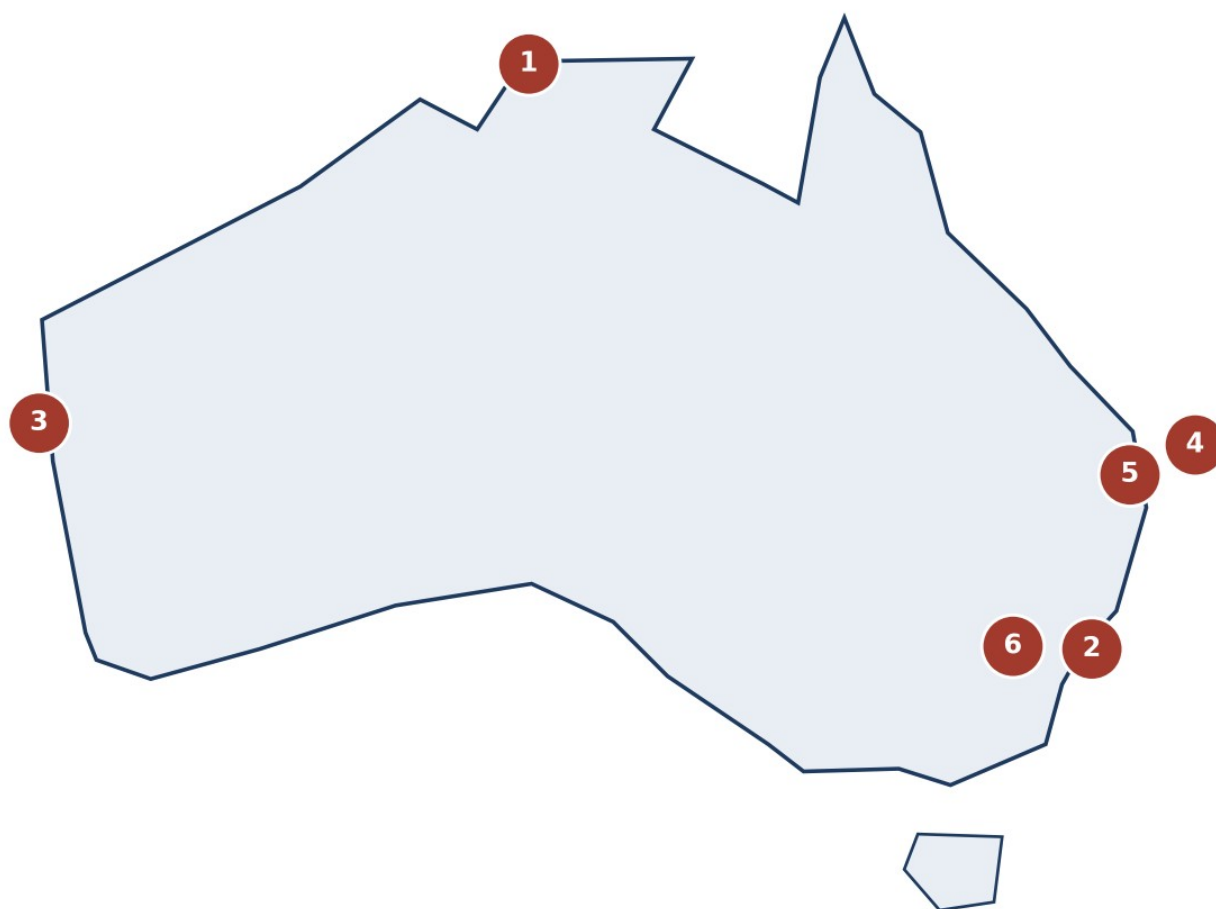
Figure 2. Source 1 — Prime Minister Robert Menzies announces Australia's entry into World War II, radio broadcast, 3 September 1939 (source: National Archives of Australia; abridged and lightly modernised; accessed 26 August 2026). Worked source analysis 1 reads this source in full.

Australia had entered World War II alongside Britain, as it had entered World War I in 1914. What made the Second World War different for those at home was scale. This was a **total war**: a war in which the whole society — its factories, farms, media, laws and people — is organised around the war effort. The consequences for Australian society, studied in parts 2 to 5, fell under three headings: the war reaching Australian soil and waters; the changing roles of women; and new government powers over rights and freedoms.

2. The war reaches Australia (VC2HH10K19.E02)

For the first two years of the war, the fighting was far away. From late 1941 it came to Australia. Figure 3 maps where the war reached Australian soil and waters; Figure 4 sets out each event with its human cost.

The war reaches Australia, 1941-1944



Key events

- 1 Bombing of Darwin
19 Feb 1942
- 2 Sydney Harbour submarine attack
31 May-8 Jun 1942
- 3 HMAS Sydney (II) sunk
19 Nov 1941
- 4 Hospital ship Centaur torpedoed
14 May 1943
- 5 Battle of Brisbane
26-27 Nov 1942
- 6 Cowra breakout
5 Aug 1944

Darwin was the largest single attack by a foreign power on Australia.

Schematic map of Australia with six numbered markers and a key: 1, bombing of Darwin, 19 February 1942; 2, Sydney Harbour submarine attack, 31 May to 8 June 1942; 3, HMAS Sydney (II) sunk off the Western Australian coast, 19 November 1941; 4, hospital ship Centaur torpedoed off the Queensland coast, 14 May 1943; 5, Battle of Brisbane, 26 to 27 November 1942; 6, Cowra breakout, 5 August 1944.

Figure 3. The war reaches Australia, 1941–1944 (source: section 3G, part 2).

The war reaches Australian soil and waters (VC2HH10K19.E02)

Event	Date	What happened	Human cost
Bombing of Darwin	19 Feb 1942	Two Japanese air raids hit the harbour, town and air base - the largest attack by a foreign power on Australia	At least 236 killed
Sydney Harbour	31 May-8 Jun 1942	Japanese midget submarines entered the harbour; a torpedo sank the barracks ship HMAS Kuttabul	21 Allied sailors killed
HMAS Sydney (II)	19 Nov 1941	Sunk off Western Australia in a battle with the German raider Kormoran	All 645 aboard lost
Hospital ship Centaur	14 May 1943	Torpedoed by a Japanese submarine off the Queensland coast	268 killed
Battle of Brisbane	26-27 Nov 1942	A riot between Australian and US servicemen over pay and treatment	1 Australian soldier killed; hundreds hurt
Cowra breakout	5 Aug 1944	Japanese prisoners of war broke out of the camp at Cowra, NSW	231 Japanese and 4 Australians killed
'Brisbane Line'	1942 (claim)	A disputed plan said to give up northern Australia; a Royal Commission found no official plan	No fighting took place

Table titled 'The war reaches Australian soil and waters' listing seven rows: bombing of Darwin (19 February 1942, at least 236 killed); Sydney Harbour submarine attack (31 May to 8 June 1942, 21 Allied sailors killed); HMAS Sydney (II) sunk (19 November 1941, all 645 aboard lost); hospital ship Centaur torpedoed (14 May 1943, 268 killed); Battle of Brisbane (26 to 27 November 1942, 1 Australian soldier killed, hundreds hurt); Cowra breakout (5 August 1944, 231 Japanese and 4 Australians killed); and the 'Brisbane Line' (1942 claim, a disputed plan, no fighting took place).

Figure 4. The war reaches Australian soil and waters (source: Australian War Memorial; National Archives of Australia; accessed 26 August 2026).

Two events stand out for their impact at **local and national level**.

The bombing of Darwin, 19 February 1942. Japanese carrier aircraft and land-based aircraft raided the harbour, town and air base in two attacks on the same morning. At least 236 people were killed and hundreds more wounded — the largest single attack by a foreign power on Australia in the country's history. Locally, Darwin's civilian population mostly fled or were moved south; the town's normal life ended for the rest of the war. Nationally, the raid shattered the belief that Australia was safe behind its oceans. Fear of invasion spread, and the federal government began to plan for the defence of the mainland in a way it never had before 1941. Notably, newspapers gave the raid only small coverage at the time: the government **censored** the news — checked and limited what could be published — to hide the damage from the enemy and to avoid panic, a control examined in part 4.

The Sydney Harbour attack, 31 May to 8 June 1942. Japanese midget submarines slipped past the harbour defences at night. One torpedo sank the harbour barracks ship **HMAS Kuttabul**, killing 21 Allied sailors. Shells were also fired at Sydney's eastern suburbs a few days later. For a city of over a million people that had felt far from the war, the attacks made the war personal: blackouts were ordered, harbour defences were strengthened, and families began to imagine the fighting reaching their own streets.

The other rows of Figure 4 show the war's wider reach. The cruiser **HMAS Sydney (II)** was sunk off Western Australia on 19 November 1941 in a battle with the German raider *Kormoran*, with all 645 aboard lost — Australia's greatest single loss at sea. The hospital ship **Centaur** was torpedoed off Queensland on 14 May 1943, killing 268 of

those aboard. The war also changed Australian towns without a single shot: the **Battle of Brisbane** (26–27 November 1942) was two nights of street fighting between Australian and United States servicemen, sparked by resentment over American pay, rations and behaviour; one Australian soldier was killed and hundreds of men on both sides were hurt. At **Cowra**, New South Wales, on 5 August 1944, Japanese prisoners of war staged a mass breakout from their camp; 231 Japanese prisoners and four Australians died.

A contested claim: the ‘Brisbane Line’. In 1942 the Minister for the Army in the Curtin Labor government, **Eddie Ward**, claimed that the previous governments of Menzies and Fadden had planned a ‘Brisbane Line’ — a line north of which northern Australia would be left to an invader. Menzies and Fadden denied that any such plan had ever been adopted. A royal commission after the war found no official plan or document supporting the claim. The ‘Brisbane Line’ is therefore studied as a wartime political claim and a fear of the time, not as a settled fact — a good example of history being contested.

3. Women’s changing roles (VC2HH10K19.E01)

As hundreds of thousands of men enlisted and were later called up for service, jobs they had done stood empty. The consequence was the largest change in women’s work in Australia’s history to that point. Figure 5 lists the women’s services; Figure 6 charts the rise in factory work; Figure 7 weighs change against continuity.

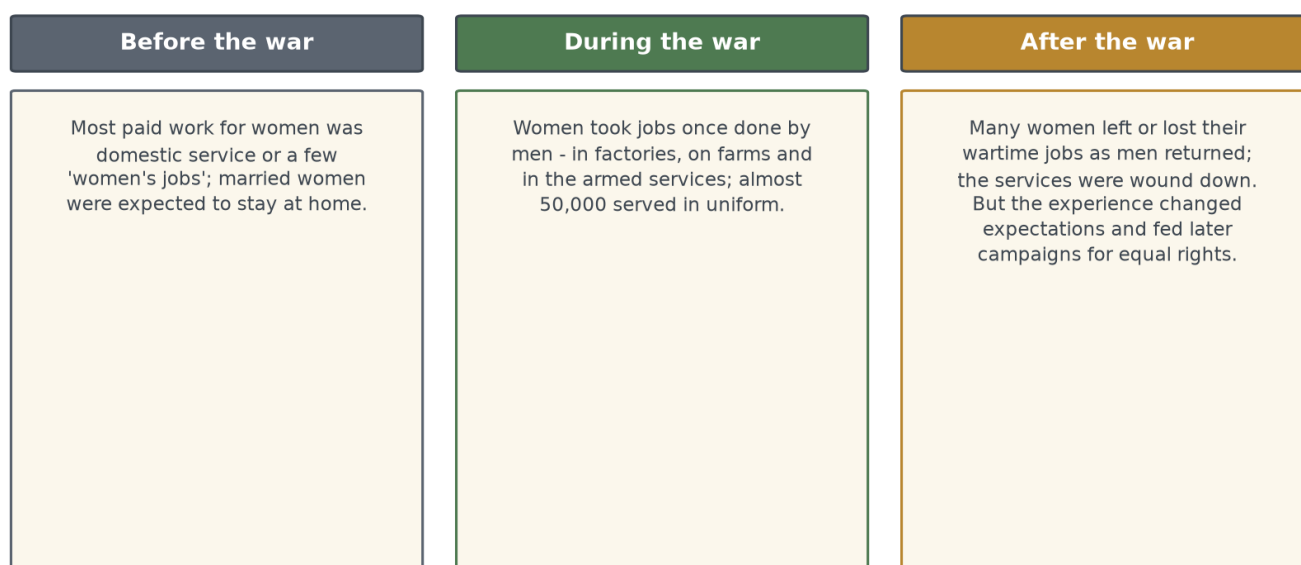
Women's wartime services in Australia (VC2HH10K19.E01)

Service	Formed	Numbers	Work they did
WAAAF (air force)	Mar 1941	about 27,000	Aircraft upkeep, radar and signals, office and transport work. First and largest service; Director Clare Stevenson
AWAS (army)	Aug 1941	about 24,000	Office, transport, signals and intelligence work, and gun-defence support; Controller Sybil Irving
WRANS (navy)	1942	over 3,000	Support work for the navy, in signalling, driving and office roles
AWLA (Land Army)	Jul 1942	about 3,400 at peak	Farm work left by servicemen: vegetables, fruit, and sheep and wool (the 'land army girls')

Table of the four women’s wartime services: the WAAAF (air force), formed March 1941, about 27,000 members, doing aircraft upkeep, radar and signals, office and transport work, led by Director Clare Stevenson; the AWAS (army), formed August 1941, about 24,000 members, doing office, transport, signals and intelligence work, led by Controller Sybil Irving; the WRANS (navy), formed 1942, over 3,000 members, doing naval support work; and the AWLA (Land Army), formed July 1942, about 3,400 members at peak, doing farm work left by servicemen.

Figure 5. Women’s wartime services in Australia (source: Department of Veterans’ Affairs, Anzac Portal, ‘Women in the war’; accessed 26 August 2026).

Women's roles: what changed, and what continued?



Change was real but partial: the war opened work to women, yet many old expectations continued.

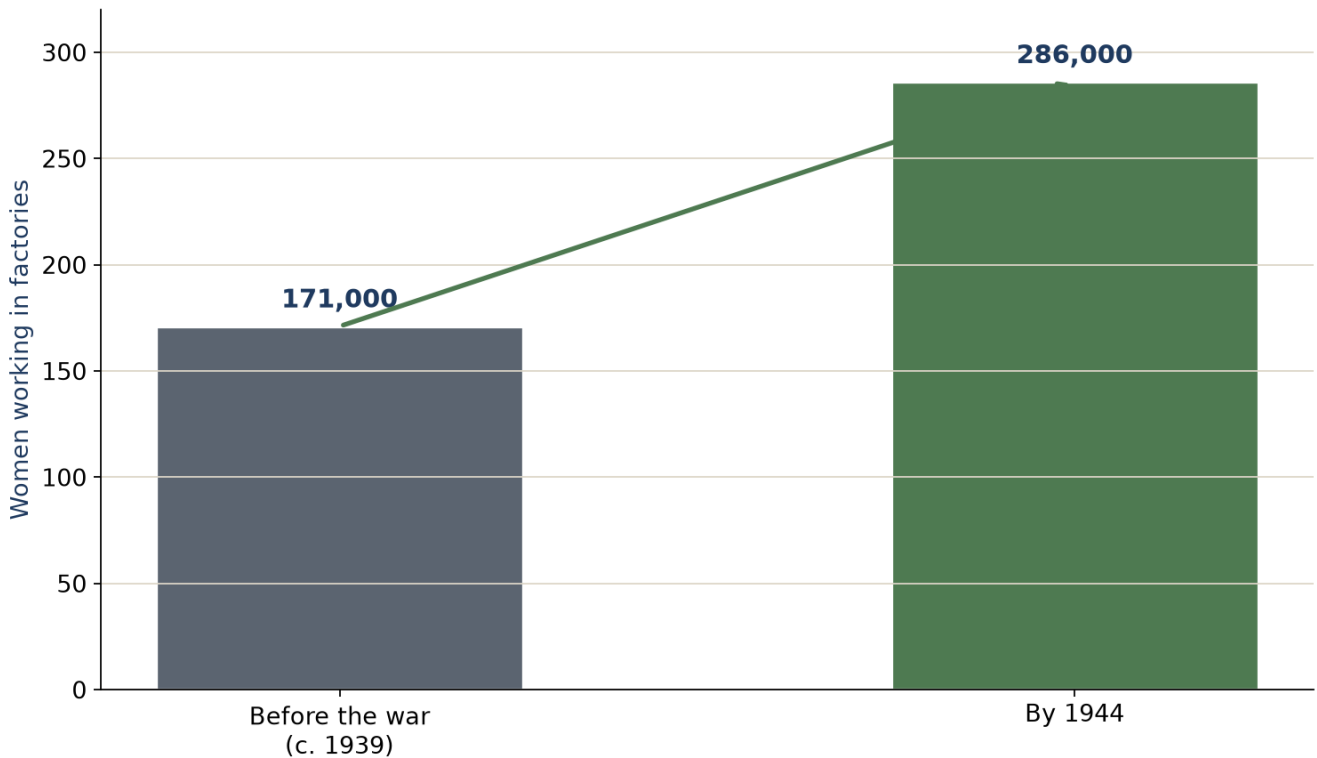
Three-panel continuity and change diagram: before the war, most paid work for women was domestic service or a few 'women's jobs' and married women were expected to stay at home; during the war, women took jobs once done by men in factories, on farms and in the armed services, with almost 50,000 in uniform; after the war, many women left or lost their wartime jobs as men returned, but the experience changed expectations and fed later campaigns for equal rights.

Figure 6. Women's roles: what changed, and what continued? (source: section 3G, part 3).

Women in the services. The **Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF)** began in March 1941 — the first and largest of the women's services, with about 27,000 members by the war's end, directed by **Clare Stevenson**. The **Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS)** followed in August 1941 under Controller **Sybil Irving**, with about 24,000 members; the **Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS)** began in 1942 with over 3,000 members. Women worked as drivers, mechanics, radar operators, signallers, clerks and intelligence staff — work that released men for fighting units. By 1944 almost 50,000 women had served in the armed services.

Women in the factories and on the land. The number of women working in factories rose from about 171,000 before the war to about 286,000 by 1944 (Figure 7). At munitions factories such as **Maribyrnong** in Melbourne, women made the shells, cartridges and explosives the armed forces needed. The **Australian Women's Land Army (AWLA)**, formed in July 1942, sent about 3,400 members at its peak to work on farms growing food and wool.

Women in factory work rose sharply during the war



By 1944 almost 50,000 women also served in the armed services. Women took jobs once done by men, but were usually paid less.

Bar chart showing women working in factories rising from 171,000 before the war (about 1939) to 286,000 by 1944, with an arrow marking the rise and a note that by 1944 almost 50,000 women also served in the armed services and were usually paid less than men.

Figure 7. Women in factory work rose sharply during the war (source: Department of Veterans' Affairs, Anzac Portal; accessed 26 August 2026).

Change — and continuity. The change was real: women proved they could do work society had called men's work, and many women speak in their wartime letters and diaries of new pay, new skills and new independence. But the continuity was real too. Women were usually paid less than men for the same work; many families and newspapers still treated paid work as a pause until marriage; and after 1945 most women left or lost their wartime jobs as men returned, and the women's services were wound down. Historians therefore describe the war as opening a door that did not stay open — yet the experience fed the later campaigns for equal pay and equal rights. Perspectives differed: a young WAAAF radar operator and a country family expecting their daughter back in the kitchen experienced the same war very differently.

4. Rights and freedoms under the National Security Act 1939 (VC2HH10K19.E03)

To run a total war, the federal parliament passed the **National Security Act 1939**. The Act let the government make regulations — rules with the force of law — for the defence of the country. Figure 8 sets out the main controls and their effect on rights and freedoms.

Controls under the National Security Act 1939 (VC2HH10K19.E03)

Control	What it did	Effect on rights and freedoms
Censorship	Checked what newspapers, radio, films and mail could publish or say	Limited freedom of speech and of the press
Internment	Detained people seen as a threat without trial - German, Italian and Japanese residents, and members of some groups	Took away personal liberty without a court
Banning groups	Made some groups unlawful, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, the Australia First Movement, and (for a time) the Communist Party	Limited freedom of belief and of association
Manpower controls	Directed workers into essential jobs and controlled who could work where	Limited freedom to choose work
Rationing and taxes	Limited fuel, clothing and some food; the Commonwealth took over income tax in 1942	Controlled daily life and people's money

Table of controls under the National Security Act 1939 with three columns (control; what it did; effect on rights and freedoms): censorship checked what newspapers, radio, films and mail could publish, limiting freedom of speech and of the press; internment detained people seen as a threat without trial, taking away personal liberty without a court; banning groups made some groups unlawful, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, the Australia First Movement and (for a time) the Communist Party, limiting freedom of belief and of association; manpower controls directed workers into essential jobs, limiting freedom to choose work; rationing and taxes limited fuel, clothing and some food and gave the Commonwealth control of income tax from 1942, controlling daily life and people's money.

Figure 8. Controls under the National Security Act 1939 (source: National Archives of Australia; accessed 26 August 2026).

Three terms need defining at first use, as the house rules require:

- **Censorship** — the checking of news, letters, films and broadcasts before or after publication, and the banning of material the censor judges harmful to the war effort.
- **Internment** — detention (imprisonment) by the state without charge or trial. During World War II, thousands of people in Australia were interned, including residents of German, Italian and Japanese background — many of whom had lived in Australia for years — and seamen from enemy ships.
- **Manpower controls** — government direction of workers into jobs judged essential to the war effort, so that a worker could be ordered to stay in, or move to, a particular job.

The consequences for individual rights and freedoms were direct. Censorship limited freedom of speech and of the press: war news was checked, and private mail was opened and read. Internment took away personal liberty without a court: people were locked up for what they were, not for what they had done. Banning groups limited freedom of belief and of association: the **Australia First Movement**, a small group accused of sympathy for Japan and Germany, was banned in 1942 and its leaders interned; the **Communist Party** was banned from 1940 to 1942; and the **Jehovah's Witnesses**, a religious group whose members refused to fight or salute the flag, were banned in 1941. Manpower controls limited the freedom to choose work, and rationing of petrol, clothing and some foods, together with the Commonwealth's 1942 takeover of income tax, reached into daily life and people's money.

Not every control survived a legal challenge. In 1943 the High Court of Australia heard the case of the banned Jehovah's Witnesses against the Commonwealth. Figure 9 presents the ruling as Source 2; worked source analysis 2 reads it.

SOURCE 2

The courts check wartime power

In 1943 the High Court of Australia decided the case *Adelaide Company of Jehovah's Witnesses Incorporated v Commonwealth*. The Court found that the regulations the government used to ban the Jehovah's Witnesses went beyond what was needed to defend the country, and it struck them down.

Summary of the ruling, High Court of Australia, *Adelaide Company of Jehovah's Witnesses Inc v Commonwealth* [1943] HCA 12. A legal primary source on wartime rights and freedoms.

*Source card titled 'The courts check wartime power' summarising the ruling of the High Court of Australia in *Adelaide Company of Jehovah's Witnesses Incorporated v Commonwealth*, 1943: the Court found that the regulations the government used to ban the Jehovah's Witnesses went beyond what was needed to defend the country, and it struck them down.*

Figure 9. Source 2 — the High Court checks wartime power, 1943 (source: High Court of Australia, *Adelaide Company of Jehovah's Witnesses Incorporated v Commonwealth* [1943] HCA 12; accessed 26 August 2026).

The Court struck the regulations down: even in wartime, the government's power had to stay within what defence truly needed. The decision is a key primary source for the history of rights and freedoms in Australia, because it shows that the wartime controls were contested at the time, not only criticised later.

5. Perspectives on the home front: a contested balance (VC2HH10K19)

The home front was not one experience. A Darwin resident who fled the town in 1942, an Italian-Australian interned without trial, a WAAAF radar operator earning her own pay, a farmer directed to grow what the government ordered, and a newspaper editor told what he might print — each lived a different war. That is why the content description speaks of *experiences and historical perspectives*, in the plural.

The sharpest debate, then and now, is whether the controls of part 4 were justified. Figure 10 sets out the two strongest positions side by side. Read each in its strongest form before you judge.

Were the home-front controls justified? Two strong positions



Both positions use real evidence. The debate turns on how to weigh security against rights in wartime.

Two-panel diagram steelmanning the debate over the home-front controls. Left panel, 'Yes: needed to win the war': Australia faced a real threat with Darwin and Sydney attacked and ships sunk off the coast; censorship kept military information from the enemy; manpower controls kept essential jobs filled; internment and banning of hostile groups aimed to stop sabotage. Right panel, 'No: they went too far': people were locked up without trial, including residents whose only 'crime' was their nationality; banning a religious group struck at freedom of belief; censorship could silence fair criticism of government; and the High Court struck the Jehovah's Witnesses regulations down as beyond what defence needed.

Figure 10. Were the home-front controls justified? Two strong positions (source: section 3G, part 5).

Both positions rest on real evidence, and historians weigh them differently. In your answers to Q11, you are marked on the quality of your reasoning — how well you use evidence from both panels — not on which side you choose.

6. Bringing it together (VC2HH10K19)

The world wars left deep marks on Australian society, and the consequences can be gathered under three headings: **the war reached home** (Darwin, Sydney Harbour, ships sunk off the coast, the presence of allied forces and prisoner-of-war camps); **women's roles changed in part** (the services, the factories, the Land Army — and the return of old expectations after 1945); and **the state grew** (censorship, internment, banning of groups, manpower controls, rationing and income tax — some of which, like federal income tax, outlasted the war). Continuity and change run through all three: the war changed daily life greatly, yet many attitudes — above all about who should do paid work — continued, and were only challenged later. As you move on in this book, compare this section's home front with the experiences of those who served overseas studied in section 3D: two sides of one war, and two sets of perspectives on it.

Sources for this section

Retrieval date for all online sources: **26 August 2026.**

1. National Archives of Australia, 'Australia at war: 3 September 1939' (Menzies broadcast reproduced in Figure 2 as Source 1, abridged and lightly modernised), naa.gov.au.
2. High Court of Australia, *Adelaide Company of Jehovah's Witnesses Incorporated v Commonwealth* [1943] HCA 12 (ruling summarised in Figure 9 as Source 2), austlii.edu.au.

3. Australian War Memorial, 'Bombing of Darwin', 'Sydney under attack' and 'Australians at war: home front' (dates, events and human costs in Figures 3 and 4), awm.gov.au.
4. Department of Veterans' Affairs, Anzac Portal, 'Women in the war' and 'The home front' (women's services, leaders, Land Army and factory numbers in Figures 5–7), anzacportal.dva.gov.au.
5. National Archives of Australia, 'Internment camps', 'Censorship' and 'National Security Act 1939' (controls in Figure 8; internment, banning of groups and manpower controls in part 4), naa.gov.au.
6. National Museum of Australia, 'Rationing and the home front' (rationing of petrol, clothing and food in part 4), nma.gov.au.

Worked examples

Both analyses below use the same five moves: (1) identify the source; (2) describe the content; (3) explain the context; (4) read the perspective and purpose; (5) state the significance and the inference.

Worked source analysis 1 — with help

Question. Read Source 1 (Figure 2): Prime Minister Robert Menzies's radio broadcast of 3 September 1939. What can historians learn from this source about how Australians learned of the war, and about the mood the government wanted to set?

Working	Comment
Step 1: Identify the source. It is a national radio broadcast by the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, on 3 September 1939, the day Australia entered World War II.	Start with what the source <i>is</i> : an official spoken announcement to the whole nation, not a private letter or a newspaper opinion.
Step 2: Describe the content. Menzies says it is his "sad duty" to tell Australians officially that, because Germany has kept up her invasion of Poland, Britain has declared war on Germany — and that, as a result, Australia is also at war.	Use the source's own words where you can: "sad duty", "as a result".
Step 3: Explain the context. Australia entered the war because Britain entered it: the two countries' ties of empire and defence meant that Britain's war was, in the government's view, Australia's war. Radio was the fastest way to reach every household at once in 1939.	Context explains <i>why</i> the announcement was made this way: one voice, one moment, for a whole nation.
Step 4: Read the perspective and purpose. The tone is grave, not cheering: "sad duty" sets a mood of duty and sorrow, not excitement. Note what the source does not say: nothing about the war's likely cost, length or reach to Australia itself.	Perspectives include what a source does not say. In 1939 no leader could foresee Darwin or Sydney Harbour under attack.
Step 5: State significance and inference. Historians can infer that most Australians first heard of the war as a duty to Britain, framed in sadness. The source is significant as the opening moment of the home-front story this section studies.	An inference must be based on evidence in the source plus its context — not on what you already assume.

Answer: the broadcast shows a nation entering the war as Britain's partner, addressed in a mood of sad duty; it is the starting point for every consequence on the home front that follows in this section.

Worked source analysis 2 — with help

Question. Read Source 2 (Figure 9): a summary of the High Court's 1943 ruling in *Adelaide Company of Jehovah's Witnesses Incorporated v Commonwealth*. Why is this ruling a significant primary source for the history of rights and freedoms on the home front?

Working	Comment
Step 1: Identify the source. It is a summary of a judgment of the High Court of Australia, delivered in 1943, in a case brought by the banned religious group, the Jehovah's Witnesses, against the Commonwealth government.	A court judgment is an official public source — and a primary source for the wartime debate over rights.
Step 2: Describe the content. The Court found that the regulations used to ban the Jehovah's Witnesses went beyond what was needed to defend the country, and it struck them down.	The key words are <i>went beyond</i> : the Court did not deny the war power; it denied that this use of it was needed for defence.
Step 3: Explain the context. The Jehovah's Witnesses had been banned in 1941 under regulations made under the National Security Act 1939, because their members refused to fight or to salute the flag. The war was at its height: Darwin had been bombed the year before.	Context shows the pressure the Court was under: to rule against the government in the middle of a war is a strong act.
Step 4: Read the perspective and purpose. The government's view was that a group refusing to fight weakened the war effort; the Witnesses' view was that their faith came before the state. The Court's purpose was to decide whether the regulations stayed within the defence power granted by parliament.	A strong analysis presents the strongest case on each side before judging — the same habit as Figure 10.
Step 5: State significance and inference. Historians can infer that wartime controls were contested at the time, and that even in 1943 an Australian court would limit them. The ruling is significant as evidence that rights and freedoms did not simply disappear in wartime — they were fought over.	Connect the source back to the content description: how these changes affected individual rights and freedoms.

Answer: the ruling is significant because it shows the wartime expansion of government power being checked by law, at the height of the war — direct primary evidence for the history of rights and freedoms on the Australian home front.

Practice questions

With help

Q1. Entering the war. Use Source 1 (Figure 2).

- Who announced Australia's entry into World War II, and on what date?
- In your own words, define *the home front* as this section uses the term.
- Why does Menzies call the announcement his "sad duty" rather than a call to cheer?

Q2. The war reaches Australia. Use Figures 3 and 4.

- Name the event of 19 February 1942 and state why it was significant at a national level.
- Give the date and human cost of the Sydney Harbour attack, and name the ship sunk in the harbour.
- Which row of Figure 4 is a *contested claim* rather than a battle? State what makes it contested.

Q3. Women's roles. Use Figures 5, 6 and 7.

- Name two women's services and the woman who led each.
- How many women worked in factories before the war, and how many by 1944?
- Give one change and one continuity in women's roles across the war years.

Q4. Rights and freedoms. Use Figure 8.

- (a) Match each control to the freedom it limited: internment; censorship; manpower controls.
- (b) Define *internment* and say who was interned in Australia during World War II.
- (c) Name two groups banned during the war and the ground on which each was opposed to the war (political or religious).

Q5. Source skills. Use Source 2 (Figure 9).

- (a) Is Source 2 a primary or a secondary source for the history of wartime rights? Explain your answer.
- (b) State one thing the source's content shows about the government's wartime power.

Q6. Perspectives. Give two examples of people on the home front who experienced the war differently, and say why their perspectives differed.

On your own

Q7. Consequences and continuities for women (VC2HH10K19.E01). Explain two consequences of World War II for women's roles in Australia, and two continuities — ways their roles stayed the same from before the war to after it. Use at least two named examples (services, organisations, places or people) from part 3.

Q8. Impact at local and national level (VC2HH10K19.E02). Choose one of the bombing of Darwin or the Sydney Harbour attack. Describe the event, then explain its impact at a local level and at a national level.

Q9. The National Security Act 1939 (VC2HH10K19.E03). Describe two controls made under the Act and the consequence of each for individual rights and freedoms. Then explain what the High Court's 1943 ruling in the Jehovah's Witnesses case shows about those controls.

Q10. Contested history. Explain why the 'Brisbane Line' is studied as a contested claim rather than a settled fact. Name the two sides of the 1942 argument and the later check on the claim.

Q11. Debate. "The home-front controls of World War II were justified." Use Figure 10. Set out the strongest case on each side, then give your own reasoned view. You are marked on the quality of your reasoning, not on the side you choose.

Q12. Significance. Choose the single most significant consequence of the world wars for Australian society studied in this section. State two criteria you used to judge significance, and argue your choice in one paragraph.

Answers

Q1. (a) Prime Minister Robert Menzies, 3 September 1939. (b) The civilians, work and daily life of a country at war, away from the battlefields, and the way war shapes them. (c) Because it set a mood of duty and sorrow for a war that would cost lives, not excitement; it framed the war as a sad necessity.

Q2. (a) The bombing of Darwin; the largest single attack by a foreign power on Australia, which shattered the belief that the country was safe behind its oceans. (b) 31 May to 8 June 1942; 21 Allied sailors killed; the harbour barracks ship HMAS Kuttatubul. (c) The 'Brisbane Line': Eddie Ward claimed a plan existed to give up northern Australia, Menzies and Fadden denied it, and a royal commission found no official plan — so it is a claim to analyse, not a fact to report.

Q3. (a) Any two: WAAAF — Clare Stevenson; AWAS — Sybil Irving. (b) About 171,000 before the war; about 286,000 by 1944. (c) Change: women took jobs once done by men (factories, farms, the services). Continuity: women were usually paid less, and after 1945 most left or lost those jobs as men returned.

Q4. (a) Internment — personal liberty without a court; censorship — freedom of speech and of the press; manpower controls — freedom to choose work. (b) Detention by the state without charge or trial; thousands of people, including residents of German, Italian and Japanese background and seamen from enemy ships. (c) Any two: the Australia First Movement (political — accused of sympathy for Japan and Germany); the Communist Party (political); the Jehovah's Witnesses (religious — members refused to fight or salute the flag).

Q5. (a) Primary: it is a summary of a judgment delivered in 1943, a document produced at the time by the court whose actions historians study. (b) That the government's wartime power had a legal limit: regulations going beyond what defence needed could be struck down.

Q6. Any two with reasons, for example: a WAAAF radar operator (new pay, skills and independence) and a family expecting their daughter back in the kitchen after the war; an Italian-Australian interned without trial (the war as injustice) and a censor defending the war effort (the war as necessity). Perspectives differed because people stood in different places: the same control was protection to one and harm to another.

Q7. Consequences: women entered work once done by men — about 286,000 in factories by 1944, almost 50,000 in the armed services, about 3,400 in the Land Army at its peak; many gained pay, skills and independence. Continuities: lower pay than men for the same work; the expectation that paid work ended at marriage; after 1945 most women left or lost wartime jobs and the services were wound down. Examples: WAAAF (Clare Stevenson), AWAS (Sybil Irving), WRANS, AWLA, Maribyrnong munitions.

Q8. Darwin: two raids on 19 February 1942 by Japanese carrier and land-based aircraft on the harbour, town and air base; at least 236 killed. Local: the civilian population fled or were moved south and the town's normal life ended. National: the belief in safety behind the oceans was shattered; fear of invasion spread; defence planning changed. (Sydney Harbour accepted likewise: midget submarines, 31 May to 8 June 1942, HMAS Kuttatubul sunk with 21 Allied sailors killed; local fear, blackouts and stronger defences; national shock that the war had reached the largest city.)

Q9. Any two controls with consequences, for example: censorship — news and mail checked, limiting freedom of speech and of the press; internment — thousands detained without trial, including German, Italian and Japanese-background residents, taking away personal liberty without a court. The 1943 ruling shows the controls were contestable in law: the High Court struck the Jehovah's Witnesses regulations down as going beyond what defence needed.

Q10. Because the two sides of 1942 disagreed and the evidence did not settle the matter at the time: Eddie Ward (Minister for the Army, Curtin Labor government) claimed the previous Menzies and Fadden governments had planned to give up northern Australia; Menzies and Fadden denied it; a royal commission after the war found no official plan or document. Historians therefore treat it as a wartime political claim and a fear of the time.

Q11. Answers will vary. Award: the strongest case for each side (for: real attacks on Darwin and Sydney, military secrets, essential work; against: detention without trial, banning a religious group, censorship of fair criticism, the High Court's ruling), then a reasoned view weighing the two.

Q12. Answers will vary. Award: a clear choice; two stated criteria (for example, how many people it affected, how long the change lasted, how much daily life changed); a paragraph arguing the case with section evidence.

Fully-worked solutions

Q1.

- (a) The Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, announced Australia's entry into World War II by radio on 3 September 1939.
- (b) The home front is the civilians, work and daily life of a country at war, away from the battlefields — and the way the war shapes them.
- (c) “Sad duty” frames the war as a grave necessity that would cost lives, not a cause for cheering. The mood matters: the government asked Australians to accept the war as duty, which is how the total war of parts 2 to 5 could be organised.

Q2.

- (a) The bombing of Darwin on 19 February 1942. It was significant at a national level because it was the largest single attack by a foreign power on Australia, and it shattered the belief that the country was safe behind its oceans.
- (b) The Sydney Harbour attack ran from 31 May to 8 June 1942. Japanese midget submarines entered the harbour and a torpedo sank the harbour barracks ship HMAS Kuttabul, killing 21 Allied sailors.
- (c) The ‘Brisbane Line’ row. It is contested because Eddie Ward claimed in 1942 that the previous governments had planned to give up northern Australia, Menzies and Fadden denied it, and a royal commission after the war found no official plan. A claim that serious people disputed, and that an official inquiry could not confirm, is studied as a claim — and as evidence of wartime fear and politics — not as a fact.

Q3.

- (a) The WAAAF, led by Director Clare Stevenson, and the AWAS, led by Controller Sybil Irving. (Also accepted: the WRANS; the AWLA.)
- (b) About 171,000 women worked in factories before the war and about 286,000 by 1944.
- (c) Change: women took up work once done by men — in factories such as the Maribyrnong munitions works, on farms through the Land Army, and in the armed services as radar operators, drivers and signallers. Continuity: women were usually paid less than men for the same work, and after 1945 most left or lost those jobs as men returned.

Q4.

- (a) Internment limited personal liberty without a court. Censorship limited freedom of speech and of the press. Manpower controls limited the freedom to choose work.
- (b) Internment is detention by the state without charge or trial. Those interned in Australia during World War II included thousands of residents of German, Italian and Japanese background — many long settled in Australia — and seamen from enemy ships.
- (c) The Australia First Movement, opposed on political grounds (accused of sympathy for Japan and Germany), banned in 1942; and the Jehovah's Witnesses, opposed on religious grounds (members refused to fight or salute the flag), banned in 1941. (Also accepted: the Communist Party, political, banned 1940–42.)

Q5.

- (a) Source 2 is a primary source for the history of wartime rights: it reports a judgment delivered by the High Court of Australia in 1943 — a document produced at the time by the very institution whose actions historians study. (The summary printed here is a secondary presentation of that primary judgment; the judgment itself is the primary source.)
- (b) It shows that the government's wartime power had a legal limit: regulations that went beyond what defence needed could be — and were — struck down.

Q6.

Model pair. A young WAAAF radar operator experienced the war as new pay, new skills and new independence; her family, expecting her back in the kitchen once the war ended, experienced the same years as a pause in the proper order of things. Their perspectives differed because they stood in different places: for her the war opened a door; for them it only let her through it. A second pair (also accepted): an Italian-Australian interned without trial experienced the war as injustice done by his own country, while the censor checking the newspapers experienced it as necessary defence.

Q7.

Model answer. Two consequences. First, women entered work that society had called men's work: about 286,000 women worked in factories by 1944 (up from about 171,000 before the war), almost 50,000 served in the armed services — the WAAAF under Clare Stevenson, the AWAS under Sybil Irving, the WRANS — and the Australian Women's Land Army sent about 3,400 members at its peak to work on farms. Second, many women gained pay, skills and a sense of independence they had not had before; their letters and diaries record it, and the experience fed later campaigns for equal pay and equal rights.

Two continuities. First, women were usually paid less than men for the same work, and much public opinion still treated paid work for women as a pause until marriage. Second, after 1945 most women left or lost their wartime jobs as men returned, and the women's services were wound down — the door opened by the war did not stay open. Historians therefore describe the war's effect on women's roles as real change layered on deep continuity.

Q8.

Model answer (Darwin). On the morning of 19 February 1942, Japanese carrier aircraft and land-based aircraft raided Darwin in two attacks, hitting the harbour, the town and the air base. At least 236 people were killed and hundreds more wounded — the largest single attack by a foreign power on Australia.

Local impact: Darwin's civilian population mostly fled or were moved south, and the town's normal life ended for the rest of the war; the people of the north lived under the threat of further raids.

National impact: the raid shattered the belief that Australia was safe behind its oceans. Fear of invasion spread through the country, defence planning changed, and the government's new wartime powers (part 4) gained acceptance that they might not have gained in peacetime. The same pattern — local attack, national shock — appears in the Sydney Harbour attack of 31 May to 8 June 1942, when midget submarines sank HMAS Kuttabul with the loss of 21 Allied sailors and brought the war to the doorstep of Australia's largest city.

Q9.

Model answer. Control one: censorship. News, letters, films and broadcasts were checked, and material judged harmful was banned — limiting freedom of speech and of the press; Darwin's true damage was hidden from the public at the time. Control two: internment. Thousands of people, including residents of German, Italian and Japanese background, were detained without charge or trial — taking away personal liberty without a court, for what people were rather than what they had done. (Also accepted: banning of groups; manpower controls; rationing and the 1942 income tax takeover.)

The High Court's 1943 ruling in *Adelaide Company of Jehovah's Witnesses Incorporated v Commonwealth* shows that these controls had a legal limit even at the height of the war: the Court struck the banning regulations down because they went beyond what defence needed. The controls were therefore never absolute — they were contested at the time, and checked by law.

Q10.

Model answer. The 'Brisbane Line' is studied as a contested claim because the evidence does not settle the 1942 argument. On one side, Eddie Ward, Minister for the Army in the Curtin Labor government, claimed that the previous governments of Menzies and Fadden had planned to abandon northern Australia to an invader. On the other side, Menzies and Fadden denied that any such plan had been adopted. The later check was a royal commission after the war, which found no official plan or document supporting the claim. Because a serious public dispute ended without

the claim being confirmed, historians treat the ‘Brisbane Line’ as a wartime political claim and as evidence of the fear of 1942 — not as a settled fact about defence planning.

Q11.

Model answer. The strongest case for the controls: Australia faced a real threat — Darwin bombed, Sydney Harbour attacked, ships sunk off the coast — and total war needed total organisation. Censorship kept military information from the enemy; manpower controls kept the factories, farms and mines staffed; internment and the banning of hostile groups aimed to prevent sabotage. On this case, rights were limited to save the country that guaranteed them.

The strongest case against: the controls went beyond military need. People were locked up without trial, including residents whose only ‘crime’ was their nationality; a religious group, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, was banned for its beliefs; censorship could silence fair criticism of the government, not just enemy secrets. The High Court agreed in part: in 1943 it struck the Jehovah’s Witnesses regulations down as going beyond what defence needed.

Reasoned view (example): the controls were justified in aim but not in every act. The aim — defending a country under attack — was real, and some limits (censorship of military information, direction of essential work) were closely tied to it. But detention without trial and the banning of a religious group failed the test the High Court applied: they were not needed for defence, and they harmed the very freedoms the war was said to protect. A view like this, argued from evidence on both sides, earns full marks whichever side it finally chooses.

Q12.

Model answer. Choice: the expansion of government power over daily life (part 4). Criteria: (1) how long the change lasted; (2) how many people it touched.

Argument: the war brought the state into daily life as never before — censorship, internment, banning of groups, manpower controls, rationing, and the Commonwealth’s 1942 takeover of income tax. By the first criterion, it is the most lasting consequence: federal income tax, begun as a wartime measure, never returned to the states and still funds the Commonwealth today. By the second, every working adult and every reader of a newspaper was touched by it. The change in women’s roles was great but reversed in part after 1945, and the attacks on Darwin and Sydney were shocking but short; the growth of the state reshaped Australian life for good. On both criteria, the expansion of government power is the most significant consequence of the world wars for Australian society studied in this section.