WAR IN THE ASIA PACIFIC

Learning Outcomes:

How was peace challenged in the 1930s in the Asia Pacific?
Why did World War Two break out in the Asia Pacific?

BACKGROUND

The term Asia-Pacific refers to states of Asia which border the Pacific Ocean. According to this definition, the Pacific is not defined as a body of water which divides the states. Rather, it is a link which unifies the whole area.

Map of the Asia-Pacific region

HOW WAS PEACE CHALLENGED IN THE 1930S IN THE ASIA PACIFIC?

Background

By the 1900s, Japan had annexed Korea and Taiwan. Japan also had wide political and economic influence in Manchuria and China.

The 1930s saw Japan further expanding in Manchuria and Mongolia because for them, it was an issue of survival. The Japanese justified their aggression by calling it Manchurian-Mongolian seimeisen or ‘lifeline’ argument.
1. The Economic Argument

Japan became more militaristic because Japan was a country which lacked raw materials. Japan only had a few coal and iron deposits. She also did not have petroleum, rubber and high grade iron ore. Neither did Japan have enough food for a population which was increasing rapidly. Lacking natural resources, some Japanese political leaders feared that an aggressive policy was needed to ensure Japan’s continued expansion.

Another economic argument argues that the Great Depression made Japan more militaristic. When the Wall Street Crash occurred in 1929, Japanese exports declined sharply when many countries adopted protectionist policies. This means that countries tried to protect their home industries through a policy of high taxes on particular foreign goods.

Japan was badly affected by these protectionist policies because there was a heavy tax on Japanese silk. Silk was Japan's main export. As a result of US protectionist policies, the demand for Japanese silk in the US fell drastically. By 1932, the price of silk was less than one-fifth the 1923 figure. Unemployment, bankruptcies and poverty struck Japan.

Rural Japan was worst hit because Japanese farmers produced silk to supplement their income. To make matters worse, a drought in 1932 worsened the farmers' plight. There were food shortages and food prices soared. Many landless peasants joined the army to make ends meet. Others joined patriotic societies, which promoted the use of violence and militarism to solve Japan’s problems.

2. The Rise of Militarism

Japan’s aggressive foreign policy was also the result of the rise of militarism in Japan. This was seen in:

- The rise of patriotic societies in Japan
- The rise of political assassinations

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<td>194,100</td>
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<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>220,000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
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<td>1939</td>
<td>270,000</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>560</td>
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3. Aggressive Foreign Policy, 1931-1941

The Manchurian Crises 1931

An example of Japanese aggressive foreign policy in the 1930s is seen in their preoccupation with Manchuria, a country rich in raw materials like coal, timber, iron, soya
beans, grain and gold. It was also seen as a cheap source of manpower and an overseas market for Japanese exports.

In the 1930s, Manchurian warlord, Zhang Xueliang, adopted pro-Chinese policies. He allowed Chinese schools, businesses and banks to be set up in Manchuria. This worried Japan because they were concerned about Japanese interests in Manchuria.

Profile

(Zhang Xueliang) (June 3, 1901 - October 15, 2001), nicknamed the "Young Marshal", Zhang was the warlord of Manchuria and much of Northeast China. He was made warlord after the assassination of his father Zhang Zuolin in 1928. The Japanese assassinated his father because they believed that the younger Zhang, who was an opium addict, would be much more subject to Japanese influence. The younger Zhang however, overcame his opium addiction and declared his support for Chiang. He also ordered the execution of two pro-Tokyo officials at a dinner party in January 1929. When Japan annexed Manchuria following the Mukden Incident in 1931, Zhang's armies retreated from the front lines to preserve his sizable army.

On December 12 1936, the Young Marshall and another Chinese general, Yang Hu-cheng, kidnapped the Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek. They released him only when he agreed to fight Japan and end his squabbles with the Chinese Communist Party.

Following Chiang Kai-shek's release, the Young Marshal was tried, convicted, and placed under house arrest. In 1949, Zhang was transferred to Taiwan where he remained under house arrest, spending his time studying Ming dynasty poetry. Only in 1990, after the death of Chiang's son, Chiang Ching-kuo, did the Young Marshall gain his freedom. Zhang was the world's longest-serving political prisoner. After regaining his freedom, he emigrated to Honolulu, Hawaii in the 1990s where he died of pneumonia at the age of 100

In 1931, the Japanese army stationed in Manchuria which was called the Kwantung army manufactured an excuse to annex Manchuria.
On 18 September 1931, Kwantung army officers blew up a train carry Japanese passengers outside Mukden and blamed the incident on the Chinese. This was called the 'Mukden Incident'. Troops from the Kwantung Army then moved into Mukden and seized it. Soon, the Kwantung army then annexed the whole of Manchuria.

In March 1932, the Kwantung Army set up the puppet state of Manchuguo and installed the deposed Manchu emperor Henry Pu-Yi as it's Head of State. All important positions in the Manchukuo administration were then filled with Kwantung Army officials and Japanese advisers.

The Lytton Commission 1932 and Japan’s departure from the League of Nations

When China appealed to the League of Nations for help against Japan, the League set up the Lytton commission to investigate the Manchurian crisis.

The Lytton commission report had several weaknesses:

- They took too long to announce their decisions. The committee was set up in December 1931 but the League released it's findings only in October 1932.

- The report did not condemn Japan outright and take action against her. Instead the report, recognized Japan's special interests in Manchuria. They condemned Japan's aggression in Manchuria but they also condemned China for encouraging anti-Japanese feelings in Manchuria. China was also condemned for refusing to participate in negotiations with Japan.

- The Lytton Commission could not enforce their decisions. The committee recommended that Manchuria should become an autonomous region under Chinese sovereignty with special provision for Japanese economic interests. However, they could do little when Japan withdrew from the League of Nations.

Angered by the Lytton Commission reports, Japan left the League of Nations. It made Japan become increasingly diplomatically isolated. This means that Japan's relations with countries like the US, Britain and the US began to deteriorate.

Cartoon printed in 1931 about the League of Nations titled "Let Sam Do It." (New York Newspaper, 1931) iii

What does the source tell you about the League of Nations?

Why would the leading countries in the League of Nations have that mentality?

Why would the Manchurian crisis concern the US?
The Shanghai incident 1932

Peace was also challenged in the 1930s because of Japanese aggressive action in China. Immediately after the Manchurian incident, fighting between Chinese and Japanese troops broke out in Shanghai, China in January 1932. The incident was caused by a Chinese boycott of Japanese goods and anti-Japanese riots. The riots sparked off violence between rioters and Japanese troops protecting the nation’s enclave in the port of Shanghai.

Violence again occurred when Japanese monks sang patriotic songs to celebrate Japan’s successes in Manchuria. They sang their tune in a Chinese factory, which
provoked anti-Japanese riots. One of the monks was lynched by the angry Chinese mob, which led to another series of Sino-Japanese tensions.

In 1932, Japanese forces mobilized and attacked Shanghai, demanding that the Chinese army under Chinese general Cai Tingkai withdraw from the defense of Shanghai. When he refused, the Japanese waged a three-month undeclared war before a truce was reached in March 1932.

In the fighting, 18,000 civilians were killed or missing and 240,000 people lost their homes. Shanghai was a city under siege. The foreign-controlled areas, the International Settlement and the French Concession, were packed with Chinese refugees trying to escape the Japanese.

Forward China Policy 1933-1937

In the 1930s, Japan embarked on a 'Forward China Policy' in northern China. The Kwantung Army was at the vanguard of this policy and fought numerous border skirmishes as part of their effort to create a Japanese-dominated buffer zone in northern China. There were several reasons for their aggressive foreign policy:

a) Japanese experience in Manchuria made army leaders feel that the western powers would not oppose them.
b) North China was rich in coal and iron – resources that would help Japan to become a great power.

c) Anti-Japanese riots and boycotts of Japanese goods organized by the Chinese provoked them to act further.

d) Guomindang policy was to avoid an all-out war with Japan which encouraged Japanese aggression.

After 1931, Japanese troops took over Jehol, another province north of the Great Wall of China, and then crossed over into Hopei, where they established as a a demilitarized zone 30 to 40 miles wide between Peiping and Tietsin. In this DMZ, no Chinese troops were to be in this area without Japanese consent. The Japanese advance was halted by the Tanggku truce of May 31, 1933 which then turned the whole Hopei region into a demilitarized zone.

In 1935, on the grounds that China had violated the Tanggku truce by refusing to end anti-Japanese activities, the Kwantung Army leaders demanded that all anti-Japanese officials be removed from power. The Chinese refused.

In 1936, through political arrangements with puppet governors, Japan then annexed Inner Mongolia and north China. Japan also annexed Hebei and Chahar province.

China did not dare react firmly because Chiang Kai-Shek, the leader of Guomindang China ,believed that China's military and industrial capability was weak compared to Japan. He believed that as long as China’s warlords were feuding against each other, war with Japan was unrealistic. Instead, China adopted a policy of compliance and conciliation.

Chiang was also concerned that with fascism on the rise in Europe and the isolationist policy of the USA, the international climate was not suited for effective Chinese resistance to Japan. Chiang felt that China’s priority should lie with defeating the Chinese communists.

**Deteriorating Japan-Western Countries relations**

Another reason for Japan’s aggressive actions in the 1930s and anger with the western countries came from deteriorating relations between the West and Japan.

**The Versailles Treaty**

In World War I, Japan fought on the side of the Allies and joined the new League of Nations in 1919. Japan wanted a racial equality clause included in the treaty but they were overruled by the other political leaders. Many Japanese felt insulted and felt the West did not consider Asians as their equals.

**Immigration**

In 1924, America’s attempt to prevent Japanese immigration into USA worsened Japan-American relations. The practice of segregated schooling in San Francisco and other US states worsened the immigration issue. Many Japanese felt unfairly treated.
The Washington Naval Conference

The Washington Naval Conference Agreement as also a sore-point in Japan's relations with the West. At the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-22, the Japanese delegation was persuaded to sign an agreement to scale down her naval forces. American, British and Japanese naval tonnage for capital ships would be in the ratio of 5:5:3 respectively and Japanese nationalists believed they were presented with a poor deal.

In December 1934, with the Washington Naval Conference agreement due to expire in 1936, Japan gave formal notice that they would not renew the Washington Naval Treaty. The Washington Naval Treaty was one of the the last treaty link Japan had with the West. By ending the treaty, there could be more likelihood for conflicts in the Pacific-Asian region.

Profile
When Japan ended the Washington Naval Treaty commitments, they announced that they would begin building the giant battleships of the “Yamato” class. The Yamato was the largest battleship ever built. She weighed 64,000 tons, had 9 18-inch main guns and a total of 146 anti-aircraft guns on board.
The Amau Doctrine

By 1934, an emerging foreign policy based on expansion was clearly emerging. A spokesman of the Japanese Foreign Office, Eiji Amau, claimed that Japan acted as “Guardian of peace and order in East Asia”. As such Japan claimed the right to oppose loans or any form of support by other nations to China. He claimed that China did not have the right to resist Japan's expansion. This was called the Amau Doctrine, a predecessor to the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperrity Sphere.

WHAT RESISTANCE DID JAPAN FACE IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC AREA BETWEEN 1936-1937?

By 1936, however, Japan's aggression in North China and Manchuria faced some degree of resistance

China's resistance

In China, Guomindang generals Zhang Xueliang and Yang Hu-cheng kidnapped their own leader, Chiang Kai-Shek in 1936. His life in danger, Chiang was forced to end his campaign against the communists and adopt a united front with them. The united front's objective was to resist future Japanese aggression in North China

The Japanese War Minister, General Hajime Sugiyama, was sufficiently concerned about Chinese nationalism to remark in May 1937, "The Chinese are developing a national resistance that could obstruct Japan's peaceful advance to it's very foundations"vii

What does this source tell you about how Sugiyama viewed Japanese policy in China?


In July 1937, full scale war broke out between China and Japan.

POINTS OF VIEW: WHO WAS TO BE BLAMED FOR THE MARCO POLO BRIDGE INCIDENT?

On 7 July 1937, Japanese and Chinese troops clashed at the Marco Polo Bridge, just north of Peking. On a regular patrol, one Japanese private was discovered missing. The Japanese unit demanded that they allowed to search the Chinese section to search for the missing soldier. Shots were exchanged between both sides. The missing private showed up shortly afterwards, but the Japanese demanded that the Chinese withdraw from the strategic Marco Polo Bridge and the railway bridge area. The Chinese refused.

Further exchange of gunfire between Chinese and Japanese troops carried on throughout the night, which led to a full-scale Japanese invasion of China and the start
of the Second World War in East Asia. 3.2 million Chinese soldiers and more than 1 million Japanese troops were involved in the war. As many as 10 million civilians perished in the 8 year conflict.

Who was responsible the Marco Polo Bridge Incident?

(1) The Japanese military

By 1936, the Japanese army took over the Chinese northern provinces of Jehol, Hebei and Chahar. The Japanese military leaders expected the Chinese government to back down over the Marco Polo Bridge Incident.

Japanese Kwantung Army leaders stationed in China also felt they had to teach China a lesson. The Chinese boycotts of Japanese goods irritated the Japanese and was very effective. The movement spread over the whole country and overseas. Japanese exports to China were back to 1908 levels and cut by more than half due to these boycotts.

The Japanese high command were annoyed by anti-Japanese sentiments and concerned about growing anti-Japanese sentiments. The Second GMD-CCP alliance had been formed and strikes and demonstrations were growing in intensity. They felt it was best to invade China while it's economy and military strength was still weak. They believed Chinese resistance would collapse within a month.

(2) The International Situation

The international scene was also favorable for further Japanese aggression in China. Stalin's purge of his officer corps in 1937 reduced the likelihood of war along the Russo-Japanese borders. It enabled Japan to concentrate her military resources on defeating China quickly.

(3) Japanese political control of the Kwantung Army was weak

In many aspects, the 'Marco Polo Bridge' was the Manchurian crises all over again. The same forces were at work. The army dictated events in northern China. The Tokyo government could not prevent the escalation of the war and struggled to keep pace with the military situation in China. By the end of the year, Japan had 200,000 soldiers in the field.

(4) The Japanese zaibatsus

The Japanese zaibatsus was also guilty of war-mongering. They favored war with China because they wanted China's potential markets, industries and natural resources. They wanted to secure their industrial investments in northern China by shattering Chinese business competition in northern and south China. They also wanted to end the Chinese boycotts of Japanese goods which hurt their businesses. When fighting started, the zaibatsus were firmly behind the army.

(5) Chiang Kai Shek

Generalissimo Chiang Kai Shek also had a role to play in the outbreak of the Second
Sino-Japanese War. In 1936, Chiang’s position in China was strengthened by the second GMD-CCP alliance. The alliance was signed several months before the start of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident. Always suspicious of Japanese intentions, Chiang was overconfident and spoiling for a fight in 1937. When Marco Bridge incident occurred, Chiang was supposed to have declared in private, ‘The time has come now to make the decision to fight’.

**Soviet Union’s resistance**

As Japan expanded into North China, the Soviet Union clashed with Japan over the border areas. These border conflicts occurred with increased frequency along the 3000 mile frontier separating the Soviet Union from Manchuguo.

Between 1937-1939, large-scale fighting broke out between Japanese and Soviet troops in militarily unimportant areas like Changkufeng (between Siberia and Japanese controlled Korea), Nomanhan and Khalkin Gol (between Manchuguo and Mongolia).

Japanese troops were defeated in 1938 but the Soviet troops halted at the border. In 1939, a non-aggression pact was signed between the Soviet Union and Japan over the disputed areas. According to the agreement, there would be a ceasefire in the disputed areas. Both sides exchanged prisoners of war and set up a joint commission to resolve their border disputes.
Western responses

In the face of Japanese aggression, the US responded by appeasing Japan. In 1932, after Japan attacked Shanghai, the US urged London to cooperate with the US to stop Japanese aggression. Britain refused to act in concert with the US because she was too preoccupied with recovering from the effects of the Great Depression.

The US was also recovering from the Great Depression. US policy in Asia was called the Hoover-Stimson doctrine. (This was named after President Herbert Hoover State Secretary Henry Stimson). This doctrine stated that the US would morally condemn Japanese action. US policy was to refuse to recognize any situation brought about by aggressive Japanese actions between 1932 - 1937.

In December 1937, the US gunboat Panay, escorting US tankers in the Yangtze River was bombed and sunk in China. It was an opportunity for the West to act. The crisis however passed when the US accepted Japan’s prompt apology and Japan’s agreement to pay for all damages.

WHY DID WORLD WAR TWO BREAK OUT IN THE ASIA PACIFIC?

War in the Asia Pacific began when Japan launched attacks against the US bases in the Philippines, the Pacific Islands and Hawaii. Simultaneously, Japan launched attacks against British Malaya and Hong Kong in December 1941. Why did Japan launch this series of attacks, thereby starting World War Two in the Pacific?

Japanese Militarism

Because of the popularity of militarism, military commanders in Japan became very influential in policy-making. After an attempted coup d'état on 26 February 1936 in Japan by the military, a rule was introduced in May of that year, that only serving officers could become military ministers was reinstated. This gave the military a veto over the cabinet, and the power to topple governments.

After Prince Fumimaro Konoe became prime minister for a second time, in 1940, his brain-child, the Imperial Rule Assistance Association, failed to deliver a popular civilian-controlled government capable of checking the military In October, General Hideki Tojo came to power in October 1941 and created what was effectively a military-bureaucratic regime., making war more likely.

Continuing the war in China

World War Two also broke out in the Asia-Pacific because by 1940, the war in China was not going well. Due to the immense population and rugged terrain of China, the Japanese army were engaged in a war of attrition in China.

The war consumed Japanese manpower, material and resources. There were already forty divisions tied up in the China campaign and 15 divisions stationed in Manchuguo to watch the Soviet-Manchuguo borders.

The Japanese were running out of resources to fight the war in China and only had a two year stockpile of fuel to continue the war. Coal and iron were still readily available in
north China and Manchuria. However, other essential war materials like oil, rubber, tin, scrap metal, tungsten, chrome, nickel and aluminum were also in short supply.

**German Invasion of the Soviet Union 1941**

Before 1941, Japan always worried about fighting a war on two fronts – one in Asia against China and the West, and the other against the Soviet Union.

In April 1941, Japan was able to conclude a neutrality agreement with Russia. This lessened the likelihood of a war against the Soviet Union in 1941 but the threat of a two-fronted war still concerned Japan.

In June 1941, Germany invaded Russia in June 1941 and Japanese military planners felt that this situation provided Japan a good opportunity to attack Pearl Harbor and Southeast Asia without being concerned about a two-fronted war.

**Fall of France and the Low Countries**

The opportunity for Japan to attack Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific was also indirectly caused by the quick defeat of France and the Low Countries.

By May 1940. Germany occupied the Low Countries and France. Britain was in the midst of fighting a desperate air-war with Germany called the Battle of Britain.

Japan felt that the Southeast Asian colonies of British Malaya, French Indo-China and the Dutch East-Indies (Indonesia) were vulnerable because the western powers in Europe were fighting for their survival. Japan was in an ideal position to attack Southeast Asia.

By 1940, Japan had forced Britain to close the Burma road which stretched from Lashio to Kunming. This road supplied Guomindang troops in Chungking.

As a result, by 1941, Japan was also able to pressurize the Vichy French government in Vietnam into allowing Japanese troops to use strategic air and naval bases in the Haiphong-Hanoi area (North Vietnam).

By July 1941, Japan had also demanded and received from the Vichy French government the right to land troops in Northern Indo-China and use air and naval bases there and were training for jungle warfare in Vietnam. They were also negotiating with Siam (Thailand) to remain neutral in the event of war with the western powers. Events in Europe therefore placed Japanese troops in an ideal position to launch their attacks against Southeast Asia.
**Burma Road**

*Vichy*: This is a city in central France, on the Allier River. In July 1940, after the Franco-German armistice, Marshal Henri Pétain set up his government in this city. Its effective control extended only to unoccupied France and its colonies. The Vichy government was never recognized by the Allies because it was seen as a German tool for control. When the Allies invaded North Africa in November 1942, Hitler annulled the armistice of 1940 and occupied all France.

**Worsening US-Japan relations**

US-Japan relations also became increasingly worse in the 1930s because of Japan’s aggressive foreign policy.

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<th>Japan’s invasion of China 1937</th>
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<td>• US accepts Japan’s apology and damage payments</td>
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| Japan’s occupation of Indo-China 1940 | |
|--------------------------------------| |
| • US expands size of their navy      | |
| • US moves Pacific Fleet to Pearl Harbor | |
| • US embargo on steel and scrap iron exports to Japan | |
| • US froze Japanese assets in the US | |
| • General trade embargo against Japan | |
| • Embargo of oil on Japan            | |
The USA controlled the Philippines and had a large navy and many bases throughout the Pacific. The USA also supported China in the war against Japan.

As Japan's influence grew in Asia, the relations between the USA and Japan worsened. In order to ensure the success of its military campaign in Southeast Asia, some Japanese military leaders felt that Japan had to weaken US power in the Asia-Pacific.

In 1940, Japan's moves into Indochina worsened Japan's relations with the USA. In September 1940, the Americans placed an embargo on steel and scrap-iron exports to Japan. This cut off Japan's construction materials by 80 percent.

The US also increased the size of their navy. In June 1940, US Congress approved the expansion of the US fleet by 17 battleships, 11 aircraft carriers, 40 cruisers, nearly 70 submarines and over 100 destroyers. The US Pacific fleet was ordered to move to Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. US forces in the Philippines also received an increased flow of supplies. US fighter pilots were also allowed to volunteer to serve in China as the 1st American Volunteer Group or Flying Tigers under General Claire Chennault.

In July 1941, US President Franklin D Roosevelt froze all Japanese assets in the US to retaliate against Japanese occupation of southern Indochina. He demanded that Japan withdraw immediately from Indochina and China. Britain and Holland also adopted embargoes against Japan. Although Japan still had a two-year stockpile of oil in 1941, Japan's military planners were in a difficult situation.

Although Japan still had a two year stockpile of oil, Japan was left with two options concerning their war in China

a) to negotiate a peace-settlement
or
b) wage war on the rest of Asia to gain its precious resources, particularly oil from the Dutch East Indies and Borneo.
**Last Ditch Attempt at negotiations**

In October 1941, the US announced that they would not resume normal relations unless Japan evacuated both Indo-China and China. Japan would not concede with this demand because the war in China had already resulted in 185,000 dead after four years of war.

The Prime Minister of Japan, Prince Konoye Fumimaro, resigned. War minister, General Hideki Tojo, formed the new government. His appointment made war more likely because he saw war as the only means to solve Japan's problems.

In December, Tojo sent Admiral Saburu Kurusu and Japan’s ambassador to the US, Nomura Kichisaburo to negotiate for a peaceful solution.

These negotiations however failed to improve relations. The US proposed an immediate withdrawal from southern Indo-China and China. On the other hand, Japan was agreeable to only a phased withdrawal from China over the next 25 years.

Unknown to Kurus and Kichisaburo, the Japanese fleet had already set out to attack Pearl Harbor. Tojo's plan was to destroy the Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor and maintain naval supremacy in the Pacific Ocean.

On 7 December 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and crippled the Pacific Fleet. Overall, 12 ships of the US Pacific Fleet were sunk or breached, and nine were damaged. Losses included the battleship Arizona and Oklahoma. Aircraft losses were 164 destroyed and 159 damaged. The American dead numbered 2388.

The day after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, Japanese troops attacked Hong Kong, Malaya and Burma. Wake and Midway islands were bombed. World War Two in Southeast Asia and the Pacific had begun.
Endnotes

i http://www.dean.usma.edu/history/web03/atlasses/ww2%20pacific/ww2%20pacific%20war%20index.htm


iii Corbis - DEC336-17

iv http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/map_sites/hist_sites.html#asia;
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vi http://www.akiraifukube.org/yamato_battleship_under_construction.jpg

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ix www.montoire-sur-le-loir.net/ museedesrencontres/

x Corbis: BE035992 and Corbis: US002020