

# World War-II Documentaries

All of these films are in the public domain. Most were made for the War Department. They are the best available quality, and are roughly grouped together by subject matter. On DVD-R or Mpeg2.

## Why We Fight Series:

Frank Capra directed or supervised this series of seven films to explain the war to both the troops and the home front. With additional war shorts on each volume. \$25 each or all 5 for \$100.

DVD Vol. 1:

**PRELUDE TO WAR** (1943) 52 min. "Why We Fight" #1

Directed by Frank Capra. Prelude to War, the Oscar-winning documentary, shows the viewer how diplomatic and political snafus made in the wake of World War I planted the seeds of World War II. Blame is pointed squarely at the American populace, who had come to believe that the problems of the rest of the world would never affect them. While America slumbered, Japan and Germany inexorably built their armies and launched their plans for world domination.

**THE NAZIS STRIKE** (1943) 43 min. "Why We Fight" #2

This tough-minded documentary masterfully assembles newsreel footage to trace the ascent of Adolf Hitler and his ravening hunger for global domination. After forcefully wresting the German government from more moderate politicians, Hitler installs himself as dictator. Having suppressed the Jewish people in Germany, Der Fuhrer invades the Rhineland and Austria, and subsequently calls for the annexation of Czechoslovakia. In spite of assuring the world of "peace in our time," he marches on Poland, leading to the conflict that became World War II.

**NEWS PARADES OF 1942, 1943 and 1944** 10 min. each

Castle Films compilation of newsreel highlights from World War II.

DVD Vol. 2:

**DIVIDE AND CONQUER** (1943) 57 min. "Why We Fight" #3

Utilizing visceral newsreel footage and maps, the documentary chronicles Hitler's stunning sweep across Europe. We watch as the Nazis overcome Denmark and Norway, repel the British Army, and force France into a humiliating surrender. We discover how ground-breaking Nazi military tactics and the duplicity of traitors lead to the fall of the majority of Central Europe. **THE BATTLE OF**

**BRITAIN** (1943) 53 min. "Why We Fight" #4

Narrated by double amputee RAF fighter pilot Douglas Bader, The Battle of Britain records the courage and resolve of the British people in the face of the constant bombings by Hitler's Luftwaffe. In 1940, Britain was virtually the only European nation not to have fallen to the German war machine. At the conclusion of the film Britain's pilots are readying an air assault that will finally lead to payback for Hitler's oppression.

DVD Vol. 3:

**THE BATTLE OF RUSSIA** (1943) 83 min. "Why We Fight" #5

In this Oscar-nominated documentary, we discover Russia's valiant resistance to the invasion throughout its history. The Russian people's strength of character was the key to their determination in prevailing against unstoppable German forces during some of the bloodiest battles of the World War II. The film is a wonderful compilation of authentic newsreel footage from both the U.S. Signal Corps and various Soviet sources.

**THE ALL-STAR BOND RALLY** (1945) 19 min.

Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, Betty Grable, Frank Sinatra, Harpo Marx, Carmen Miranda and many more Hollywood entertainers sell bonds.

**THE HOUSE I LIVE IN** (1945) 10 min.

Frank Sinatra pleads for religious tolerance to a group of young boys.

DVD Vol. 4:

**THE BATTLE OF CHINA** (1944) 63 min. "Why We Fight" #6

In this fascinating documentary we learn about the nation of China, its populace and the countries resolve to stop the invading forces of the Japanese during World War II. Starting with a short historical background to the country, we discover the reasons behind the Japanese desire for its conquest, and why they were confident of success. Ultimately, the events of the war in that region are chronicled, showing the Japanese forces taking control of portions of China to aid them in conquering all of Asia as well as the iron resistance of the Chinese people, who use all their ingenuity to fight Japanese aggression to the end.

**THE STILLWELL ROAD** (1945) 51 min.

Narrated by Ronald Reagan. This World War II documentary, narrated by actor (and future U.S. President) Ronald Reagan, homes in on the China-India-Burma arena of the war. The Stilwell Road (conceived by American General Joseph Stilwell) was a stunning feat of engineering and brute force construction carried out by 63,000 men. Designed to create a truck supply line that would provision the Chinese army fighting the Japanese forces on its home front, it took twenty-six months, many lives and \$150 million to build. The 478 mile road started in India, cut through the almost impenetrable jungles and mountains of Burma, and ended in China.

DVD Vol. 5:

**WAR COMES TO AMERICA** (1945) 66 min. "Why We Fight" #7

In this final installment of the "Why We Fight" propaganda series, the subject focuses on the United States of America. We learn of its good qualities and the things worth fighting for. With that established, we learn of the history of the United States' population shifting opinion towards siding with the Allies against the Axis until the attack on Pearl Harbour which brought America into full scale involvement in the war.

**IT'S EVERYBODY'S WAR** (1944) 16 min.

Narrated by Henry Fonda. 20th Century Fox short about the effect of the war and soldiers deaths on the home front.

**NEWS PARADE OF 1945** (1945) 10 min.

Newsreel look at the end of World War II.

**PEACE COMES TO AMERICA** (1945) 11 min.

The surrender of Japan and Germany, the aftermath around the world and homecoming.

## Victory At Sea

Twenty-six episode series on 7 DVDs. Each episode approx. 26 min. Directed by M. Clay Adams.

Victory At Sea is a great television series about World War-II produced by NBC in conjunction with the U.S. Navy. Most of the footage was shot by Navy cameramen. NBC edited the footage, added a host and the famous musical score by Richard Rogers. \$25 each or all 7 for \$150.

**Vol. 1:**

**DESIGN FOR WAR**

As the Second World War begins, England finds itself unprepared for Germany's modern submarine fleet. The United States and Canada begin sending aid by naval convoys as the British Isles

become isolated from the European mainland.

### **THE PACIFIC BOILS OVER**

Japan continues its expansion by staging surprise attacks on the American strongholds guarding the Pacific Ocean, including the naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Although their Pacific fleet is crippled, the United States responds with a declaration of war and begins gathering forces to halt the Japanese advance.

### **SEALING THE BREACH**

The United States Navy and Merchant Marines continue their convoys across the Atlantic Ocean to bring supplies to England, despite heavy losses to German U-boats and surface ships.

### **MIDWAY IS EAST**

As Hong Kong, Singapore, and the Philippines fall to Japanese invasions, the United States looks to stop the enemy's advance with a naval victory at the island of Midway.

## **VOL. 2:**

### **MEDITERRANEAN MOSAIC**

Germany and Italy try to consolidate their hold on the Mediterranean Sea, but two essential bastions of British strength--the Rock of Gibraltar and the island of Malta--refuse to surrender.

### **GUADALCANAL**

The United States begins its offensive campaign to halt the Japanese advance by invading Guadalcanal and capturing the island's valuable airfields.

### **RINGS AROUND RABAU**

The United States continues capturing enemy bases in the Solomons by conducting amphibious operations across the chain of islands, until the Japanese stronghold on Rabaul is surrounded and destroyed.

### **MARE NOSTRUM**

The Italian Navy fails to dominate in the Mediterranean Sea against the Royal Navy, and the lack of supplies brings the Axis campaign across North Africa to a halt.

## **VOL. 3:**

### **SEA AND SAND**

American forces undertake offensive operations against the Germans by landing troops in Algiers and Casablanca. As the British army advances across North Africa from the east, the Axis forces are caught in a vise of Allied strength and face certain defeat.

### **BENEATH THE SOUTHERN CROSS**

The Battle of the South Atlantic begins as German battleships, raiders and U-boats seek to stop supplies from being shipped out of South America to the Allies fighting in North Africa.

### **THE MAGNETIC NORTH**

As the Second World War spreads across the globe, even the harsh Arctic region becomes a battleground. In the North Atlantic, Allied convoys head for Murmansk, carrying supplies to aid Russia in its fight against Germany. In the Pacific, Japan seizes the frigid island of Attu as another stepping stone, but American forces quickly respond with their own invasion to secure the area. **CONQUEST OF MICRONESIA**

After a brief refit in Hawaii following the victories at Midway and Guadalcanal, the United States Navy returns to support the destruction of Japanese forces guarding the Gilbert and Marshall islands.

## **VOL. 4:**

### **MELANESIAN NIGHTMARE**

Japanese forces continue their advance across the South Pacific by making a bold inland march along

New Guinea. The fate of Australia hangs in the balance as the Allies take their own offensive operations to secure the vital base at Port Moresby.

### **ROMAN RENAISSANCE**

Following up their success in North Africa, the Allies continue the task of securing the Mediterranean Sea by making an amphibious assault on Sicily, and then into the Italian mainland itself. The fascist government of Italy falls as Allied troops capture Rome, and Germany finds itself alone to defend the ground of its former partner.

### **D-DAY**

The Allies stage the largest amphibious assault in history by landing thousands of troops along the Normandy coast of France. As the German army attempts to destroy the invading forces, Allied naval superiority once again proves to be the deciding factor in providing support and supplies to ensure victory in the perilous operation.

### **KILLERS AND THE KILL**

Although Germany's surface fleet is no longer a factor beyond D-Day, its submarine packs continue to wreak havoc upon the Allied convoys that are vital to the survival of troops fighting in France. The Allies develop new ways to counter the U-Boat threat to open the pipeline to Europe.

## **VOL. 5**

### **THE TURKEY SHOOT**

The American battle fleets return to reclaim Guam after almost three years of Japanese occupation. The Japanese forces in the Marianas attempt to stop the invasion, but suffer devastating losses--and Guam returns to American hands as an important base in the drive towards Japan.

### **TWO IF BY SEA**

Japanese strongholds in the Palau Islands are the last line of resistance as American forces continue their approach to the Philippines, and the heavily defended islands of Pelelui and Anguar become the next targets for the island-hopping campaign.

### **THE BATTLE FOR LEYTE GULF**

In a desperate attempt to defend the Philippines, the Imperial Japanese Navy gathers its forces to meet the American fleets head on, resulting in the largest naval battle of the war.

### **RETURN OF THE ALLIES**

American forces begin the bloody task of dislodging the Imperial Japanese army from the Philippine archipelago. After taking the southern islands and landing on Luzon, the Americans fight their way north to liberate Manila. General MacArthur has kept his promise to the Filipino people: "I shall return."

## **VOL. 6:**

### **FULL FATHOM FIVE**

From the earliest days of the war, the American submarine fleet was crucial to the success of interdiction of Japanese convoys and defending strategic locations such as the Panama Canal. The factories in Japan were totally reliant upon the shipping of resources from remote parts of their empire, and as merchant ship losses to submarines grew, the Japanese war machine faced certain defeat.

### **THE FATE OF EUROPE**

The Third Reich begins to crumble as Allied amphibious landings liberate occupied territories and open up other fronts that must be defended; Soviet marines help to liberate the Crimean area, and American and Free French forces land in Southern France. The German forces are pushed back as Allied forces attack from all directions, until Berlin itself falls and the War in Europe comes to an end.

### **TARGET SURIBACHI**

As the US Navy continues to dominate the Pacific theater and Japan comes within striking range, the air campaign begins its final stage. A small, volcanic island becomes prized for its airfields and an

essential strategic target: Iwo Jima. A 35 day battle results with more than 47,000 casualties to both sides.

### **THE ROAD TO MANDALAY**

As the great naval battles sweep across the Pacific Ocean, a different type of warfare unfolds in the jungles of Southeast Asia. The early success of Imperial Japan's armies placed India, a vital part of the Allied supply line, in peril and a successful defense of Burma leads to the liberation of vast areas of Asia.

### **VOL. 7:**

#### **SUICIDE FOR GLORY**

The Battle for Okinawa, the last great battle of the war, starts as US forces begin securing islands in Japanese waters. With their own fleets destroyed, the Japanese make a desperate attempt to defend their homeland by sending the last of their aircraft squadrons on suicide missions to sink American ships by crashing into them.

#### **DESIGN FOR PEACE**

With an Allied invasion imminent, and nuclear devastation a reality, Imperial Japan submits to an unconditional surrender--the Second World War is over. As Allied troops begin returning to their homes in victory, war-torn countries around the globe begin rebuilding the destruction left by years of conflict. **BONUS FILM: D-DAY: THE NORMANDY INVASION (1944)** --51 min. Filmed by the US Coast Guard.

## **The War in Europe:**

25 episode series recounts the World War-2 campaigns in Europe from the rise of Nazi Germany to the final victory.

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|--------------------------------------|------|
| 1) Prelude to War                    | 18m. |
| 2) America's Unpreparedness          | 18m. |
| 3) America Goes To War               | 18m. |
| 4) Platform for Invasion             | 18m. |
| 5) Africa, Our First Offensive       | 18m. |
| 6) The Campaign                      | 18m. |
| 7) Rommel Routed                     | 18m. |
| 8) Sicily, Operation Huskey          | 18m. |
| 9) Assault on Italy                  | 18m. |
| 10) The Secret Life of Adolph Hitler | 53m. |
| 11) The G.I., Hero of the War        | 18m. |
| 12) Victory in Italy                 | 18m. |
| 13) Preparation for Invasion         | 18m. |
| 14) D-Day, August 4th                | 18m. |
| 15) Beachhead and Breakthrough       | 18m. |
| 16) Liberation of Paris              | 18m. |
| 17) Pursuit                          | 18m. |
| 18) The Battle of Supply             | 18m. |
| 19) The Air War                      | 18m. |
| 20) The Battle of the Bulge          | 18m. |

21) Crossing the Rhine	18m.
22) Overrunning Germany	18m.
23) Victory's Aftermath	18m.
24) The Battle of San Pietro	38m.
25) Russia	38m.

## **The War in the Pacific:**

24 episode series recounts the World War-2 campaigns against Japan until the final victory. Each episode runs 25-26 min.

- 1) The Pacific in Eruption
- 2) Awakening in the Pacific
- 3) The Rise of the Japanese Empire
- 4) America Goes to War in the Pacific
- 5) The U.S. and the Philippines
- 6) The Navy Holds - 1942
- 7) Guadalcanal: America's First Offensive
- 8) War in the North: The Aleutians
- 9) The Road Back: New Guinea
- 10) Up the Solomon's Ladder: Bougainville
- 11) Attack in the Central Pacific: Makin and Tarawa
- 12) The War at Sea
- 13) Speeding Up the Attack: The Marshalls
- 14) Stepping Stones to the Philippines
- 15) Battle for the Marianas
- 16) The War in the China - Burma - India Theatre
- 17) Palau: The Fight for Bloody Nose Ridge
- 18) MacArthur Returns to the Philippines
- 19) Bloody Iwo
- 20) At Japan's Doorstep: Okinawa
- 21) The Air War on Japan
- 22) The Surrender and Occupation of Japan
- 23) Shifting Tides in the Orient
- 24) War in Korea

## **Other WW-II Documentaries:**

The documentaries are grouped together the way they appear on the DVDs.

### **Volume 1:**

**DECEMBER 7TH, 1941** (1942) 34 min.

Produced by John Ford. This Oscar-winning documentary on the Pacific War begins with Japanese preparations before the bombing of Pearl Harbor and ends with the U.S. dropping the atomic

bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Aside from the interesting footage on the Japanese home front before Pearl Harbor, there are also many questions raised as to why the U.S. was not aware that Pearl Harbor might be bombed. Evidence is given that enemy planes were sighted earlier and messages were decoded, both in time to give plenty of warning.

**YANKS BOMB TOKYO** (1942) 10 min.

Newsreel report of Doolittle's bombing run over Japan.

**APPOINTMENT IN TOKYO** (1945) 55 min.

This World War II documentary covers the American war effort in the Pacific from the fall of Bataan and the Philippines to the surrender of Japan on the deck of the U.S.S. Missouri. Covering events through the use of Army Signal Corps film footage as well as captured Japanese newsreels, the documentary presents the war with an up close feel and a realistic, though opinionated, approach.

### **Volume 2:**

**THE WORLD AT WAR** (1942) 44 min.

Official War Information Bureau documentary about the decade of war that led up to the Dec. 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, taken from news reels and captured enemy films of the events. **ATTACK IN THE PACIFIC** (1944) 52 min.

After a fascinating introduction to the diverse Pacific islands and their inhabitants, the documentary segues to the rise of Japanese military might from its home base all the way to Australia, including the critical turning point attack on the US naval base at Pearl Harbor. We see, at first hand, the methods used by the Allies, particularly the U.S., to ready counterattacks against Japan, including a harrowing island by island advance that generated a devastating body count.

**TO THE SHORES OF IWO JIMA** (1945, Color) 20 min.

This Academy Award-nominated documentary graphically depicts the American assault on the Japanese-held island of Iwo Jima and the massive battle that raged on that key island in the Allied advance on Japan. The five marines and one sailor who raised the American flag on Mt. Suribachi are shown.

### **Volume 3:**

**ATTACK! THE BATTLE FOR NEW BRITAIN** (1944) 59 min.

This gripping documentary chronicles the relentless and bloody 1943 Allied assault on the entrenched Japanese forces on Arawe Beach and Cape Gloucester, New Britain. Beginning with unsparing training footage of the Allies preparing for the assault, you are then presented with the three-prong Allied attack to retake the island of New Britain. Despite the heavy losses, the Allies were victorious in this pivotal battle of the South Pacific theatre in World War II.

**SUBMARINE WARFARE** (1945) 53 min.

For those not familiar with US Navy Submarine Force of WWII, this documentary is an excellent introduction. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the submarines of the Pacific fleet eventually would destroy Japan's merchant fleet and cripple their Navy. Comprising only 2% of the US Navy Fleet, submarines were responsible for sinking over 55% of all Japanese tonnage sunk during WWII.

### **Volume 4:**

**TUNISIAN VICTORY** (1944) 76 min.

Directed by Frank Capra and John Huston. With Burgess Meredith. This documentary was made by the British and United States Service Film Units. Frank Capra and Roy Boulting directed this account of the North African campaign in World War II; it covers the period between the American intervention in 1942 and the Allied victory. Burgess Meredith and Bernard Miles narrate.

**MARINES AT TARAWA-RETURN TO GUAM** (1944) 40 min.

Directed by Louis Hayward. The documentary covers two of the Marine Corps' most savage battles.

Tarawa was characteristic of the vicious island fighting that was the hallmark of the war in the Pacific. Fought within an area the size of the Pentagon, three days of fighting claimed almost 10,000 lives. The second part of the documentary portrays the return of the Marine Corps to their recaptured base on the island of Guam.

#### **Volume 5:**

**THE MEMPHIS BELLE** (1944, Color) 42 min.

This award-winning World War II documentary covers the 25th and final mission of "The Memphis Belle", a B-17 Flying Fortress that flew bombing missions over Europe. Covering the various aspects of the mission, including footage from the actual flight of its raid on the German submarine pens in Wilhelmshafen, Germany, the documentary shows the crew of the plane as ordinary men doing their job in an extraordinary situation. The story of the plane and crew eventually was made into a major motion picture in 1990 by Warner Bros. Studios starring Matthew Modine. **THUNDERBOLT** (1947, Color) 45 Min.

The documentary chronicles the exploits of the P-47 Thunderbolt pilots of the "Fighting Gamecocks" of the 65th Fighter squadron, 57th Fighter Group. Based on the island of Corsica off the northwest coast of the Italian boot, they flew from behind the enemy's flank. As part of "Operation Strangle," they continuously attacked highways, bridges, ammo dumps, railroads and just about anything that moved to choke off the flow of supplies to the Axis front line.

**LETTER FROM BATAAN** (1942) 15 min.

Paramount dramatization about the effect of a soldier's death on the folks back home. With Richard Arlen, Susan Hayward, Jimmy Lydon, Joe Sawyer.

#### **Volume 6:**

**THE TRUE GLORY** (1945) 81 min.

Directed by Garson Kanin. The documentary was compiled from actual footage of the World War II Allied invasion of Europe, seen through the lenses of thousands of different cameramen. Beginning with D-Day, the documentary reveals the key European engagements all the way to the fall of Berlin, along with individual stories that bring the conflict to life. The prologue is read by General Dwight D. Eisenhower, with Robert Harris and Peter Ustinov providing narration. The True Glory won an Academy award for Best Documentary in 1945.

**THE BATTLE OF SAN PIETRO** (1945) 38 min.

Directed by John Huston. According to Time magazine, "San Pietro is in every respect as good a war film as any that has been made; in some respects it is the best. A record of one of the tense and bloody battles for the Liri Valley in Italy in late 1943, it is a story told chiefly in terms of the experiences of one infantry regiment -- the 143rd of the 36th Division. San Pietro's record of combat, its eye for terrain and for weather, its recognition of war as a science both wonderful and tragically inexact, is at least equal to any seen in films so far".

#### **Volume 7:**

**GREAT BATTLE OF THE VOLGA** (1962) Russia, 66 min.

This documentary depicts the Russian forces heroic battle to stop the invading German army from taking Leningrad. The Nazi battle plan, codenamed "Operation Barbarossa", was to take the vital city in their efforts to conquer all of Russia. The documentary shows the resolve of the Russian troops as they battle against the well-organized and outfitted German forces, the rally of the Russians against impossible odds and the horrific results of this battle.

**REPORT FROM THE ALEUTIANS** (1943, Color) 47 min.

Written and Narrated by John Huston. This Oscar-nominated documentary chronicles the every-day

day activities of the US troops who protected Alaska's Aleutian Islands from Japanese assault. Director John Huston focuses on the human element, emphasizing the determination and character under pressure of the soldiers on the line, stationed in this isolated part of the world. Huston narrates the film with the considerable empathy.

**Volume 8:**

**AFTER MEIN KAMPF: The Story of Adolf Hitler** (1940) 54 min.

Produced in war-time England, this is the first actual documentary produced outside of Germany to depict the rise in power of Adolf Hitler and his plans for world domination. The feature uses actual film footage and dramatic reconstructions to present the rape of Poland, the seizure of the Low Countries, and the attacks on Great Britain. This documentary was obviously meant as war-time propaganda, but it is still remarkable for its content.

**NUREMBURG TRIALS** (1947) 58 min.

Soviet produced look at the trials that followed the fall of Germany. Deadly serious, this film is almost too somber to be taken with a straight face since the narration often comes across as rather preachy and purple. Its pure propaganda in the "we were right to try these people" sort of way and is clearly biased against the defendants who had just set Europe aflame. The take is rather odd and unlike any thing that I've run across in American or in Western European films on the same subject. It seems to be trying to over explain why the leaders of Germany were tried, which in retrospect is painfully obvious. Its clear from the lean toward the Soviet take of events and of its lingering on the speeches by the Soviet prosecutors who was behind the film. Its not bad but the heavy handedness of the presentation becomes wearing after a while.

**JAPANESE RELOCATION** (1942) 9 min.

Documentary short demonstrating American reasons for interning Americans of Japanese ancestry following the outbreak of war between the U.S. and Japan.

**JAPANESE AMERICANS** 7 min.

Short honoring Japanese Americans who served and died in Italy during WW-II.