The Fallen of World War II

Over 70 million people died during World War II. This video explores the meaning behind the numbers, to reveal the staggering toll of this global conflict. Millions of soldiers were slaughtered in the war, but civilians were targeted and killed in equal number. While the Soviet Union and China suffered astonishing numbers of casualties, millions of civilians were murdered in the Holocaust and Japanese war atrocities. In terms of total number of deaths, the Second World War is the deadliest in history. Since 1945, wars have become less deadly and less common, resulting in what some call the "Long Peace."

0:00 *White timeline on a black screen with diagonal red lines from 1940 to 1946. Horizontal white lines appear showing the lifespan of various WWII figures.*	The average lifespan of an American is 80 years and an 80-year-old today was 10 when World War II ended, four when it began. A soldier who saw battle would have to be in his late 80s at least today. Generals, political leaders, the decision makers of the war, few are still with us and over the past few decades we've seen authors and film makers rush to capture stories from survivors before this connection of memory is lost.
0:36 The white timeline on a black screen is zoomed out. Numerous white lines showing the lifespan of various people in WWII are added all ending on the red slanted lines from 1940 to 1946. Two white stick figure people are drawn on a black screen one is a civilian and the other is a soldier. An equals sign appears with numerous stick figures at the other end indicating that each stick figure represents 1,000 deaths.	This project is not about individual war stories and it's not about survivors. We're going to tally up the tens of millions of people whose lives are cut short by the war and see how these numbers stack up to other wars in history including trends in recent conflicts. We'll be counting soldiers and civilians separately, each of these figures represents 1,000 people who died. Civilians were of all walks of life whereas military deaths were almost entirely men, the average age was about 23. In most battles for every 1,000 soldiers killed there are more than a thousand who were injured. The word casualty can be confusing because in military speak it often includes both deaths and injuries and anything else that takes a soldier out of service. Here we're just counting the deaths, and we'll begin with American soldiers.
1:45 *A grid of white stick figure soldiers appears on the screen with an American flag below them. The stick figures are separated and labeled in white lettering "European Theater" and "Pacific Theater." The stick figures fall out of the grid and are stacked on a white timeline in a bar chart. The timeline is briefly interrupted by a black and white photo of D-Day on Omaha Beach, then a black and white photo of two soldiers on Okinawa, finally a black and white photo of a ship with smoke billowing out of it.*	Over 400,000 died, most of the deaths occurred in the European Theater fighting the Nazis and about a quarter were in the Pacific fighting the Japanese. When you put them on the timeline you see that casualties were the heaviest at the end of the war. The War began on September 1st, 1939, but the US wasn't willing to join the fight until Pearl Harbor, two years in. The deaths increased drastically on D-Day when the Allies invaded Normandy. One of the most tragic moments of the war was on D-Day at Omaha Beach where 2500 Americans fell. So, about the same number of US soldiers died on this single beach landing as the entire 13 years of the recent war in Afghanistan. The bloodiest battle in the Pacific was Okinawa which lasted 82 days during which 12,500 Americans died. About 5,000 of these deaths were at sea from kamikaze attacks.

3:18 A bar of pink stick figure soldier appears on the screen with the Polish flag below them. The grid is separated and labeled in white lettering "Invasion" and "Post Invasion." A line of yellow stick figures appears above the Nazi flag. Flags from Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Greece, and Yugoslavia are added to the screen with various numbers of colored stick figures above them. The French stick figures, in red, are separated and labelled "Post Surrender" and "Battle of France." The Yugoslavia stick figures, in purple, are separated and labelled "Invasion" and "Posit Invasion." Additional lines of yellow stick figures are added above the Nazi flag.	Now let's look at some other countries starting with Europe. Germany started World War II when it invaded Poland. Poland ultimately lost 200,000 soldiers in the war. Most died after the invasion while the country was occupied by Germany in the Soviet Union. Germany meanwhile lost just 16,000 in the invasion of Poland. The Nazis went on to invade and conquer other countries including Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Greece, and Yugoslavia. France surrendered but after losing 92,000 soldiers in the Battle of France. Over 200,000 ultimately fell which includes deaths in POW (Prison of War) camps, French colonies, and other fights. Yugoslavia suffered almost half a million military deaths. The initial Invasion brought relatively few casualties on both sides, but the deaths mounted under Nazi occupation due to guerilla fighting, civil conflict, and mass executions. The Nazi invasions were swift with relatively few German losses, even the Nazi commanders expressed surprise at their success.
4:26 The British and American Flags are added with a bar of white stick figures above the American Flag. Blue stick figures are added above the British flag. More yellow stick figures are added above the Nazi flag.	And then we have the United Kingdom in the United States who are not invaded but took the fight to the Nazis. Britain lost about the same number of soldiers as the US which includes the British colonies. Germany lost about half a million soldiers fighting the US and Britain in what is known as the Western Front which took place in France and Belgium.
4:52 The Soviet Union flag is added with red stick figures above. More yellow stick figures are added above the Nazi flag. The number of stick figures above the Nazi	But most Nazi soldiers died in the Eastern Front. Germany's unsuccessful invasion of the Soviet Union, the numbers are staggering. The most famous battle of the Eastern Front and perhaps the turning point of the European War was Stalingrad.

and the Soviet flag continue to grow significantly.	
5:09 The screen shifts to a montage of black and white photos. First soldiers on a snowy hill, then a soldier in front of a destroyed city, finally an injured person with a wrap around their head and a soviet soldier carrying a gun.	The German 6th Army successfully took Stalingrad but then got surrounded by the Soviets and cut off from food and ammunition. Half a million Nazis would ultimately die in Stalingrad, another 100,000 were taken prisoner of which 6,000 would ever return. POWs had a low survival rate throughout World War II, and it was particularly grim in the East.
5:33 The screen shifts back to the stick figures above the various flags. The screen moves up showing more and more red stick figures above the Soviet flag ending with 8.7 million written in white letter.	When you include these POWs, roughly the same number of Germans died in Stalingrad as all the Western Front fighting against France, the UK, and the US. And though Stalingrad was a victory for the Soviets they suffered almost twice as many losses as Germany. The Soviet Union would eventually defeat the once unstoppable German Army killing 2.3 million Nazi soldiers but winning the War came at a cost. 8.7 million is the official tally by the Russian military, a hotly disputed number, some studies have calculated as many as 14 million dead.
6:57 More yellow stick figures are added above the Nazi flag. The Hungry, Romania, and Italian flags are added with stick figures above. All of the stick figures are added to a timeline.	To complete the count of European military deaths we need to add German deaths from other fronts including the North and Africa, as well as deaths from other Axis Powers Allied of the Nazis Hungary, Romania, and Italy. When you put these European military debts on the timeline it looks like this. You can now interact with the chart to learn more, pause the narration if you would like more time.
7:32 Rows of white stick figures on a black screen in front of a blue Star of David appear. The stick figures are separated and color coded by countries. The stick figures are then brought back together and then separated by where they were killed with white labels on the left side. The screen shifts to a black and white photo of a solder pointing a	And now we switch to civilian deaths in Europe. 6 million Jewish people were killed in the Holocaust. If you separate this by country you see that about half, 2.7 million, were polish, 700,000 were Soviets, followed by Hungary, and 17 other countries. Broken down another way, about half of the 6 million were killed in the concentration camps. Over a million died in Auschwitz, most were killed in the gas chambers, others died from starvation, exhaustion, disease, and other forms of execution. The second most deadly camp was Treblinka, which was exclusively an extermination camp set up to look like a train station. Mobile killing groups killed 1.4 million Jews. Like with the gas chambers, men were killed first to reduce the risk of revolt.

gun at a man carrying a child.	
9:05 Two bars of white stick figures appear on the screen with white labels above them. A third bar and label is added to the left.	The Holocaust also includes non-Jewish deaths, between 130,000 to 500,000 Roma, then called gypsies, were killed, the numbers are disputed. About a quarter of a million people with disabilities were killed. Homosexuals, Catholics, and other groups were also exterminated but their numbers were relatively small.
9:24 The bars of white stick figures are color coded and stacked above various European flags. The screen zooms in on the bar of pink stick men above the Polish flag with a white label above. A red bar appears to the left of the pink bar made up of stick figures. Two black and white photos are shown. The first showing two women sitting in a destroyed room and the second showing kids collecting water on a snowy street. The screen shifts back to the red bar chart made up of stick figures.	Some historians say that other civilian deaths should go under the label of Holocaust. About 2 million non-Jewish Poles were killed under German occupation, some of which were sent to the gas chambers at Auschwitz. When you combine civilian and military deaths, over 16% of the total Polish population died in World War II which is the highest percentage of any country, but not the highest in total death count. The Soviet Union again tops that list losing at least as many civilians as it did soldiers, somewhere between 10 and 20 million. A particularly dark moment for the Soviet Union was the siege of Leningrad now, St. Petersburg. German forces surrounded Leningrad before civilians could be evacuated, supplies including food were cut off for two and a half years. One and a half million people died as a result mostly from starvation, mostly civilians. Stalin's cruelty towards his own people is partly responsible for these numbers he often didn't allow civilians to evacuate from cities thinking it would cause the soldiers protecting them to fight harder. About a million Soviets died in Stalin's own labor camps called the Gulag.
10:36 Red stick figures on a black screen with a white label on the left. The screen zooms out and shows the bar chart made up of stick figures. The screen zooms in on the British flag below a bar of blue stick figures. The screen shifts to the bar of yellow stick figures. The screen zooms out and shows the entire bar chart.	Just about every country suffered civilian losses, especially countries who were invaded. While many died as a result of so-called collateral damage, the biggest numbers occurred when it was no accident. Civilians were exterminated, purposely fired upon or bombed, used as human shields, or intentionally deprived of food. The intentional killing of civilians was done by most warring parties including the United Kingdom and the United States. The United Kingdom was spared of a land Invasion but still lost 60,000 civilians largely from German Air Raids, or blitzes, often directed at civilian population centers. The UK did the same to German cities at a much greater magnitude causing about 10 times the number of deaths. But most German civilian deaths came from the ground at the late stage of the war. When the Nazi regime collapsed civilians living in occupied regions had to desperately flee from the advancing Soviet Army. Rapes were widespread and death estimates ranged from 600,000 to 3 million.
11:40 The entire bar chart made up of stick figures is	Let's step back and see where we are with the totals. We just counted about 20 million civilian deaths in Europe. If you add this to the European military deaths we already covered, it brings us to over 40 million. Then we have the Asian theater. Here

combined into a single bar with a white label on top. A bar chart of military deaths appears on the right with a white label at the bottom and then is added to the combined single bar. A bar chart appears on the right showing the Asia Military and Civilian deaths with the various Asian flags.	we see the vast majority of military deaths in Asia came from China and Japan. On the civilian side about 6 million deaths from China, Indonesia, Korea, Indochina, and the Philippines can be attributed to Japanese war crimes, which are sometimes compared to the Nazi atrocities due to the sheer scale of the cruelty. China had the second highest death count after the Soviet Union and like the Soviets the Chinese government demonstrated a stunning willingness to sacrifice its own people.
12:30 The screen zooms in and shows a map of China under a line of red stick figures. The screen zooms out and shows the Asia death bar chart and the combined bar. The screen zooms in on the stick figures above and below the Japanese flag with labels on the left side. The Asia deaths are added to the combined bar with a white label at the top.	Chinese nationalists open the dike at the Yellow River hoping the flood would halt the Japanese advance. Half a million Chinese civilians or more were killed which is two or three times the number who died in all countries in the 2004 Asian tsunamis, but the invasion of China only cost Japan 200,000 soldiers. Most were killed fighting the US and allies in the Pacific War. A significant portion of Japanese civilian deaths were caused by American firebombing and the two nuclear attacks. Contrary to official US statements these air strikes were directed at civilian populations not military targets. When you add all the deaths outside Europe it brings us to a grand total of 70 million for the War, give or take depending on who's counting and what civilian deaths get included.
13:25 A bar chart on a black screen showing the number of deaths during wars. WWII is red and the other wars are grey. Each bar in the chart has the number of deaths at the top in white. The screen zooms out and adjusts the chart based on world percentage.	More people died in World War II than in any other war in history. For comparison, here are 20 or so of the very worst wars and atrocities we have on record. Some of these are more of atrocities than wars but we've seen how that distinction can get blurry. Some of these spanned across centuries. World War II had the highest body count, and it all happened in just 6 years. The world's population has grown significantly since the earliest atrocities on this list, if you want to compare them in terms of what percentage of the world died, we can adjust the chart to look like this. This rough approximation tells us there may have been more devastating wars before World War II proportionally speaking.
14:21 The screen zooms in and shows only the red WII bar with a timeline at the bottom. Grey diagonal lines appear on the timeline with a white label in the center. The timeline zooms out and	When we turn to post-War conflicts it's hard to say anything that isn't controversial, but the data shows something quite extraordinary has been happening. In 1989 John Gattis coined the phrase "The Long Peace" to identify the absence of conflict between the nuclear powers during the Cold War. 25 years later the Cold War is over, and the term is still being used although its meaning may have shifted. European countries have not fought each other, except for this 10-day war in 1956 when the Soviet Union invaded Hungary. When we look at European wars before World War II it looks like this. They tend to be more frequent as they go back though smaller in scale, and the

shows European wars highlighted by pink lines. The screen zooms back in and shows white circles over the grey diagonal lines. The first circle flips over and shoes an American flag.	largest 44 economies of the world have not battled each other since World War II. Rich countries have fought poor countries like the US versus Iraq, but rich countries have not fought other rich countries. Such a period of peace between the so-called Great Powers hasn't been seen since the Roman Empire.
15:30 Four horizontal lines indicating the number of deaths appear on the timeline labeled Colonia in purple, Interstate in green, Civil in yellow, and Civil (with foreign intervention) in orange. The horizontal lines are broken up and added to the timeline.	To many, peace is too strong of a word. Wars have occurred since World War II and they can be grouped into these four categories. We don't see colonial wars anymore. We've already noted that interstate wars between rich countries have not occurred at all and here we see wars involving smaller economies have tapered off. That leaves civil wars of two types, with and without foreign intervention. And this is what these battle deaths look like alongside of World War II. More people died fighting in World War II than in all the wars since. And again, we can't forget about world population which has almost tripled since World War II. If we scale these numbers to show deaths in proportion to world population showing the likelihood that a person on Earth dies in battle the downward trend becomes even more pronounced. Now this isn't to infer anything about why this trend is occurring that's a discussion for another day. You can now interact with this chart to explore what conflicts are behind the totals now bear in mind we're just looking at battle deaths here not civilian deaths but those two are in decline.
16:34 White lines are briefly added filling the space above the timeline while the number of deaths bars disappear. The timeline and deaths bars reappear. The screen zooms into November 8th 2016.	Peace is a difficult thing to measure, it's a bit like counting the people who didn't die in wars that never happened. We give such importance to the word peace, but we don't tend to notice it when it occurs or report on it. Sometimes it takes reminding ourselves of how terrible war once was to see the peace that has been growing around us. Of course, this trend may not continue and it's not clear how looking at these charts can help us make the right decisions to ensure that it does. But the longer the Long Peace grows the more significant it becomes. So, if watching the news doesn't make us feel hopeful about where things are heading, watching the numbers might. If you' like to support this project and encourage new episodes, please follow us using one of the options below and consider paying the suggested ticket price for today's show. Thank you very much.