

war. Moreover, after Nazi Germany's rapid military advance in the west during the late spring of 1940, Fascism's principal institutional allies came to accept the idea of a war that promised to be very brief, require few sacrifices, and provide easy gains, as long as Italy did not "arrive late". On June 10, 1940, Mussolini made the official announcement from the balcony of his office in Rome that Fascist Italy was "going to war against the plutocratic and reactionary democracies of the west".

7. The Experience of Total War in Turin.

From the first day of Italy's involvement in World War II, nothing seemed to work out according to Mussolini's expectations. Two hours before the formal declaration, the British navy attacked an Italian submarine; the following day Allied airplanes began a bombing campaign on Italy's northern industrial cities. The Fascists' invasion of southern France began late and encountered strong resistance, so that Mussolini had little leverage in the discussions between France and Germany to reach a peace settlement. To make matters worse, the Duce's short, easy war did not materialize as he had expected when the confrontation between the English and German air forces in the battle of Britain failed to produce a decisive Nazi victory in the fall of 1940. Likewise, Fascist pretensions to rule the Mediterranean suffered a major setback in November when the British fleet launched a surprise attack on the Italian naval base at Taranto. The decision to invade Greece late in the previous month marked the first in a series of unmitigated military disasters for the dictator. The humiliating defeats on the battlefield and at sea brutally exposed to public view the fundamental failures of organization and leadership within the Fascist regime.

Beginning with the opening night of Italy's involvement, when Allied air raids killed seventeen and wounded another forty, the people of Turin experienced first hand the full impact of total war in the form of bombs, blackouts, hunger, cold and terror. The war from the air gradually intensified after the summer of 1940. In the first two years of the war, Turin was subjected to fourteen bombing raids, mostly at night time and with limited destruction and death. From the fall of 1942 to the summer of 1943, however, the raids increased in number, scale, and intensity. On the night of July 13, 1943 for instance, over seven hundred tons of incendiary bombs were dropped on the city, resulting in the death of nearly 800 and the wounding of more than 900 others. As a consequence of the bombing, one-third of the buildings in the city had been destroyed by the fall of 1943.