

Leaders of World War II Essay Questions—Volume 5

Following are brief biographies of five influential leaders of World War II. With each biography are questions to answer in essay form. The first pages give you the biography and the questions. Notebooking pages you can use for your answers follow.

Prime Minister Peter Fraser

Born on August 28, 1884, in Fearn, Scotland, Peter Fraser served as prime minister of New Zealand during World War II. Peter left school when he was young because he needed to help his family. He apprenticed as a carpenter but had to quit due to poor eyesight. After moving to London and failing to find work, he moved to Auckland, New Zealand, on January 2, 1911. His forceful speaking skills and talent for organization served him well while he worked on the wharves and with the workers and their unions. In 1911, his work brought better wages and working conditions to the Portland Cement Company. Two years later, he moved to Wellington and found work on the wharves there. In 1916, as a member of the Labour Party, he opposed the military draft and was arrested, along with other members of the party, for inciting rebellion. After serving a year in prison, he worked as a journalist, was active in politics, and was elected to Parliament in 1918, where he served the rest of his life.

Peter Fraser was elected to Parliament during difficult times. World War I had just ended with the Treaty of Versailles. He had opposed the treaty's terms because he believed they would lead to more wars. He also thought the League of Nations was a bad idea because it recognized governments instead of people. A terrible influenza epidemic broke out in 1918 as well. His consistent work to organize relief efforts earned him a great deal of respect.

In 1933, Fraser became deputy to the head of the Labour Party under its leader Michael Savage. When Mr. Savage became prime minister, Fraser took on many important responsibilities. He started a routine that he maintained the rest of his life—rising at 6 a.m. and working from 8 a.m. to 1 a.m. He worked to improve education in New Zealand, pass social security, and found the health care system. When Prime Minister Savage was diagnosed with cancer and had to have surgery in 1939, Fraser became acting Prime Minister. When Mr. Savage died in 1940, Fraser was elected as his official successor.

Germany invaded Poland in 1939, and the United Kingdom declared war on Germany. New Zealand declared war on Germany later the same day. Prime Minister Fraser met with Winston Churchill and Bernard Freyberg and immediately realized this war would not involve only the armed forces, but the entire nation as well. He had a very hard time delegating authority to others and tried to do everything himself. He focused his attention on World War II, introduced very strict censorship rules, and introduced the military draft, which he had opposed as a younger man. He felt conscription was necessary to supply the troops needed for the war. The troops from New Zealand mainly served in Europe and North Africa. Prime Minister Fraser's deep concern for the New Zealand troops led him to make it very clear that any plans for action that involved New Zealand troops must be reported to the government of New Zealand. When Pearl Harbor was attacked and the Japanese began moving through the Pacific with acts of aggression, many people in New Zealand wanted the troops brought home to defend the country. The military advisors for the Allies thought the forces from New Zealand should stay

where they were already fighting. Fraser agreed and persuaded Parliament to support him, demonstrating his exceptionally strong leadership skills. Fraser also tried to strengthen ties between New Zealand and the other Allied nations. He appointed his deputy as minister to the United States and also formed stronger ties with Australia.

Prime Minister Fraser was one of the representatives who signed the charter of the United Nations in 1945. He also chaired the committee that wrote the part of the charter founding the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations and fought strongly for the principles he believed in. He worked with the Māori about their concerns and played an influential part in the passage of the Māori Social and Economic Advancement Act. Fraser also wanted compulsory military training in New Zealand to make the country able to contribute to any war efforts that may come in the future. Peter Fraser was defeated as Prime Minister in 1949, but he remained leader of the Labour Party until he died on December 12, 1950.

It has been said that when Peter Fraser had decisions to make involving international questions, he tried to ground his views on the principles of morality. Once he made up his mind, he held onto the decisions he made. His judgment was extremely intuitive, and his ability to cope with the huge responsibilities of war were unequaled by most other politicians of the time in New Zealand. He was very determined to place the interests of the nation above the interests of political parties. If you were running for office and had to make the decision to stand for what you believe in or what your political party stands for, how hard do you think it would be to go against your party in this day and age? Do you think it would be more difficult to make a stand for your own beliefs today than it was for Peter Fraser during his time in politics? Why or why not?

Chiang Kai-shek

Born on October 31, 1887, in Chekiang province, China, Chiang Kai-shek prepared for a military career from 1906 to 1911. He served in the Japanese army from 1909 to 1911 and became a revolutionary. When he heard reports of fighting in China, he returned and helped overthrow the Manchu Dynasty. The new government struggled, and Yuan Shikai became president. The country began dividing among warlords, and in 1918, Chiang joined Sun Yat-sen, whose goal was to reunify China. Chiang visited the Soviet Union in 1923 to study life there, especially the Red Army. After his return to China, he became commandant of a military academy styled after the Soviet Union model. Soviet advisers came into China, and the Chinese communists became much more powerful. When Sun Yat-sen died in 1925, Chiang was the strongest of the followers of Sun, with a large army behind him. At times, he was forceful with the Soviets, and he was lenient at other times. In 1927, he finally broke with the communists and threw them out of the Nationalist Party.

He went far in reunifying China, and in 1928, his forces entered Beijing and established a new central government. In October 1930, Chiang became a Christian. As head of the new government, he worked toward reform, but it did not progress very far at first. The warlords continued to dispute his authority, and the communists moved to rural areas and formed their own army and government. In addition to these problems, war with Japan seemed imminent. Chiang decided not to try to stop the Japanese invasion until after he had stopped the communists, but many disagreed with him. In 1936, Chiang was taken captive by one of his own generals who wanted to stop the Japanese invasion. He was released when he agreed to ally

with the communists to fight the Japanese. In 1937, the Sino-Japanese War between China and Japan began. China fought without formal aid until the Allies declared war on Japan in 1941. Chiang Kai-shek's position in China weakened during World War II, but his status grew internationally. He met with President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill in Cairo in 1943. He became a member of the Big Four with Roosevelt, Churchill, and Joseph Stalin. By the end of World War II, Chiang Kai-shek's government was decaying, and it continued to do so at an alarming rate as civil war broke out in 1946. By 1949, The People's Republic of China was established and Chiang moved to Taiwan with the remaining part of his Nationalist forces. The United States supported the government of Chiang in Taiwan until 1972, when the United States began moving toward recognizing the People's Republic of China. By 1979, the United States had broken ties with Taiwan in order to establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. Chiang Kai-shek died on April 5, 1975.

During the early fighting with the Japanese, before the Allies gave formal aid to China in 1941, Chiang Kai-shek felt it was more important fight the communists than to fight the Japanese. What do you think of that plan? Do you think he would have been more successful if he had fought both enemies at the same time? Do you think Chiang invited the problems he had with the eventual communist take-over by allying with them early in his career? What, if anything, do you think could have been done differently? Do you think the people of China would have had better lives under the rule of Chiang Kai-shek than they did under Communist rule?

Prime Minister John Curtin

Born to Irish immigrants on January 8, 1885, in Creswick, Victoria, Australia, John Curtin left school at an early age to work and help support his family. At night, he studied many things at the public library, including political works. He worked with labor parties and unions for better working conditions, better wages, and better living conditions for workers. He opposed Australia's participation in World War I and was jailed for refusing to register for the military draft. In 1917, Curtin became editor of a weekly newspaper. He became a leader in the labor movement in Western Australia, and in 1924, he was a labor movement representative at the International Labour Conference in Geneva, Switzerland. He won a seat in the Australian House of Representatives in 1928, but because of political changes due to the depression, Curtin went back to writing articles for the newspaper.

He again won a seat in the House in 1934. As World War II came closer, he initially did not think Australia should take part in world affairs, though he later came to support participation in the war but opposed the military draft. In 1941, due to changes in the government, the governor general asked Curtin and his party to form a new government and swore him in as prime minister. When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941, Australia declared war on Japan without waiting to follow the lead of the United Kingdom as it had done in declaring war on Germany. Since Australia faced invasion by the Japanese, Prime Minister Curtin was forced to reluctantly resort to military draft. He rejected the British strategy for Australian troops, which allowed them to fight in a successful defense of New Guinea. He also put General Douglas MacArthur in charge of Australia's defense forces. In 1942, John Curtin became the first Australian prime minister to address the American people when he did so with a radio broadcast on March 14. As with many areas, a certain amount of complacency set in during parts of the war. Curtin's efforts to sustain the war effort won, and the nation began to cooperate much more effectively. In Australia, Prime Minister Curtin began clothing and food rationing and raised many taxes. He also moved

some of the authority for taxing from the states to the Commonwealth. He lowered the voting age for those who had served in the military outside Australia and expanded social services. Curtin worked to enact policies that allowed the government to control commercial broadcasting, allowed women to hold jobs that had previously been available only to men, gave the government control over interest rates, and regulated the dairy industry. Prime Minister Curtin worked to strengthen ties with the United Kingdom and to plan for the world after the war. Curtin had many health problems as time went on and died in office on July 5, 1945.

After his death, Australian Prime Minister John Curtin was described as "receptive and perceptive," "best and fairest," "one of the greatest Australians ever," and someone "who considered everybody." How difficult would it be to be considered fair and still be someone who tried to consider everyone in your decisions? Wouldn't there be one group or another who felt their feelings or situations were not being taken in to account? Do you think feelings of people not considering the opinions of others is more prevalent today than it was during the time John Curtin was prime minister? Do you think people were more open to the fact that working for the good of the whole nation, as John Curtin did, was truly the fairest way that benefited everyone, than they are today? If so, what has changed?

President Franklin D. Roosevelt

Franklin Roosevelt was born on January 30, 1882, in Hyde Park, New York, USA. Though his family was wealthy, the values of caring for the poor and showing his love for God in service for other people were instilled in him at an early age. He did well in school, and in 1900, he enrolled in Harvard University. After graduation, he enrolled in Columbia Law School, but left before he earned his degree. He did manage to pass the state bar examination and became a clerk with a law firm in New York City. He became engaged to a distant cousin, Eleanor Roosevelt, in 1903, and they married in 1905. Eleanor's uncle, President Theodore Roosevelt gave her away at the wedding. Franklin Roosevelt ran for a seat in the New York State Senate and won, beginning his term at the age of 29. In 1912, Franklin Roosevelt supported Woodrow Wilson for president, and after Wilson's election, was appointed assistant secretary of the Navy. Roosevelt learned a great deal about national politics while in this position. He tried to bring reforms to navy yards and learned to negotiate with labor unions while in this position.

During World War I, Roosevelt toured European battlefields and met with military leaders. Although he lost in his attempt to be elected vice president in 1920, he made many contacts with party leaders that would help him with his political ambitions in the future. In 1921, while on vacation with his family, Roosevelt was stricken with polio. Although only 39 years old, Roosevelt was paralyzed from the waist down and for the rest of his life could only walk with heavy leg braces. His wife worked to keep his name in the public scene while he was beginning his recovery. He tried every available treatment but was never fully cured. He did not give up. He did strenuous exercise, used heavy leg braces, and had a car made he could drive just with hands. He forbade pictures that showed him unable to do certain things so people would not know just how serious the polio was. Many did not know how serious his polio was until after his death. He helped found the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, an organization that eventually supported the research that resulted in a vaccine for polio.

In 1928, Roosevelt ran for governor of New York and won. When the Great Depression hit, he started an unemployed relief system in New York. He used the radio to tell the public why help

for the unemployed was necessary. In 1930, he was reelected governor of New York, and in 1932, he won the Democratic nomination for president. He flew to Chicago for the Democratic National Convention and became the first candidate of a major party to accept the nomination in person. Roosevelt won the presidency in an election against then-President Herbert Hoover.

Roosevelt began his term by dealing with the banking crisis. He kept the people informed with fireside chats he hosted on the radio to explain what was going on. Although things began to improve, the improvement was slow. People became dissatisfied, and Roosevelt immediately worked to stop the unrest. Through the passage of many acts and an increase in goodwill and trade with other countries, Roosevelt did what he thought was best to improve the lives of the people. In the election of 1936, Roosevelt won the presidency again. As with his first term, there were many ups and downs in the nation, but the biggest threat was the beginning of World War II. Although trying to stay out of the war itself, the United States changed its neutrality law and also began spending more on defense. Roosevelt also negotiated a deal with Britain where the United States would give fifty destroyers to Britain in exchange for 99-year leases on certain British naval bases. The first peacetime military draft law began in 1940. Roosevelt ran for president a third time and promised to try to keep the United States out of the war. He won by a large margin. In the beginning of 1941, the president was given the power to give war supplies to any nation he felt was important to the security of the United States. Roosevelt also met with Prime Minister Winston Churchill and they adopted what was later called the Atlantic Charter. This declaration stated certain goals of the United States and the United Kingdom prior to the United States being involved in World War II. President Roosevelt was concerned that the actions of the Japanese in the Pacific would cause Britain to have to fight on another front and make it harder to fight the war in Europe. He imposed economic sanctions on Japan which made the relationship between the two countries very tense. On December 7, 1941, Japanese planes attacked the U.S. Fleet that was anchored in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Many people were killed and much of the naval and air resources of the United States in Pearl Harbor were destroyed.

The United States declared war on Japan on December 8, 1941. Germany and Italy declared war on the United States on December 11, 1941, and the United States declared war on those countries also. At this point, Germany and Japan were already very close to winning the war. Roosevelt made his first priority the defeat of Germany. Roosevelt agreed with Winston Churchill that the first joint offensive should be to drive the Axis from North Africa. Others thought the best first joint offensive would be to invade across the English Channel in to France.

After the offensives in North Africa began, Roosevelt spoke by radio to the French people and explained to them in their own language why it was necessary to begin the offensives in North Africa and not in France. During World War II, Roosevelt became the first President of the United States to travel outside the country during wartime. There were many meetings between Roosevelt, Churchill, and Joseph Stalin, with these leaders becoming known as the "Big Three." At home, Roosevelt continued his fireside chats to encourage the military and the civilians to meet the goals that were set to win such a worldwide war. Roosevelt was often at odds with other lawmakers during this time, but he was granted a great amount of authority to manage the military aspects of the war. Although Roosevelt was generally in favor of civil rights, political pressure convinced him to order the internment of more than 110,000 people of Japanese ancestry in the United States.

Roosevelt was nominated for president for a fourth time in 1944, with Harry S. Truman running as his vice president. Roosevelt had been diagnosed with advanced heart disease, but he

managed to convince people he was back in shape to run the country. He easily won reelection. The Big Three met at Yalta, located on the Black Sea, just days after Roosevelt was inaugurated for his fourth term. At this meeting, they planned the final assault against Germany and developed a postwar plan for Germany. They also planned to meet in San Francisco to begin the foundation of the United Nations. In March 1945, President Roosevelt took a break and visited his retreat called the "Little White House." Eleanor had a demanding schedule and did not join him, but several staff members and cousins were with him on the trip. He seemed to be regaining some strength, but on April 12, 1945, he said he had a terrible headache and slumped in his chair. He died shortly after.

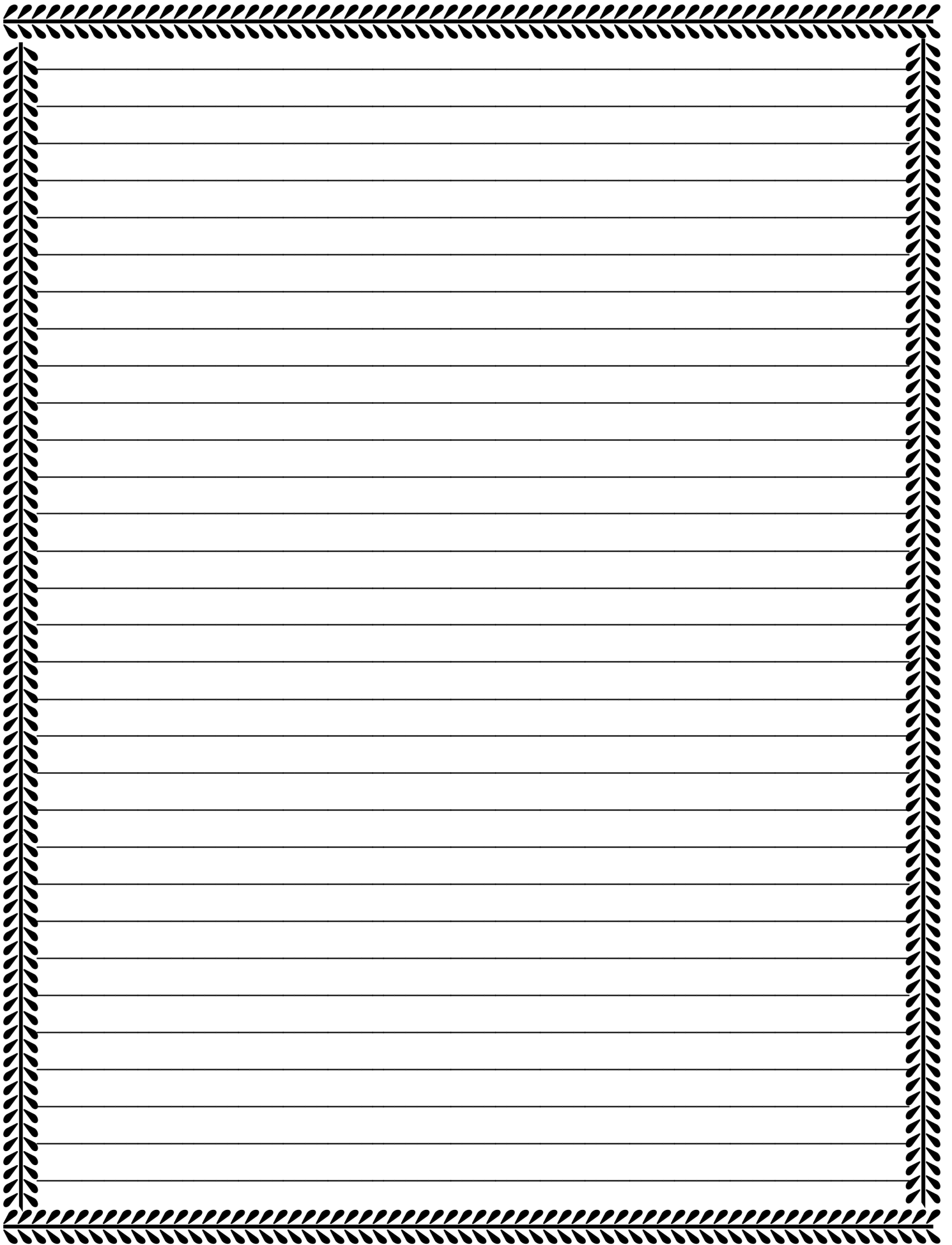
Franklin Roosevelt was loved by many people around the world and, at the same time, was very disliked by others. He led the United States through two very dark times in its history, but many felt that he extended the powers of the federal government beyond what was allowed by the Constitution. In either case, however, it is thought by many that he was brilliant and able to work with leaders of many different views within the government. What do you see in Franklin Roosevelt's life that points to the fact that he would be such an influential president? How much of the success of the United States, at home and abroad during World War II, do you think can be attributed to Franklin Roosevelt's influence? Do you think the citizens of the United States would have rallied around any president as they did Franklin Roosevelt? Why or why not?

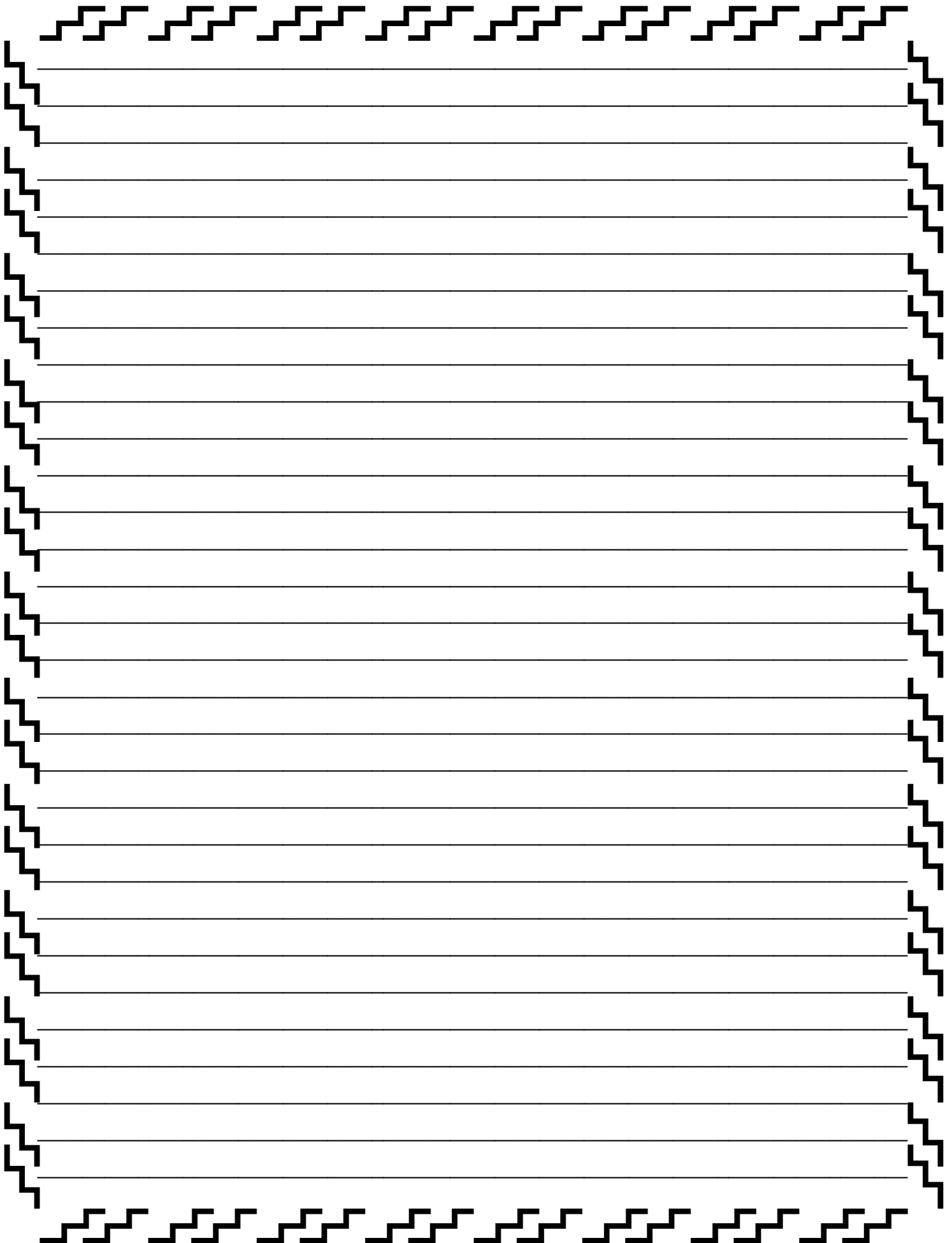
Admiral Louis Mountbatten

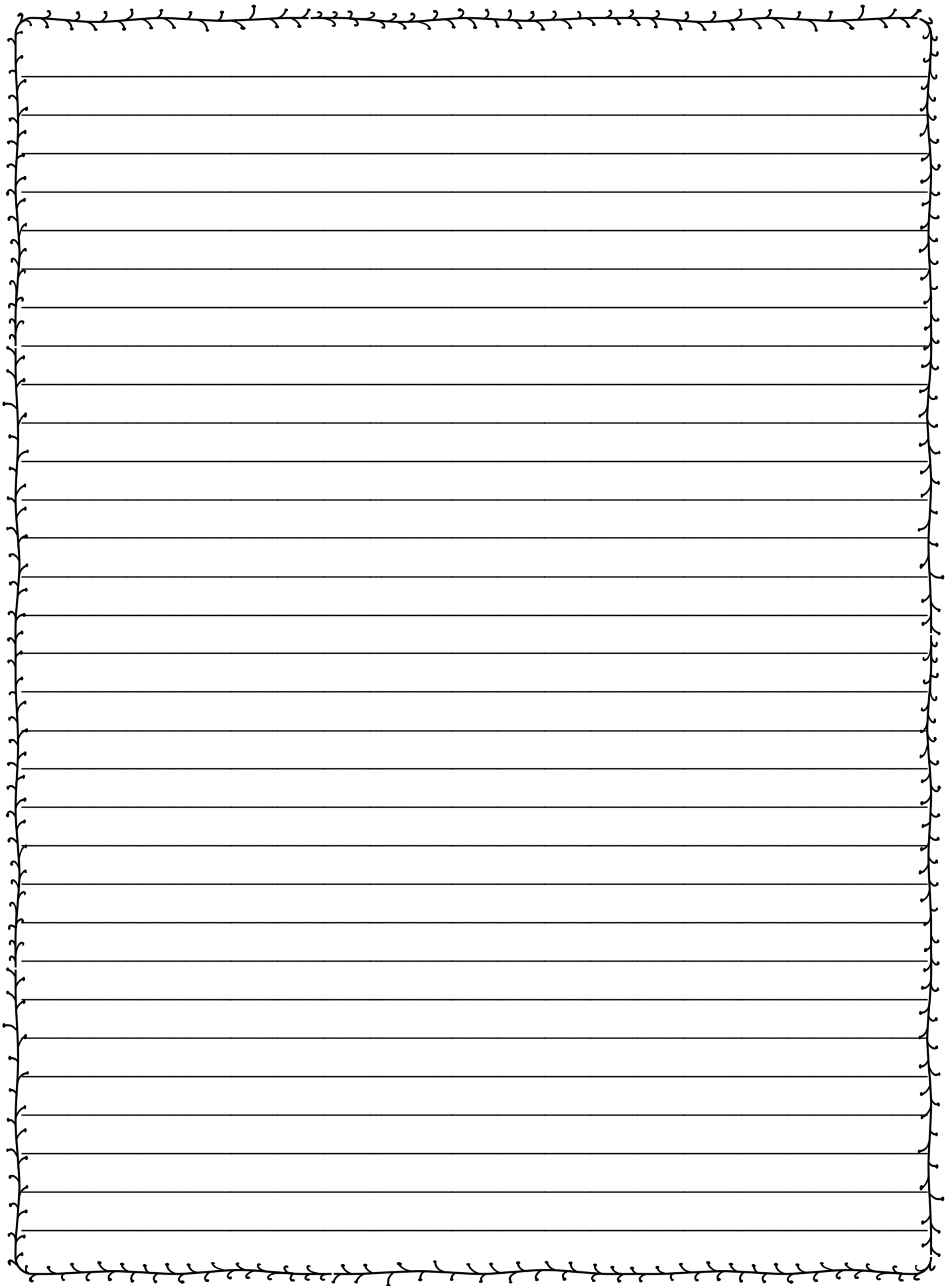
Born on June 25, 1900, in Windsor, England, Louis Francis Albert Victor Nicholas Mountbatten was the great grandson of Queen Victoria. His family name had been Battenberg, a very German name, but it was changed in 1917 to Mountbatten due to anti-German feeling during World War I. He received his education mainly at home until 1913 when he began attending the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth. In 1916 he joined the Royal Navy and served in World War I for a short time. After World War I, he attended Cambridge University for a year. After specializing in communications while going forward with his naval career, he received his first command in 1934. In 1939, a short time before World War II began, he began his command of a flotilla of destroyers that fought in the Mediterranean Sea. Lord Mountbatten commanded the destroyer Kelly, which was sunk during an attack by twenty-four German bombers. However, Mountbatten swam to shore and commanded the rescue efforts. In 1942, Lord Mountbatten was appointed chief of combined operations and helped with the preparation of the invasion of Europe. During this time, he also organized raids against the coastline of Europe. In 1943, he was named supreme allied commander, South East Asia Command (SEAC), a position he held until 1946. He took part in the defeat of the move of the Japanese toward India and the reconquering of Burma. In 1945, he received the Japanese surrender at Singapore. After the war, he served a viceroy of India while he oversaw the British withdrawal in order for India to become an independent nation. He then became governor-general of India until June 1948. Mountbatten returned to the Royal Navy in 1953 and then retired from the navy in 1965. On August 27, 1979, Lord Mountbatten died when his boat was blown up by IRA terrorists.

It has been said that Lord Mountbatten was an extremely good negotiator. He negotiated independence for both India and Pakistan after being unable to convince them to remain united as one country. How do you think his time commanding troops in World War II and his time as supreme allied commander, South East Asia Command, helped him develop as a negotiator? Explain your answer.









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