

The Road to World War II

Within a generation of the end of World War I, Europe and the world at large were once again at war, a conflict which became the largest conflict in the history of the world—World War II. The events which led to World War II actually help link the two conflicts together. Circumstances created by the First World War set the stage for another conflict down the road.

One such circumstance was the peace conference which hammered out the agreement following World War I—the Versailles treaty. This treaty condemned the Germans harshly, blaming them for WW I, leveling against them payments of billions of gold marks as war damages, thereby crippling Germany's struggling postwar economy. The Versailles treaty also ordered the near destruction of the German military, leaving the German state unable to defend itself from outside aggression.

Many Germans chafed under the Versailles agreement, considering it unfair and vindictive. They dreamed of the day when Germany could again rise up and stand against the confines of Versailles. During the early 1930s, the German people saw in Hitler's vision of a new Germany, one of power and strength. In some ways, the 1930s is a story of how World War II came about.

The story begins with aggression, not in Europe, but in Asia. In September 1931, the Japanese attacked the state of Manchuria, located north of and claimed by China. When the Chinese called on the League of Nations to condemn the Japanese for their attacks, the League only criticized the Japanese government, but did little more. When the League acted weakly to such obvious aggression, others believed they could do the same.

Adolf Hitler was one of them. By 1933, Hitler withdrew Germany from membership in the League

of Nations. Two years later, he condemned the Versailles treaty, calling for Germany to rearm its military once again.

Hitler then systematically set about to re-create the German military. He revived a draft and began building a new army of nearly 500,000 men. The League of Nations protested, but did little more. A cautious Britain and France joined together once again in a military alliance, in case of war.

And Germany was not to be alone in creating a new era of war. Mussolini, fascist leader of Italy, invaded the African country of Ethiopia (then Abyssinia) in October of 1935. Shield-bearing natives soon found themselves facing tanks, bombs, and poison gas. Again, the League of Nations sanctioned Italy, but did next to nothing. In addition,

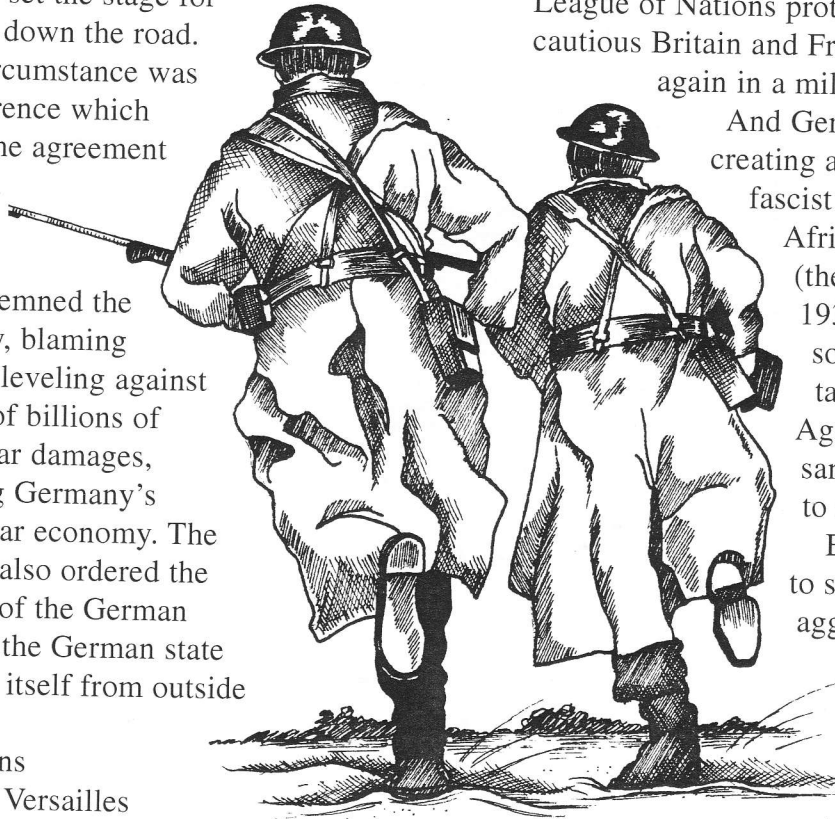
England and France did little to stop the Italians and their aggression. (By 1937,

Mussolini withdrew Italy from the League of Nations, ending any interest he might have had in the struggling

organization.)

With each passing year, Hitler, too, became increasingly bold. In March 1936, the German leader sent troops into the Rhineland—rich, fertile German lands which had been controlled by the Allies since World War I. This move was a direct violation of the Versailles treaty.

This move was a risky one for Hitler and his new army. At that time, the western democracies, such as England and France, had the military power to stop Hitler in his tracks. In fact, Hitler was so desperate to avoid a direct conflict with the French military that he had given orders to his commanders to withdraw from the Rhineland at the slightest hint that France might mobilize against Germany. That mobilization did not materialize. With each passing move, the potential for a wider war in Europe loomed larger and larger.



The Fascists Extend Their Power

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the ruthless leaders in Europe and Asia took bold steps to extend their power. Under the direction of their war lords, the Japanese invaded Manchuria, Mussolini sent Italian troops against the Ethiopians, and Adolf Hitler violated the Versailles treaty by reoccupying the demilitarized Rhineland. Throughout the early 1930s, none of the western powers—Great Britain, France, even the United States—took a significant stand against such aggression.

By 1936, other ruthless men, however, continued to control events. In July, Spain faced civil war, as a weak Spanish republic fought against right-wing fascists led by General Francisco Franco (1892–1975). Once again, Britain and France declared their neutrality and convinced other European powers to do the same.

However, Hitler and Mussolini agreed to help their fellow fascist Franco by sending war supplies, troops, and airplanes to crush Republican forces. By 1938, Franco had come to power with the aid of power hungry men.

During 1936, Mussolini and Hitler formed a military alliance called the Rome-Berlin axis. This treaty created an agreement in which the two conspirators were determined to rule Europe jointly in the future. The “axis” was to be the center, around which all the other nations would revolve, just as the earth rotates on its axis. Although Mussolini had been critical of Hitler’s march into the Rhineland, the two agreed to cooperate.

Before the year closed, Germany made a similar alliance with Japan—the so-called Anti-Comintern (Anti-Communist) Pact (which Italy joined in 1937). By such agreements, Europe and the world began dividing into two conflicting camps.

By 1938, Adolf Hitler took personal command of all German forces and prepared to send them

into neighboring countries, not just formerly occupied German territory. His first target was Austria to the south. (In 1934, Austrian National Socialists had murdered the Austrian chancellor in a failed coup attempt.) Germany’s takeover of Austria was bloodless. Hitler summoned the Austrian premier to meet with him and forced him to admit Austrian Nazis to his cabinet. When

Premier Schuschnigg resigned, Hitler moved in troops who met with no opposition. On March 13, Germany annexed Austria. With the occupation of Austria, Germany was now in position to attack Hungary, Italy, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia.

Following the annexation of Austria, Hitler continued his campaign of aggression. His next target was the western portion of Czechoslovakia, a region known as the Sudetenland. Hitler claimed that the region should be controlled by Germany since it was home to approximately three million Germans.

Czechoslovakia attempted to fight against German control of any of its land. Tension rose as German troops were moved to the Czech border. The British navy began to mobilize. France was watching closely. War seemed close at hand.

To avoid war, a conference was held in September 1938, in Munich, Germany, attended by Hitler, Mussolini, the French premier Daladier and the British prime minister, Neville Chamberlain. At the meeting, Hitler promised to annex no more territory if given control of the Sudetenland. Daladier and Chamberlain agreed.

This appeasement of Adolf Hitler was considered necessary in the fall of 1938 to avoid general world war across Europe. Upon his return to England, Prime Minister Chamberlain announced in Britain that the agreement, known as the Munich pact, represented “peace in our time.”



Francisco Franco

Nazi Terror and Control

The promise delivered by Adolf Hitler at Munich to stop seizing European territory in the future soon proved a false one. Although British prime minister Neville Chamberlain tried to convince the British people and the world that the surrender of the Sudetenland was necessary to avoid war, others did not agree. Winston Churchill (1874–1965), then a member of the British Parliament and destined to be prime minister, spoke against the Munich Accords, branding them a defeat for democratic Europe.

But such moves and negotiations made Hitler even more popular with the German people. He worked his magic at Munich, forcing the great powers of England and France to give into his demands. (Czechoslovakia had not even been allowed to attend the Munich conference!)

By annexing the Sudetenland, Hitler no longer faced serious challenge from the Czech military, a significant force at the time. This western region of Czechoslovakia was home to nearly 75 percent of all Czech steel mills and coal mines. From the spring to fall of 1938, Hitler added ten million under German control without having to resort to direct war.

Although France and Great Britain had hoped that Hitler's appetite for territory would be satisfied with the Sudetenland, they soon discovered they were wrong. By March of 1939, Hitler sent his military forces to occupy the rest of Czechoslovakia.

Even at home, Hitler continued his policy of aggression. Two months after the signing of the Munich Accords, Hitler launched a domestic campaign across Germany against the Jews. His agents and fellow Nazis began a systematic persecution of all Jewish people, ordering them to register with the government. Eventually, this policy of racial hatred led the National Socialists to build work and slave camps, as well as death camps where all those deemed by Hitler "undesirable"—including Jews, Slavs, communists, gypsies, and others—were sent.

During Hitler's 12 years in power, from 1933 to 1945, the Jews were the Nazi's primary target of hatred. During the 1930s, the policy of intimidation and humiliation of the Jews was replaced by the building of the slave and death camps. Here, approximately ten million people died, including six million Jews, a policy known as the Final Solution.

To the Nazis, absolute control and intimidation was an important aspect of the fascist-controlled state. Hitler organized several extensive organizations within the National Socialist Party to ensure that few, if any, challenged his power in Germany or in states which came under Nazi control.

This pattern of terrorist organizations began in 1922 when Hitler organized his *Sturmabteilung* (the "Storm Troops"), known commonly as the SA, whose uniforms included the distinctive brown shirts. In 1926, another Nazi

power organization was created, the SS, known officially as the *Schutzstaffel*, or "Security Guards." Originally, the SS was a branch of the SA, but by the 1930s, the two organizations had split. Such groups practiced intimidation, beatings, torture, kidnapping, and murder for their own political ends.

When Hitler came to power in 1933, he formed a secret state police force, called the *Geheime Staatspolizei*, or the "Gestapo." Designed to intimidate the populace and arrest anyone suspected of anti-Nazi activity, the Gestapo had a branch organization called the SD, or *Sicherheitsdienst*. This was the Security Service which infiltrated every branch of the German government to help the Nazis maintain power and expose alleged enemies of the party. Such organizations reveal how fundamental hate was within the Nazi organization.



Herman Goering

Research and Write

Using outside sources, write 250 words about the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz.

World War II Begins

When Adolf Hitler sent troops against Czechoslovakia, he violated the promise he made at the Munich conference. There he had promised to end his campaign of land annexation if only France and Great Britain would give him the green light to annex the western portion of the Czech Republic, the region known as the Sudetenland.

However, Hitler invaded and occupied Czechoslovakia in March 1939. That year proved significant in the history of the conflict which would in time be referred to as World War II. Nazi aggression continued throughout 1939, as well as the expansion of other totalitarian states such as Italy, Japan, and Russia.

But Hitler's annexation of the whole of Czechoslovakia did not go unnoticed or fail to bring about cries of protest. The British prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, who had negotiated with Hitler at Munich, realized he had been lied to and publicly chastised the German leader before the House of Commons.

On March 31, 1939, Chamberlain made it clear that Great Britain would not stand by in the future and allow Hitler to invade other states without punishment. The prime minister stated that if Germany invaded Poland at some later date, both the democratic nations of England and France would intervene against Germany.

Chamberlain's challenge caused Hitler to respond angrily. But he remained unconvinced that either Britain or France would declare war on Germany over Poland.

As the tense weeks of spring passed, other invasions took place. Italy attacked the tiny, defenseless nation of Albania on the Adriatic coast on Good Friday, April 7, 1939. Mussolini's occupation of Albania did not draw the attention of the western democracies, however. They considered the real threat to the future security of Europe to be Adolf Hitler. (Mussolini actually invaded Albania, in part, because of his jealousy over Adolf Hitler's successes against neighboring nation-states.)

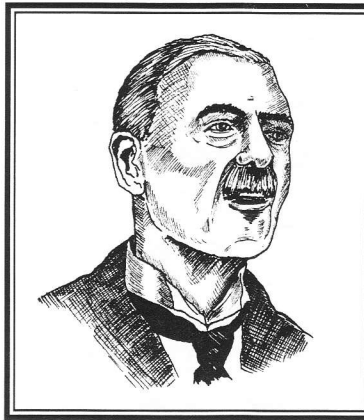
Despite threats from England and France, Hitler continued his preparations for the invasion of Poland. By April 3, 1939, he instructed his generals to set the date for the Polish invasion for September 1. Once again, Hitler targeted a struggling democracy as his next victim. But Hitler's plans for invading Poland had one serious potential in his mind. Since Poland's eastern neighbor was Russia, a German invasion might bring direct conflict between the communist state and Hitler's armies.

In anticipation of Germany's invasion plans against Poland, Great Britain's leaders attempted to court Russia as a possible ally against Hitler. Their efforts were lukewarm at best, however, and no alliance was formed in the summer of 1939 between England and Russia.

Instead, Joseph Stalin, the Russian leader, made his own contacts with Hitler. Stalin was not much interested at that point in allying his state with the western democratic powers, especially after they allowed Hitler at Munich to annex the Sudetenland.

Stalin knew Germany would one day invade Poland. For that reason, the Russian leader suggested a Nonaggression Pact, which was agreed to on August 23, 1939. This agreement eliminated (or so it was thought) any future possibility of Germany and Russia going to war against each other. Both Stalin and Hitler were pleased with the agreement.

This treaty cleared the way for Hitler's invasion of Poland. Within one week of their agreement, Hitler sent his armies into Poland. That date—September 1, 1939—is used to mark the beginning of World War II. And the invasion sparked a dramatic expansion of involved powers. As promised, England and France both declared war on Germany on September 3.



Neville Chamberlain

Research and Write

Using information on these pages and from outside sources, create a timeline of events leading to the start of World War II.

Early Victories for Germany

World War II was the greatest conflict in the history of warfare. It was a bloody struggle resulting in the deaths of millions of people, both military and civilian. The war was worldwide in scope, with major campaigns and battles taking place from Europe to Asia, Australia to Africa, the Pacific to the Atlantic.

Unlike its predecessor, World War I, it was not limited to trench warfare. It was a highly mobile conflict involving infantry and armored divisions which moved with furious speed (in German, such movements were referred to as *blitzkrieg*, meaning “lightning war”). World War II was fought with the latest technologies, many of which were invented during the war itself, including radar, jet planes, intercontinental rockets, and the atomic bomb.

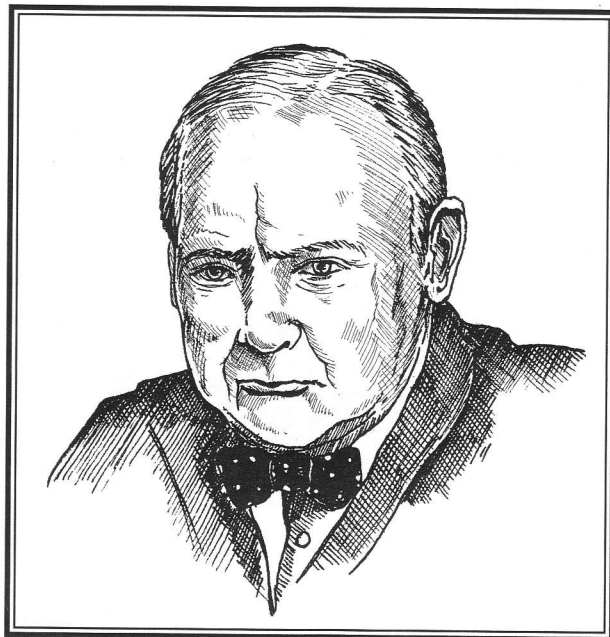
Although the war was fought largely to contain and defeat the spread of fascism in Europe and Asia, it brought together unlikely allies including the western democracies and Soviet communists. And after the war itself was over—signaled by the defeats of Italy, Germany, and eventually Japan—the alliance which brought these powers to their knees did not continue. Instead, the west—led by Britain, the U.S., and France—soon perceived another enemy—their former ally, the Soviet Union, which began to systematically take control of the nations of eastern Europe.

Following the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, the Russians also invaded from the east. By the end of the month, the two powers agreed to partition Poland between them. Two months later, the Soviet Union invaded Finland; by March 1940, the small nation was defeated, surrendering 16,000 square miles of territory to the Russians.

Despite their declarations of war on Germany after the Polish invasion, neither France nor Great

Britain moved immediately against Germany. Both were unprepared for war and settled into a defensive posture.

Meanwhile, Germany continued its assaults. In April 1940, Germany invaded and occupied Denmark and attacked cities in Norway. Later that spring, the Nazi war machine rolled into Belgium and the Netherlands on its way to France. The Germans were able to accomplish a string of such victories by using their infantry, armored ground divisions, and air strikes in a highly coordinated and rapid fashion. As long as the Soviet Union stayed out of the war against Germany, Hitler could concentrate on a single front, which ultimately led him to the streets of Paris. By the summer of 1940, Nazi troops were seen marching in the French capital.



Winston Churchill

This defeat of the French left the British as the only viable force still facing Germany. Hitler expected them to sue for peace, but the British were led by a newly elected prime minister named Winston Churchill, who vowed that his nation would never surrender. Through the summer of 1940, the courageous island of Britain struggled against Nazi air invasion. The Battle of Britain was finally won by the Royal Air Force, which downed hundreds of German aircraft. By September, the raids had failed to defeat Churchill and his people.

Over the next eight months, the war centered on the Mediterranean region. Italy's involvement in the war threatened England's naval dominance in the east Mediterranean. Serious fighting took place across northern Africa from 1940 to 1941, and the fate of the region was not clearly decided until 1942.

By the summer of 1941, however, Hitler was preparing another invasion which would prove to be one of his costliest mistakes.

The Scope of the War Expands

Although Hitler and Stalin had both agreed not to attack each other in August of 1939, Hitler never intended to live up to the agreement. Despite his campaigns across western and eastern Europe, Hitler's hatred of communism and his immense thirst for power and empire caused him to make plans for an eventual invasion of the Soviet Union.

The German leader began his campaign against Russia by first attacking the Balkan states, on April 16, 1941. Hitler's Balkan campaign was intended to later protect the left flank of his Russian invasion forces. (It also gave relief to Mussolini's disastrous campaign against Greece.) Hitler's primary target in this campaign was Yugoslavia, which had earlier sided with Germany and the Axis powers and later declared its neutrality. The Yugoslavian capital of Belgrade was nearly destroyed by Nazi air and ground attacks.

Two months after invading the Balkans, Hitler's war machine launched a massive offensive against the Soviet Union, including 150 divisions of men, tanks, and air support. Hitler's plan had assumed that the surrender of Russia would come by early fall. But the Russians proved a better foe than the German leader had expected. Although the German campaign slowed, after six months, Germans were within a few miles of Moscow.

On December 6, 1941, the Soviet premier, Joseph Stalin, ordered a massive counteroffensive against the Nazis. The early success of this counterattack managed to push the Germans back by 200 miles. But Hitler's forces were far from being defeated.

The next day, a significant invasion was occurring elsewhere involving other world powers. On the morning of December 7, 1941, Japanese forces attacked the naval and army bases located on the Hawaiian island of Oahu. The Japanese had been preparing and planning their surprise for months. Dozens of American naval ships were destroyed at Pearl Harbor—including several key battleships—as well as nearly 2500 sailors, soldiers,

and civilians.

With the attack by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor, the United States soon joined the Allies in their war efforts. The U.S. Congress declared war on Japan on December 8 at the request of President Franklin Roosevelt.

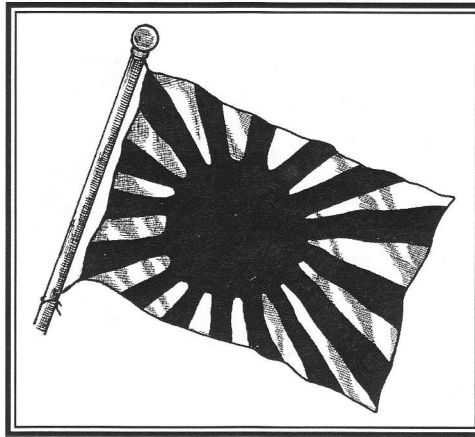
Japan not only attacked United States soil on December 7, but also launched a series of assaults over the following days and weeks—conquering Hong Kong (December 25, 1941), Manila (January 2, 1942), Singapore (February 15, 1942), and the Philippines in May of 1942.

After the U.S. declaration of war against Japan, Germany and Italy declared war on the U.S. on December 11. Before the day was over, the Congress had declared war on both powers. As the scope of the war enlarged with the entrance of the United States into the conflict, the Russian campaign continued on.

By late spring of 1942, the Allied powers were still struggling. Most of Europe was under the control of the German military machine. Russia was still facing strong German thrusts. The United States had not yet recovered fully from the Pearl Harbor attack (and had not been prepared for war even before the bombings at Hawaii). And Hitler's submarines were menacing the British Navy, bringing about serious casualties and ship losses for Great Britain.

There were bright spots for the Allies, however, during 1942. Hitler's Russian campaign ran out of gas during that destructive year of war. When, during the summer, German military units attempted to take control of Soviet oil fields in the Caucasus, they also began to lay siege to the city of Stalingrad.

Although the German Sixth Army came close to victory at Stalingrad, the Russians held out until the arrival of winter, which left the Germans stranded. When Hitler ordered his troops to take Stalingrad or die, the German soldiers there were doomed. By February 1943, Germany had lost the upper hand in the Russian campaign and 500,000 men lost their lives to combat, starvation, and cold.



1943: A Year of Turning Points

By the summer of 1942, the Allies were starting to rebound from their losses of the previous year and of the first six months of 1942.

The British held out in North Africa despite the relentless drives of Germany's great tank commander, General Erwin Rommel (1891–1944).

By October 1942, the British tank commander, General B. L. Montgomery (1887–1976), brought defeat to Germany's Africa Korps at the battle of El Alamein. In November, British and American forces landed in North Africa—a wide-ranging assault plan called Operation Torch—and, by May 1943, brought about the defeat of the Germans in North Africa.

By May 1942, the course of war in the Pacific was turning in favor of the Allies as well. United States naval forces defeated the Japanese in the Battle of the Coral Sea on May 7. The next month, Japanese and American aircraft carriers squared off in the Battle of Midway (June 4–7). The U.S. sank four Japanese carriers—a turning point in the war for the Allies, as was the removal of German forces from North Africa.

On the Atlantic Ocean, the tide was also turning. By 1943, the Allies were using radar and sonar to detect enemy ships and submarines. Germany lost dozens of submarines in the spring of the year, including 40 in May alone. From October until year's end, the German navy lost 53 submarines at the hands of the Allies. (During those months, only 47 merchant ships were lost.) Meanwhile, American shipyards were building merchant ships faster than the enemy could destroy them.

In 1943, the Allied nations extended their bombing of Germany from the air, a trend which continued until the war's end. Allied planes, mostly British and American, dropped 120,000 tons of bombs on German and other targets. In 1944, the Allies dropped five times that figure. And in the first four months of 1945, the final months of the European-based war, the Allies pounded German targets with half a million tons of aerial bombs. Despite a literally “round-the-clock” schedule for Allied bombing missions during the last two years of the European war, 75 percent of all German

manufacturing and industrial plants were still in operation at war's end.

By the summer of 1943, the Axis nations were losing the war, having been defeated in Russia at Stalingrad and in North Africa. The Japanese had lost the offensive by 1943 and the U.S. navy was busily engaged in an extensive offensive operation. Yet the war would drag on for another two years.

Once the Germans were defeated in North Africa, the Allies developed a plan of assault to the north. The plan was to invade the island of Sicily, (located off the toe of the boot of the Italian peninsula), and to use that site as a springboard to the Italian mainland. The assault against Axis forces at Sicily began on July 10, 1943. In just over five weeks, the campaign was won. The success of the Allied invasion of Sicily helped bring about the ouster of Mussolini. (Over the next two years, Mussolini would further discredit himself by serving as a Hitler-controlled ruler of northern Italy until he was killed by Italian partisans in April of 1945.)

With Sicily firmly in Allied hands, an invasion of the Italian mainland was not far away. On September 2, 1943, the Allies landed along the beaches of southern Italy, bringing about the official surrender of the Italian government by the next day. Yet divisions of tenacious German troops attempted to slow the Allied advance through Italy. Over the next nine months, the Allies fought hard battles against seasoned German troops. Although the Allies occupied and liberated Rome by June 4, 1944, the German forces in Italy did not completely surrender until May of 1945.

Research and Write

Write 100 words describing the fighting which took place at any of the following sites: Anzio, Cassino, Midway, Coral Sea, or El Alamein.

The Allied Drive Continues

As the war continued through 1943 and 1944, the Allies found themselves on the offensive in nearly every theater of combat, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Hitler's misplaced campaign against Russia caused the German military serious losses in manpower and equipment—losses from which they never fully recovered. Even after the Russians finally broke the German siege at Stalingrad in January 1943, Hitler ordered another offensive two months later.

But the possibilities for ultimate German victory against the Soviets had already died in the harsh Russian winter of 1942–43. The Russians turned the German offensive around and went on the counter-offensive by July. Before year's end, the Russians had pushed the Germans out of nearly all remaining strongholds in the Soviet Union.

Several factors made this Russian campaign successful. The German army was at a crisis point in morale. Hitler often rendered his generals ineffectual, refusing to allow them to make independent mistakes without his input. Their Russian counterparts had complete independence in the field, allowing them to respond faster and more decisively than the Germans. In addition, the Russians, by 1943, simply had more available equipment than did the Germans.

Through the American Lend-Lease Program, U.S.-produced war material was delivered to the Allies—including the Soviet Union—in staggering quantities. By the end of 1943, Lend-Lease materials to the Russians included 8,000 airplanes, 5000 tanks, and 170,000 trucks, plus food and medicines. By the summer of 1944, the Soviets outnumbered the Germans in the field by three to one and had an equipment advantage of five to one. By the end of the summer, the Germans had been forced out of the Soviet Union altogether and the

Russians pursued them across Poland and Romania, all the way to Germany itself.

But the greatest military feat of the summer of 1944 was the long-planned liberation invasion of France by the Allied armies. This campaign—code-named *Operation Overlord*—was developed by the supreme commander of all Allied forces, General

Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890–1969). For many months prior to its launch, all the elements needed for a successful amphibious attack from bases in England to the northern French coast were assembled. In all, the Allied effort was to include 5000 ships, over 12,000 aircraft, and hundreds of thousands of men.

On June 6, 1944—D-Day—the invasion began. Although the Germans had known such an attack across the English Channel would come eventually, they did not know when or where. Thus, they did all they could prior to the assault to guarantee Allied failure once it did come. Gun



Dwight Eisenhower

emplacement and protective concrete bunkers sprouting machine guns were erected along the coastal cliffs along French shores. The beach waters were crowded with barbed wire and explosives, as well as anti-assault barriers.

Despite all such challenges, Eisenhower's D-Day plans were successful. By June 10 (D-Day plus four) British, American, and Canadian forces had landed thousands of troops along 80 miles of Normandy coast and had moved inland by as many as 20 miles. By D-Day plus seven, the Allies had landed over 500,000 men and 90,000 tons of supplies and support vehicles. In addition, another 500,000 Free French forces joined the Allies. By August, the Allied invaders had turned back the Germans, occupying and liberating the city of Paris, which had been under Nazi control for four years.

Allied Victory Comes in Europe

The success of the Allied invasion of France's Normandy coast in June 1944 further signaled the victory of the Allied powers over Germany and Hitler's Third Reich. But the war would continue for almost another year before the German surrender materialized.

With the liberation of France, Hitler ordered the first military use of Germany's newly designed *Vengeance Bombs*. These weapons were a form of rocket, consisting of a jet plane carrying no pilot and a ton of explosives in the nose. Popularly known as the "V-1," these deadly weapons rained down on targets in Britain, especially the city of London.

Britain responded by ordering bombing missions against the factories which manufactured the V-1. In addition, British planes attempted to shoot down the V-1s during their approach to the British Isles. In just a few months, Hitler's technicians delivered a new model, the V-2, a true rocket which hurtled through the sky at supersonic speeds, traveled silently and hit its target without the slightest warning. In the months of their use, the V-1 and V-2 weapons resulted in the deaths of 8000 people, nearly all of them in London.

But the Allies were not daunted by these weapons. Before the end of the summer, the German military high command understood that the war was a lost cause for Germany. But Hitler could not be convinced. A group of German generals plotted against Hitler and attempted to assassinate the Nazi leader. But the July 20 bombing scheme failed and the conspirators were killed.

On the battle front, the war continued. By August, the Allies had established a second French invasion site, in southern France. From there, Allied armies pushed toward Germany, crossing the border in September. Hitler, desperate to turn the tide, attempted a last ditch, major offensive near year's end. In December, the Battle of the Bulge (December 16–25) took place. The Germans hit the Allied line hard in several key places and managed, for a short period, to push part of the Allied line back. But the offensive was too little, too late. Before year's end, the Allies had turned the German assault strategy back around.

Through the late winter and early spring of 1945, the Allied efforts brought the close of the war in Europe closer with each passing day. United States tank units, under the command of General George S. Patton (1885–1945) moved along speedily throughout the winter months, finally reaching the Rhine River (the German border) in March 1945, discovering a bridge at Remagen which the Germans had failed to destroy.

In April, the final weeks of the European conflict witnessed the further advance of invading American, British, and Canadian troops into western and southern Germany. At the same time, the Russians were advancing on the city of Berlin. On the 12th, the American public was shocked when they heard of the death of their president. Franklin Roosevelt died of a cerebral hemorrhage.

A week later, the Russians entered the German capital, Berlin. After 11 days of street fighting, which took Russian troops from house to house, the city lay in ruins. Deep under its streets, in his personal bunker, the German leader, Adolf Hitler, committed suicide by taking poison and shooting himself in the head on April 30, 1945. A week later, German leaders surrendered to the Allies on May 7, 1945. The war in Europe was over.

Research and Write

Despite a long succession of victories for the Allies by 1944, Hitler still held out for another year. From your reading of these pages and outside sources, how was Germany able to hold out as long as it did?

Axis and Allied Leaders: Biographies

World War II witnessed the leadership of Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, Winston Churchill, Joseph Stalin, and FDR. Each man made his contribution to the war, as either an Allied or Axis power. Among these men were villains and heroes, and some of them might qualify as both.

Research and Write

In the spaces provided below, write a short biography, hitting the highlights of each of these World War II leaders. Include years of birth and death, and some of the important events of their lives.

Adolf Hitler

Benito Mussolini

Winston Churchill

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Joseph Stalin

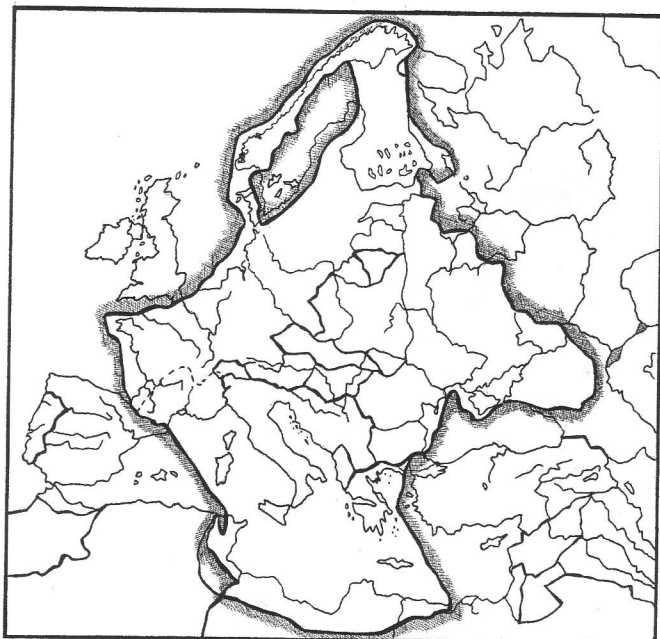
Axis Aggression: A Map Study

September 1, 1939 marks the date of the official beginning of World War II. But the aggression of Germany, Italy, and Japan began even earlier than that. Throughout the early years of the war, the Axis powers, especially Japan and Germany, were responsible for the invasions and annexations of

dozens of states, nations, and island groups from Europe to the South Pacific.

Ambitious and greedy leaders such as Hitler, Mussolini, and the Japanese warlords, led by Hideki Tojo (1884–1948), attempted to extend their national influence with brute, military force.

Europe 1942



Map Exercise I

The map at left reveals the extent of Nazi control over the nations of Europe by 1942.

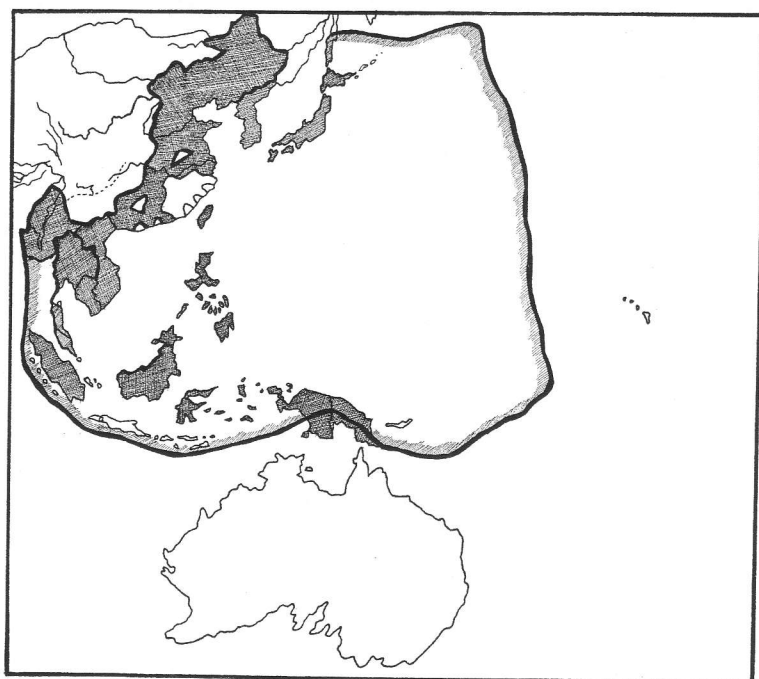
List below as many nations as you can which fell under German occupation.

Map Exercise II

The map at right reveals the furthest extent of Japanese control over the region of the Pacific and Asia by 1942.

List below as many nations as you can which fell under Japanese control.

The Pacific 1942



The Holocaust

As Allied armies descended on Germany in the latter months of the war, a horrible reality came to light. As British, American, and Russian armies swept through Poland and Germany, they discovered the gruesome evidence of the Nazi concentration camps, or death camps, where mass exterminations of “undesirables” had been taking place for years.

During those years, rumors had circulated throughout Europe of the existence of such facilities, built by the dozens by German companies employed by the Nazis. Adolf Hitler had incorporated his own personal brand of hatred toward those he considered of inferior race. When writing his biography, *Mein Kampf*, in the 1920s, Hitler had expressed his loathing for the Jewish race and had advocated persecution. During the 1930s, he repeated his dislike and contempt when delivering his speeches.

In early 1939, six years after becoming Germany’s leader, the Fuehrer announced to the members of the Reichstag that the Jews would be destroyed as a race during the approaching European war. Hitler’s rabid racism stemmed not only from his sense of Jewish inferiority, but from his belief in German superiority. Through his hatred, Hitler formed his program of destruction, which was known as the *Final Solution*.

The German government, led by the National Socialists, helped to bring Hitler’s dream of a master race to life. The Nazis began their campaign by harassing German Jews. Laws were passed restricting their business practices, where they could live, and forced them to register with the government. Over the years, as Hitler’s armies marched into neighboring nations and beyond, the local Jewish population was typically rounded up and forced to work, many of them shipped to the newly constructed concentration camps where the Jews and other persecuted peoples found a miserable existence of oppression, slave labor, and mass

executions. (Although Hitler’s primary targets for destruction were the Jews, the slave and death camps became home for Slavic peoples, gypsies, Poles, Russian Communists who were prisoners of war, the mentally ill, the handicapped, and others.)

By the war’s end, millions of victims were sent to the German concentration camps, many by train, packed into cattle and box cars. Once in the camps, the inmates were either forced to labor for the Nazis, or they were subjected to medical experimentation. The others were executed, many in specially constructed gas chambers. The Polish camp at Sobibor was the sight of nearly a quarter million executions, most by carbon monoxide poisoning, provided by exhaust fumes from German vans. This primitive poisoning system was later replaced, first at the

notorious death camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau, by gas chambers made to resemble large shower facilities, filled with a poison known as Zyklon-B (a form of Prussic gas).

The numbers of people killed during the Holocaust is an appalling figure. Millions were forced to their deaths in the Nazi camps. In Auschwitz, perhaps the worst of the camps, 1.1 million people were killed. In all, perhaps ten million lost their lives in these systematic extermination facilities. Of that figure, perhaps six million were of Jewish heritage, a figure equal to two out of every three Jews in Europe. Among those killed at the hands of the Nazis, 1.5 million of them were children.



*A sign at the entrance to Auschwitz:
“Work makes a person free.”*

Review and Write

Why do you believe the Holocaust took place? What circumstances must exist before one people systematically attempts to exterminate another race? Do you think another Holocaust is possible? Have other Holocausts occurred?

The Allies Defeat Japan

World War II was often referred to as a “two-front war.” Not only was there fighting in the European theater against the forces of Hitler and Mussolini, there was also heavy fighting in the Pacific against the Japanese. While the European war ended in May of 1945, the extensive conflict in Asia continued on for another four months. (In fact, winning the war in Europe first had always been the goal of the Allied leaders.)

The Japanese had achieved their most extensive control of Asia and of Pacific island groups by early summer of 1942. Burma, Malaya, the Netherlands, East Indies, the Philippines, and Thailand had all fallen under Japanese occupation. By that time, the U.S. had recovered from the devastating losses of the surprise Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor. The Battle of Midway was the struggle which turned the Allies around in the Pacific. Fought in early June 1942, it was a stunning loss for the Japanese, as four of their aircraft carriers were destroyed.

From the beginning, the Allies pursued three major goals in the Pacific theater: (1) to bring about the recapture of the extensive Philippine Islands, (2) to cut Japanese control of bases throughout Asia and the Pacific, and (3) to recapture Japanese-control sites for the purpose of launching air attacks against Japan. Following the victory at Midway, each goal was eventually accomplished.

By summer’s end, the Americans and British forces were taking the offensive. With help from loyal Allied nations (including the British Empire’s supporters in Australia, New Zealand, and India), Britain and America pursued a policy of air bombardments, submarine attacks, and island-hopping campaigns.

The first fighting of this first Allied Pacific offensive began on August 7, 1942 when U.S.

Marines landed on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands, located northeast of Australia. After several months of struggle, the Japanese finally surrendered the islands.

The Allied drive continued into 1943 as the Japanese defended their control over the Gilbert Islands in November after fierce fighting. By

January 1944, the United States began a series of attacks against Japanese positions in the Marshall Islands, located north of the Gilberts. New Guinea was regained by the Allies in early summer, followed by the recapture of the Mariana Islands, located west of the Marshalls, putting the Allies within 16,000 miles of Japan.

With each victory and regain of territory, the Allies moved closer to the islands of Japan. In October 1944, American general Douglas

MacArthur launched a massive assault on the Philippines, which were held by over 270,000 Japanese. Following months of hard fighting, the Allies occupied the Philippines.

Through the spring and summer of 1945, the Allies fought bitter Japanese opposition as they moved closer to Japan. Fighting on the tiny island of Iwo Jima (750 miles from Tokyo) resulted in 26,000 dead before the Japanese surrendered there. At Okinawa (350 miles from Tokyo) the Allies suffered nearly 50,000 casualties. One hundred nine thousand Japanese were killed. The Okinawa campaign was the final major fight of the Pacific war.

By summer, the Allies had constructed a new weapon, the atomic bomb, which they dropped on the Japanese in August 1945. These devastating weapons convinced the Japanese to surrender. On September 2, the Allies and Japan signed the surrender agreement.



General Douglas MacArthur

Test II

Part I. Matching (Worksheets 15–20)

Match the answers to the right with the statement on the left.

- _____ 1. Asian nation attacked by the Japanese in 1931
- _____ 2. German region remilitarized by the Germans in 1936
- _____ 3. Spanish Fascist leader during the Spanish Civil War
- _____ 4. Communism opposition treaty linking Germany, Italy, and Japan
- _____ 5. Agreement by which Britain and France allowed Hitler to annex the Sudetenland
- _____ 6. Organized German policy of extermination of the Jews
- _____ 7. Known as the *Geheime Staatspolizei*: Hitler's secret police force
- _____ 8. Agreement between the Soviet Union and Germany made in 1939
- _____ 9. "lightning war"
- _____ 10. British prime minister during most of World War II
- _____ 11. Site of Japanese surprise attack of December 7, 1941
- _____ 12. Russian city where Germans laid down a siege

- A. Anti-Comintern
- B. Nonaggression Pact
- C. blitzkrieg
- D. Manchuria
- E. Final Solution
- F. Winston Churchill
- G. Francisco Franco
- H. Stalingrad
- I. Munich Accords
- J. Gestapo
- K. Pearl Harbor
- L. Rhineland

Part II. Matching (Worksheets 21–27)

- _____ 1. German tank commander in North Africa
- _____ 2. Landing of American and British forces in North Africa
- _____ 3. June 1942 naval battle in the Pacific which brought U.S. victory
- _____ 4. Program which supplied the Allies with American war material
- _____ 5. Plan for an Allied landing in June 1944 off the Normandy coast
- _____ 6. Supreme commander of all Allied forces during World War II
- _____ 7. Rocket bomb designed by the Germans and used against England
- _____ 8. Last major German offensive of the war (December 1944)
- _____ 9. American president during most of World War II
- _____ 10. Pacific theater battle site located just 350 miles from Japan
- _____ 11. Nazi concentration camp
- _____ 12. Weapon which brought about the end of the Pacific war

- A. Battle of Midway
- B. Dwight D. Eisenhower
- C. Franklin Roosevelt
- D. Erwin Rommel
- E. Operation Overlord
- F. Treblinka
- G. Lend-Lease
- H. Battle of the Bulge
- I. atomic bomb
- J. V-1
- K. Okinawa
- L. Operation Torch

Part III. Respond and Write

Identify four major battles of World War II which brought about an Allied victory and give the significance of each battle.