

CONFLICT IN EUROPE 1935–1945

by Ken Webb M.A. (Oxon), C.Ed

*“Everything you wanted to know about Conflict in Europe
1935-1945, but were afraid to ask.”*

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1st Edition

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About the author

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"Conflict in Europe 1935-1945" is one of fourteen titles in the "Everything you wanted to know about... but were afraid to ask" series *written specifically* for the new NSW Modern and Ancient History syllabuses commencing 2018-19. Other titles in this series include:

- The Decline and Fall of the Romanov Dynasty
- World War I
- Power and Authority 1919-1946
- Russia and the Soviet Union 1917-1941
- The Cold War 1945-1991
- Conflict in Indochina 1954-1979
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Author's note

The purpose of this book – as with all titles in the “Everything you wanted to know about... but were afraid to ask” series – is to make life easy for students and teachers working their way through the Conflict in Europe 1935-1945 topic in the Modern History HSC. It is not intended to be the final word on Conflict in Europe 1935-1945; nothing beats wide-reading.

However, neither teachers nor students always have the time for such luxuries. Teachers have several other classes to worry about, not to mention a growing multitude of administrative and bureaucratic tasks to fulfill! Students have other subjects to study, and may also be burdened with a series of major works. Thus, “Everything you want to know...” steps in to make life easy.

The principal aims of this book are to:

- provide the essential factual detail needed to understand the topic;
- provide references to written and visual sources;
- provide an introduction to the essence of historiographical debate;
- provide ideas for approaching the types of questions that might appear when examined on *Conflict in Europe 1935-1945*.

Rationale for the structure of this book

“*Conflict in Europe 1935-1945*” is one of six topics in the ‘Peace and Conflict’ section of the Modern History syllabus, introduced in 2018 and examined for the first time in 2019. The syllabus divides the topic as follows:

- Survey – Growth of European tensions
- Focus of study – German foreign policy
 - Course of the European war
 - Civilians at war
 - End of the conflict

These broad headings have been used to structure the book and have been broken down into sections closely based on the structure of the syllabus to make the topic more accessible to students. Additional sections have been included on approaching the types of questions that could be set on this topic in the HSC examination.

Suggestion for scope and sequencing of this topic

The time spent on *Conflict in Europe 1935-1945* is at the discretion of the individual school. The syllabus recommends 30 indicative hours (as it does for each of the other three topics comprising Modern History at the HSC). What follows are suggestions based on past experience and the construction of the new NSW Modern History syllabus commencing in 2018-19.

- The final topic to be studied in Year 11 Modern History will almost certainly be from “*The Shaping of the Modern World*” section of the syllabus.
 - Most schools will probably study “*World War I*” in that section.
- As a result of this, it is logical to commence Year 12 study with *Power and Authority 1919-1946* as The World War I topic ends with “*the nature and legacy of World War I*”, part of which will involve an examination of the post-World War I peace settlement.
 - The Survey Topic which opens the *Power and Authority 1919-1946* topic comprises an overview of the post-World War I peace settlement and its consequences. ¹
- Many schools may choose to study *Russia and the Soviet Union 1917-1941* next. ² If this is the case, *Conflict in Europe 1935-1945* logically could be studied as the third topic.

¹ See: Webb, K, *Power and Authority 1919-1946*, Get Smart Education, Mona Vale, 2018

² See: Webb, K, *Russia and the Soviet Union 1917-1941*, Get Smart Education, Mona Vale, 2018

Chapter One:

The collapse of collective security, Abyssinia, the Spanish Civil War

Background

When the victorious powers met at Versailles in 1919 to work out the post-war settlement, feelings of bitterness and a desire for revenge were strong. However, there was an equally strong desire to avoid another terrible war as had just ended. US President Wilson was foremost in pushing this hope.

On 8 January 1918, Wilson had addressed the American Congress and delivered what became known as “The Fourteen Points”. These were ideas Wilson had on which a post-war settlement could be based.

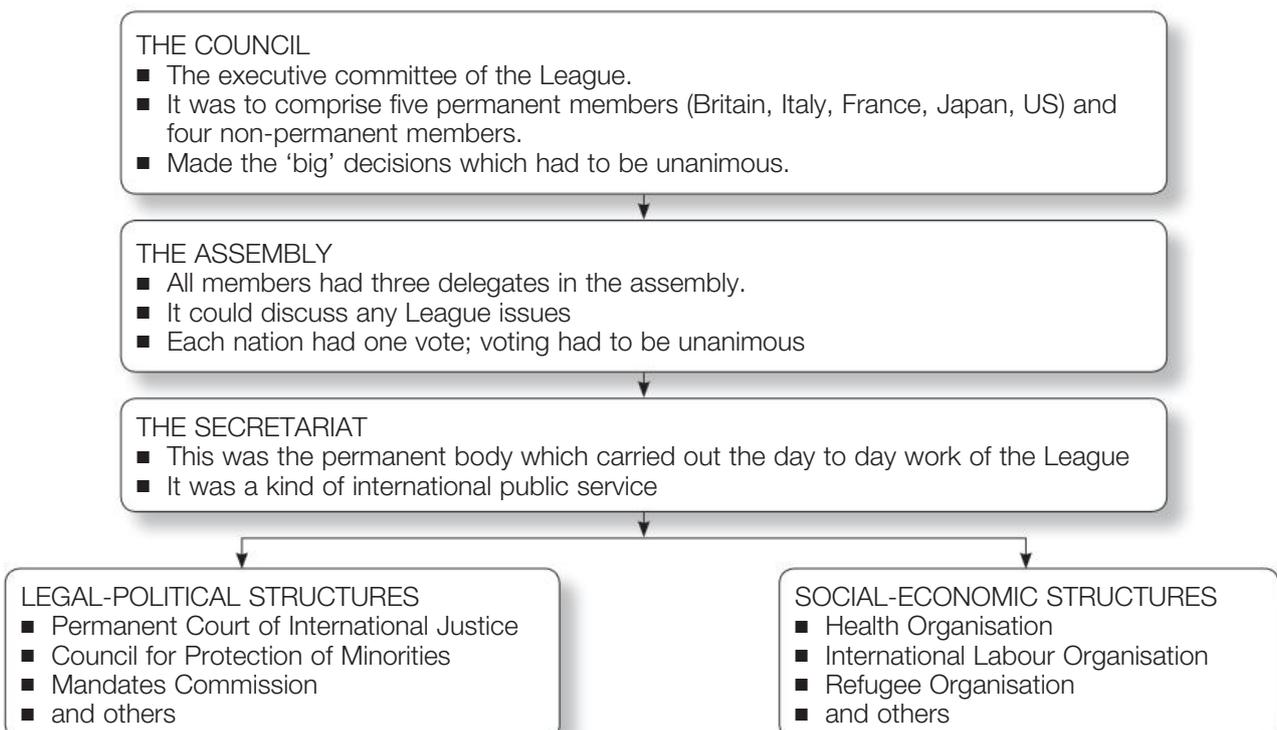
His 14th point called for the creation of ‘a general association of nations’.

Wilson hoped that such an ‘association of nations’ could prevent future conflicts by allowing nations to meet and discuss their differences.

He argued such an organisation would have prevented war in 1914.

Wilson’s association of nations became the League of Nations. Based in Geneva, the League’s prime purpose was the prevention of international conflicts. However, it also took on many other roles and had significant success in dealing with non-political issues. It also developed international bodies such as the Permanent Court of International Justice and the International Labour Organisation.

Figure 1.1 The Structure of the League of Nations



Throughout the 1920s, the League of Nations could boast some successes:

- Conflict between Sweden and Finland over the Aaland Islands in the Baltic Sea was peacefully settled with the agreement of both parties in 1921.
- Threatened with international sanctions under Article 16 of the League Covenant, Yugoslavia ended its invasion of Albania in 1921.
- A major clash between Greece and Bulgaria in 1925 was ended by League intervention when Greece accepted it was in the wrong and paid an indemnity.
- Significant success was achieved in dealing with the administration of the Saar and Danzig¹, stateless refugees, health, transport and finance.
- The League successfully dealt with 'mandates'. Germany's former colonies were now administered as mandates by other nations until the colonies could look after themselves. Australia had a mandate over New Guinea.

However, despite many successes, the League Nations also suffered some serious failures. These failures highlighted the fundamental weaknesses of the League and go a long way to explaining its ultimate failure (see below). In the 1920s League failures included:

- Allied intervention in Russia in 1919 was ignored by the League as was Polish action against Lithuania in 1920 and Turkey's refusal to accept the 1920 Treaty of Sevres (part of the Paris Peace Settlement).
- Italy ignored the League of Nations in 1923 during the Corfu Incident and preferred to deal with the Council of Ambassadors.
- The League failed to deal with issues outside of Europe. The United States prevented League action in Nicaragua in 1926 and Britain's interests were upheld in Iraq in 1924.
- Several issues were not allowed to be presented to the League such as the issue of Allied debts, relations between Britain and Egypt, and between China and the great powers.
- Attempts to achieve disarmament, a key goal of the League, failed.
- Attempts to strengthen the League, such as the 1923 Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance and the 1924 Geneva Protocol failed as nations became concerned they might get dragged into conflicts having nothing to do with them.

However, the most dramatic example of the League's impotence came in 1931 when Japan invaded Manchuria. Following an explosion on the Manchurian railway in September 1931, Japanese troops quickly moved to take control of the province. In 1932 Shanghai was bombed and further provinces annexed by the Japanese. Manchuria became the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo.

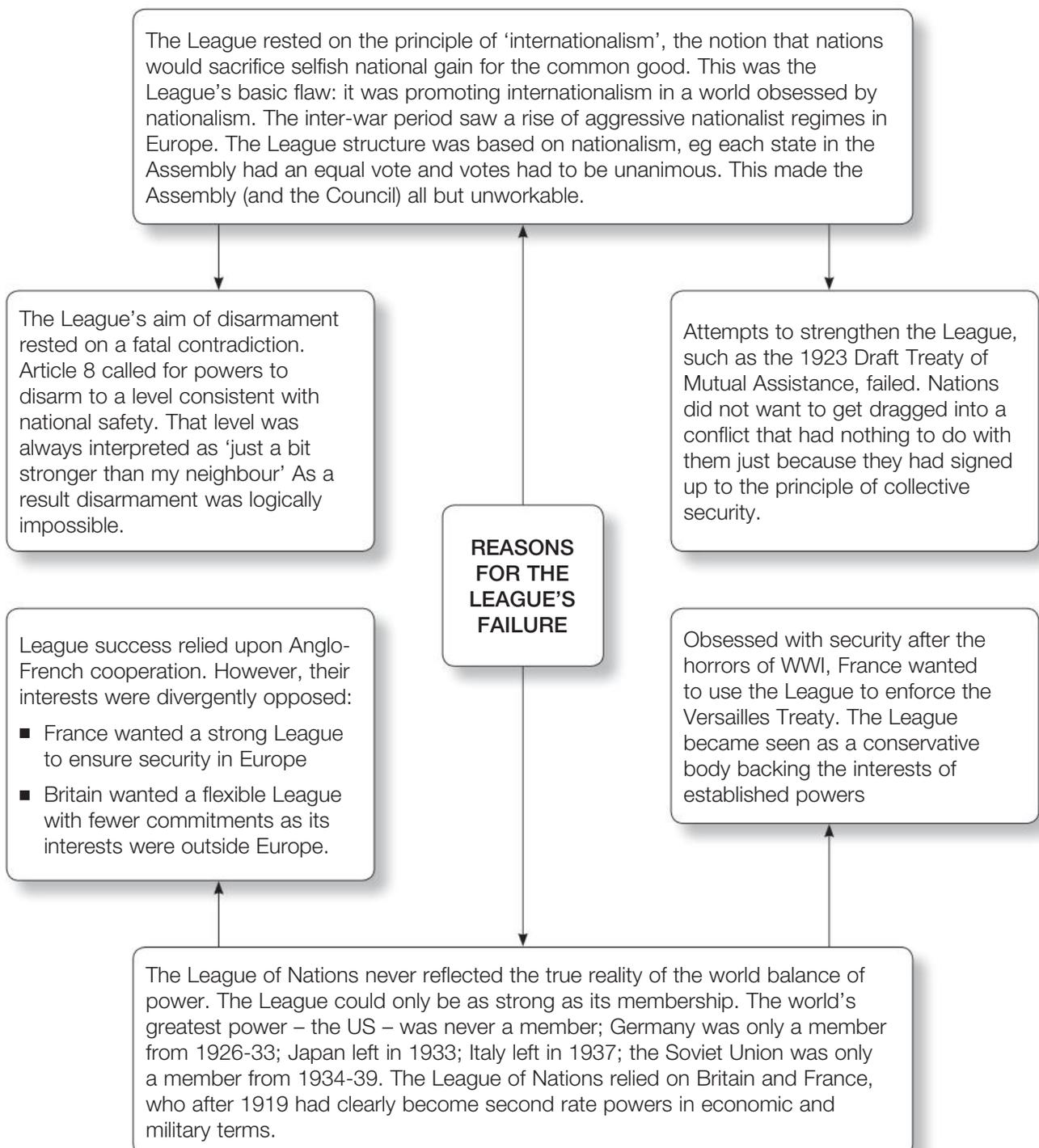
- China appealed to the League of Nations under Article 11 of the League Covenant. The League condemned Japan and ordered it to withdraw.
- The Lytton Commission was sent to Manchuria to report on the 'incident'. The Lytton Commission rejected Japan's reasons for its invasion but did not call for a return to the status quo and instead called upon Japan and China to have talks.
- Lytton's report was adopted in February 1933; Japan left the League a month later.

¹ These areas were placed under League administration in the 1919 Paris Peace Settlement.

The lesson of Manchuria was clear: when a major power chose to defy the League, the League had no power to stop it. These were lessons Hitler and Mussolini would later take note of.

The Manchuria Incident highlighted what most people had accepted for a long time. The League of Nations could not prevent international conflict. The fundamental principle behind the League was that of “collective security”: if one League member was attacked, other League members would rally round in defence of that member and force the back down of the aggressor. Japan had shown the inadequacy of the principle of collective security. However, the reasons for the League’s failure go much deeper as Figure 1.2 illustrates.

Figure 1.2 The reasons for the failure of the League of Nations



Exercise 1.1

Answer the following questions:

1	Who was behind the idea of a League of Nations?	
2	Which body of the League made the executive decisions?	
3	What was the purpose of the Secretariat?	
4	Explain the principle of internationalism?	
5	When did the United States join the League?	
6	Match these years League membership with the correct country:	1926-33= _____ 1919-33= _____ 1919-37= _____ 1934-39= _____
7	On which two League members did the League of Nations rely?	
8	List three non-political areas of League success.	
9	Which nation ignored the League over the 1923 Corfu Incident?	
10	What was the significance of the Manchuria Incident?	

Abyssinia

In October 1935, Italy launched a full-scale invasion of Abyssinia. These events in eastern Africa were to have a major impact on European affairs. It is important to understand that Abyssinia did not cause the end of Collective Security nor did it bring about the demise of the League of Nations. Abyssinia was more a symptom rather than a cause of the collapse of Collective Security and the death of the League. These are ideas which will be covered in the “What do the historians have to say” section.

Background

Mussolini had longed for a chance of imperial expansion; Abyssinia provided him with that opportunity. Victory in Abyssinia would be the start of the resurgence of a new Roman Empire.

However, there were other factors encouraging Mussolini to become involved in Abyssinia:

- Italian economists had argued that Abyssinia was rich in resources and would provide Italy with food and export markets.
- Mack Smith argues there was a political motive. The Great Depression “made it desirable to divert people’s gaze from home discontents and to unite the nation around its common patriotism.”²
- Italy had been humiliated by Abyssinia at the Battle of Adowa in 1896 and victory now would enable Mussolini to restore Italian honour.
- It was also convenient! Abyssinia was flanked by two Italian colonies – Eritrea and Somaliland – and apart from Liberia in West Africa, there was nowhere else available to colonise.

Italy had had a relationship with Abyssinia for some time. Mack Smith argues that Mussolini had designs on the country as soon as he assumed office. In 1923, Italy supported Abyssinia’s League membership, after having earlier opposed it. In 1928 an Economic Agreement and Non-Aggression Pact were signed between the two.

In December 1934, some Italian soldiers were killed in a clash at Walwal, an incident Mussolini would use as an excuse for invasion. Throughout 1935, Britain and France tried to prevent an all-out war:

- In January French Foreign Minister Laval told Mussolini that France supported Italian aims in Abyssinia.
- Britain tried to encourage Abyssinia to accommodate Italy, and offered a path to the sea and use of the port of Zeila in British Somaliland.

The Italian Invasion

- 3 October 1935: Italian armies moved into Abyssinia, from its northern colony Eritrea and its southern colony Somaliland.
- Slow Italian progress picked up once General Badoglio took over from General de Bono. Italian strength, and its brutal willingness to use all its modern weapons, including gas, quickly wore down the Abyssinians. By April 1936, the Abyssinian capital Addis Ababa was captured.
- On 9 May 1936, Italian King Victor Emmanuel III was crowned emperor.

The impact of Abyssinia on the League and the principle of Collective Security

Italian action against Abyssinia was totally indefensible though League-appointed arbitrators, who reported in September 1935, argued that neither side was at fault in their disagreements. In fact, they sought to persuade Abyssinia to accept border changes with Italy’s colonies. It was already clear, even before Italy’s full-scale invasion, that the League was not going to do much to assist this victim of Italian aggression.

Both France and Britain could have taken strong action against Italy:

- they both had colonies next to Italy’s colonies
- Britain could have denied Italy the use of the Suez Canal.

² Mack Smith, D, Italy, University of Michigan Press, Michigan, 1959, p448

They chose not to take action. Both Britain and France were more concerned with possible future German behaviour at this point. In April 1935, they had formed the Stresa Front with Italy which aimed to keep Germany in check. It was feared that strong action against Italy over Abyssinia could destroy the Stresa Front and drive Italy into the arms of Germany.

The League finally agreed to impose sanctions against Italy. However, these sanctions were half-hearted and ineffective:

- oil and coal were not included - key resources for a nation at war;
- Austria, Albania, Switzerland and Hungary refused to endorse sanctions;
- Germany and the Soviet Union actually helped Italy;
- and who was likely to try and stop American ships bound for Italy?

Sanctions achieved the worst of all possible results. They did absolutely nothing to assist Abyssinia. Their weak nature provided further evidence that the League was useless.

E H Carr's view was that:

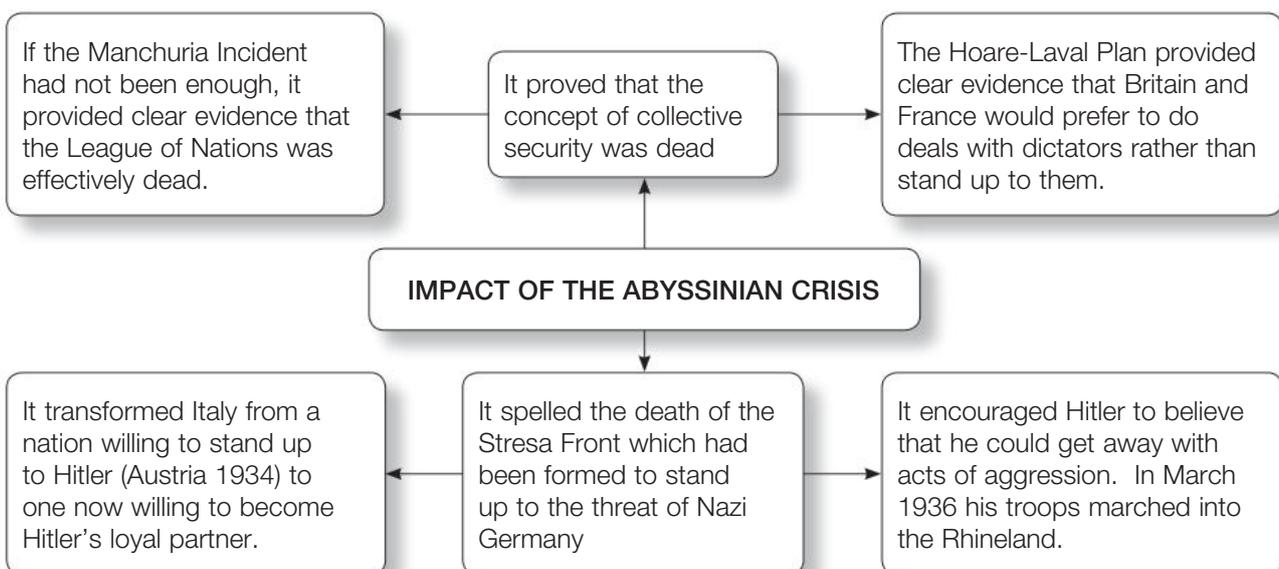
"The Italian victory was a grave blow to the League and an acute embarrassment for Great Britain." ³

AJP Taylor states his view a little more strongly:

"This was the death-blow to the League as well as to Abyssinia." ⁴

Weak though sanctions were, their imposition was enough to destroy the Stresa Front. By November 1936, Italy had become Germany's "axis partner"; in February 1937 Italy walked out of the League. Even worse for the League was the publication of the December 1935 Hoare-Laval Plan. British Foreign Secretary Hoare and French Foreign Minister Laval attempted to buy off Mussolini to maintain his favour. This act of 'appeasement' will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter Two. With Europe's attention seized by events in Abyssinia, Hitler took the opportunity to send his troops into the demilitarised Rhineland.

Figure 1.3 summarises the impact of the Abyssinian Crisis



³ Carr, EH, *International Relations Between the Wars*, Macmillan, London, 1947, p165

⁴ Taylor, AJP, *The Origins of the Second World War*, penguin, Harmondsworth, 1961, p127

What do the historians have to say about “Abyssinia”?

1. Philip Bell: *The Origins of the Second World War in Europe*

Philip Bell argues that a key result of the Abyssinian crisis was its effect on Anglo-French relations. The Hoare-Laval Plan had been an example of hard-edged politics (realpolitik). The British believed that the French had let them down with their publication of the details of the plan. The French, on the other hand, were angered at Britain’s sentimental fit of “Leagueomania and morality” (support for sanctions) which had done nothing for Abyssinia and had merely resulted in the loss of a valuable Italian alliance.

*“...There was enough realpolitik to undermine the League, and enough League sentiment to nullify the realpolitik...Anglo-French relations collapsed at a time when their solidity was sorely needed.”*⁵

2. Graham Ross: *The Great Powers and the Decline of the European States System 1914-45*

Ross explains that the Abyssinian Crisis had a major impact on the growth of Italian-German relations. He argues that Mussolini was deeply angered by Anglo-French behaviour over Abyssinia. This involved not only his annoyance at sanctions, half-hearted as they were, but also French bad faith and the inept handling of the Hoare-Laval Plan. Mussolini now turned towards Germany and throughout 1936 sent ‘signals’ to Berlin of a desire for their two nations to become closer. He told Hitler that he would not object to Austria falling under German influence and told Austrian Chancellor Schuschnigg he should come to terms with Germany.

*“...Hitler could await a suitable opportunity to absorb Austria and there was now no obstacle to a general improvement in relations with Italy.”*⁶

Exercise 1.2

Read the following passage carefully. Then rewrite the passage with the sentences in the correct order which will make sense of the events it is describing.

Diplomatically it destroyed the Stresa Front and pushed Italy into the arms of Germany. Within a month of the invasion, the League had imposed half-hearted sanctions. Finally, it showed clearly that any notions of collective security were now dead. Italy had little to gain from its invasion of Abyssinia other than a misguided sense of military glory. It also weakened Anglo-French relations. This angered Italy but did nothing to help the Abyssinians.

⁵ Bell, PMH, *The Origins of The Second World War in Europe*, Longman, Harlow, 1986, p208

⁶ Ross, G, *The Great Powers and the Decline of the European States System 1914-1945*, Longman, Harlow, 1983, p93

The Spanish Civil War

Background

Spain had not played a major role in European affairs for many years. Enmeshed as it was in a complex web of regional rivalry, church-state conflict and deep-seated political antagonisms, Spain's absence from European politics seemed likely to continue.

Between 1923 and 1929, Spain experienced a military dictatorship under Primo de Rivera, not an uncommon development in inter-war Europe. The dictatorship was overthrown in 1930 and in 1931 King Alfonso XIII abdicated, leading to the establishment of a democratic republic. Democracy survived uneasily for five years but Spain was deeply divided. The table below illustrates the nature of these divisions.

“Republicans”	“Nationalists”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Socialists ■ Communists ■ Anarchists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ landowners, businessmen ■ devout Catholics ■ military officers ■ the Spanish Fascist Party - the Falange
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ supported the newly-elected Popular Front government ■ opposed the power of the Church ■ opposed the power of landowners ■ in favour of a more equal distribution of the nation's wealth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ opposed the newly-elected Popular Front government ■ sought to maintain the much more traditional and conservative nature of Spanish society ■ wished to maintain Church power

The Spanish Civil War started in July 1936. A group of military officers, based in Spanish Morocco, revolted against the government. Leadership of the rebels soon fell to General Franco who championed those seeking to destroy what they called a “godless, communist government”. Franco's fascist forces had control of half of Spain by the end of 1936 but it would take almost another two and a half years before the Nationalists could claim victory. The deep-seated nature of Spain's internal conflict, and the usual intensity that accompanies civil wars, ensured that the Spanish conflict was a particularly bloody affair on both sides. Torture, massacres and indiscriminate civilian killings were common, seen no more clearly than in the systematic bombing of the town of Guernica in 1937.

The significance of the Spanish Civil War

Spain was important for several reasons:

- It further consolidated the divisions within Europe which were solidifying and would be played out during World War II:
 - Germany and Italy gave solid backing to the Nationalists;
 - Britain and France, though supporting non-intervention, were generally sympathetic to the Republicans;
- Germany and Italy's firm backing of the Nationalists cemented their relationship and further highlighted Italy's increasingly junior status in the Axis partnership.
 - Italy had up to 60 000 'volunteers' fighting for Franco;
 - Germany provided much military hardware and was given a chance to experiment with its modern Messerschmitt Me-109 Fighters and its Junker Ju52 transport-bombers;
 - it was Germany's Condor Legion which destroyed Guernica.
- Britain and France championed non-intervention in Spain:
 - they discouraged their citizens from joining the fighting;
 - they actively tried to prevent arms getting in (to the Republican side) while the Germans and Italians had no qualms ignoring calls for non-intervention.
- Soviet assistance to the Republicans was distrusted:
 - Soviet aid to the Republicans was significant, including 1000 aircraft, 900 tanks, arms and ammunition;
 - Stalin opposed fascism, but did anyone seriously believe Stalin was fighting for democracy?
- The Spanish Civil War took on a decidedly idealistic flavour:
 - thousands of young people from all over the world (including Australia) flocked to join the International Brigades who fought on the side of the Republicans;
 - there were also international volunteers on the Nationalist side, including the Irish Blueshirts.
 - the intensity of the Spanish Civil War produced great art, including Hemingway's "For Whom the Bell Tolls", George Orwell's "Homage to Catalonia" and Picasso's haunting painting "Guernica".
- The events of the Spanish Civil War highlighted even more the incapacity of the League of Nations, if any further evidence was needed after Manchuria, Abyssinia and Hitler's adventures.
 - Spain was perceived by many at the time as a 'rehearsal' for the bigger conflict which most people believed was now only a matter of time.

Exercise 1.3

Complete the passage below with the answers provided in the box.

The Spanish Civil War broke out in July _____ when General _____ raised a revolt from Spanish Morocco. On the one side in the war were the Nationalists who comprised landowners, _____ and the _____ Party. On the other side were the _____ who comprised socialists and communists. The Nationalists were supported by _____ and _____. Britain and France pressed unsuccessfully for _____. The _____ supported the Republican side. The war was particularly brutal, one of the most well-known incidents being the bombing of the town of _____. Franco’s forces had gained control of Spain in March _____. The _____ was again proven to be totally ineffectual and many people in Europe viewed the Civil War as a _____ for the greater conflict to come.

1939	the Church	Franco	Republicans	Guernica
rehearsal	League	1936	Falange	Soviet Union
non-intervention	Germany	Italy		

What do the historians have to say about “The Spanish Civil War”?

1. Richard Evans: The Third Reich in Power

Evans argues that Hitler entered the Spanish Civil War for both political and military reasons. Hitler feared that a Republican victory in Spain, combined with the formation of a Communist-backed Popular Front government in France, could lead to some sort of Franco-Spanish combination. This could hinder his plans for expansion and war in the east. Intervention would also allow Hitler’s military to get some real-life practice with their new weaponry. As it happened, Spain provided Hitler with a double bonus:

“...(Spain) was one more example for him of the supine pusillanimity of Britain and France, and thus an encouragement to move faster in the fulfilment of his own intentions...More immediately, however, it cemented the alliance between Hitler and Mussolini.”⁷

2. AJP Taylor: The Origins of the Second World War

Taylor simply makes the point that by the time of the Spanish Civil War, the League had long since died. It had become irrelevant and simply went through the motions of doing something about events in that country. As for the principle of collective security, it had long since been forgotten. As with Abyssinia, so too with Spain, the international failure

⁷ Evans, R, *The Third Reich in Power*, Penguin, London, 2005, p641

surrounding the Spanish Civil War was not so much a cause of the failure of collective security, as a symptom of its failure.

*“...When foreign powers intervened in the Spanish Civil War, the Spanish government appealed to the League. The Council first ‘studied the question’; then expressed its ‘regrets’ and agreed to house the pictures from the Prado at Geneva.”*⁸

3. Antony Beevor: *The Battle for Spain*

In July 1936, special representatives from General Franco managed to meet Hitler in Bayreuth after a performance of Wagner’s opera ‘Siegfried’. Hitler was convinced to send significant aerial assistance to Franco’s forces, including the Junker 52 and Heinkel 51 aircraft. Goering was ecstatic about being able to test his new Luftwaffe, and gave the operation the codeword ‘Feuerzauber’ or ‘Magic Fire’, which takes place at the end of Siegfried. Beevor suggests that Hitler’s reasons for helping Franco were essentially strategic:

*“...A fascist Spain would present a threat to France’s rear as well as to the British route to the Suez Canal. There was even the tempting possibility of U-boat bases on the Atlantic coast... The civil war also served to divert attention away from his central European strategy; while offering an opportunity to train men and to test equipment and tactics...”*⁹

4. George Orwell: *Homage to Catalonia*

The writer George Orwell fought briefly in the Spanish Civil War on the side of the Republicans. He describes his experiences in ‘Homage to Catalonia’. In Appendix 1 in his book, Orwell describes the political side of the war. He makes the comment that though the Soviet Union was supporting the Republican side, its goal was strongly anti-revolutionary. Some elements of the Republican side were revolutionary but the Soviet leader, Stalin, sought their suppression. Stalin’s interest in Spain was not the promotion of world revolution; it was the safeguarding of Soviet national interest. At this time the Soviet Union sought cooperation with capitalist countries as it viewed the rise of Nazi Germany with alarm.

*“...The whole of Comintern¹⁰ policy is now subordinated... to the defence of the USSR, which depends on a system of military alliances. In particular, the USSR is in alliance with France, a capitalist-imperialist country...”*¹¹

8 Taylor, AJP, *The Origins of the Second World War*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1961, p128

9 Beevor, A, *The Battle for Spain*, Phoenix, London, 2006, p 154

10 The comintern – Communist International – was established in 1919 by the Soviet regime to promote revolution in capitalist countries.

11 Orwell, G, *Homage to Catalonia*, Penguin, London, 1986 ed, pp 206-7

Chapter Two:

Britain, France and the policy of Appeasement

Background and origins of Appeasement

Hindsight can bedevil an understanding of the past. From our perspective in the first quarter of the 21st century, it still seems difficult to understand how Britain and France could have allowed Mussolini and Hitler to get away with their actions. Indeed, as early as 1940, writers were beginning to argue that the blame for the outbreak of war lay as much with the 'guilty' leaders of Britain and France as with the dictators. However, by examining appeasement in the context of its times, it can appear as an almost inevitable and sadly logical policy option.

There is no simple definition of the term appeasement or explanation of its origins.

1. Appeasement was nothing new to Britain.

It had been a feature of British diplomacy going back centuries. Since the 16th century, Britain's main interests had been in trade, naval power and the development of empire. Britain had long been prepared to make concessions to European powers on the continent and leave them alone so it could pursue its worldwide ambitions. This had very much been Britain's policy in the 19th century. Only when Britain believed its interests were under direct threat would it intervene in European affairs. This is what happened in August 1914.

2. Appeasement had been in operation since 1919.

Lloyd George had sought to moderate the Treaty of Versailles during the Peace Conference. He realised that the British economy needed a stable and prosperous Germany and that a contented Germany would be a much stronger bulwark against the westward spread of communism. Even Churchill supported such a view as he stated at the Imperial Conference of 1921:

"The aim is to get an appeasement of the fearful hatreds and antagonisms which exist in Europe and to enable the world to settle down."

Thus, in the 1920s, *"appeasement was seen to be magnanimous, good business, idealistic and a form of security against Bolshevism."*¹

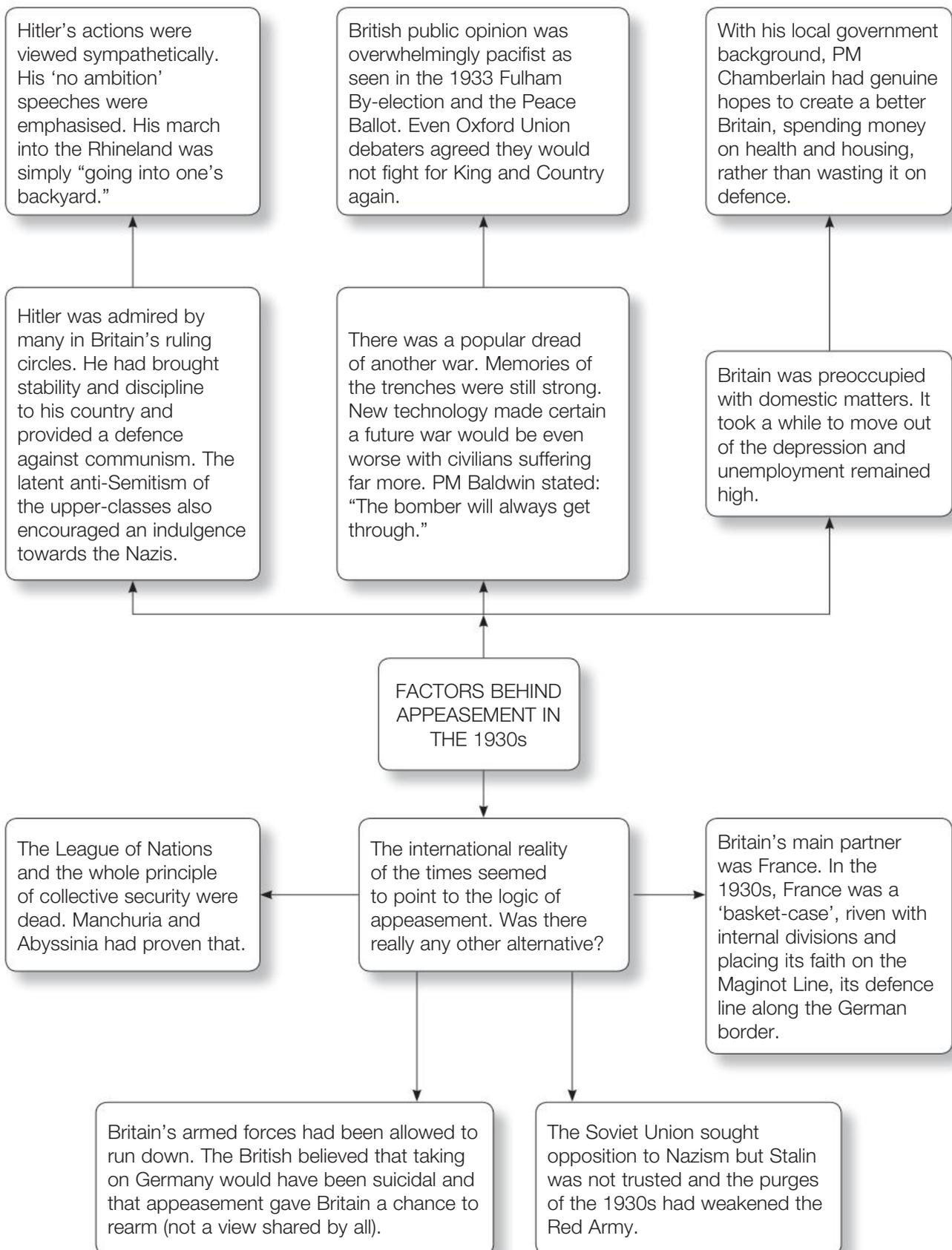
3. Appeasement in the 1930s is seen differently.

In the 1920s, Germany was weak and any appeasement-style concessions made to it, such as the Dawes Plan which scaled down reparation payments² were made from a position of strength. In the 1930s this was not the case. The combination of changing international realities, the depression, guilt over Versailles, the psychology of the British nation across all classes and the strong views of the men in power, all transpired to create an environment in which appeasement was the logical policy option. Above all, there was the dread of another war. Figure 2.1 summarises the main factors which lead to the appeasement policy of the 1930s.

¹ Webb, K, *International Relations between the Wars*, McGraw-Hill, Sydney, 1992, p71

² The Treaty of Versailles demanded that Germany pay compensation to the allies for damage caused by the war. The figure was £6.6 billion. In 1923 the German economy collapsed due to hyper-inflation. The US-backed Dawes Plan organised an easing of the reparations burden.

Figure 2.1 Factors behind the policy of Appeasement



Appeasement in action

The epitome of the policy of appeasement was the Munich Conference of 1938. However, the British government had been pursuing the policy long before then. As mentioned above, Lloyd George had endeavoured to soften the Versailles Treaty in 1919 and various trade and reparation agreements had been made with Germany in the 1920s. However, it was in the 1930s that appeasement became a key element of British policy. It manifested itself in both an active and a passive way. Sometimes it was a case of acting to make concessions, and on other occasions it was a case of simply not reacting to an action taken by the dictators.

Appeasement in action up to September 1938

Date	Act of Appeasement	Comment
October 1933	German rearmament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Accepted as a sad but inevitable consequence of the failure of the Disarmament Conference ■ Germany played up the fear of communism ■ After all, Germany was only seeking equality
January 1935	Franco-Italian Agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ French Foreign Minister Laval indicated to the Italians that France accepted their designs on Abyssinia
March 1935	Germany introduces conscription	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ This was against the Treaty of Versailles ■ A mild protest was Britain's only action
June 1935	Anglo-German Naval Agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Germany is allowed 35% of British naval strength and an equality in the number of submarines ■ This directly contravened the Treaty of Versailles and sanctioned Hitler's moves to cancel the Versailles armaments provisions. ■ Britain acted without consulting France and so weakened the Stresa Front.
December 1935	Hoare-Laval Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The French and British Foreign Ministers offered to carve up Abyssinia for Italy. Italy would be given enough land to take 1.5m people in a return for an end to the fighting. ■ The offer came as weak sanctions had been imposed on Italy. The Plan caused outrage, forcing both men from office.

March 1936	Remilitarisation of the Rhineland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Hitler's action directly contravened the terms of the 1925 Locarno Pact which guaranteed western European frontiers. ■ PM Baldwin tried to argue that Locarno made Britain a mediator not a guarantor. The terms of the Locarno Agreement did not support this view. ■ Beyond a protest note, Britain and France did nothing. A great boost for Hitler's standing. ■ The British view was that Hitler was merely 'going into his backyard'.
1936-39	Spanish Civil War	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Britain and France avoided involvement in Spain and pushed for non-intervention. ■ Germany and Italy fully backed the Nationalists and no action was taken against them. ■ Only the Soviet Union assisted the Republican cause.
January 1938	Chamberlain's attitude to ideas from US/USSR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In January US President Roosevelt floated an idea calling for the powers to convene as a means of returning to peaceful diplomacy. Chamberlain rejected 'this bomb'. ■ Soviet Foreign Minister Litvinov's similar proposal was called 'woolly rubbish'.
March 1938	Austria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Hitler's march into Austria was greeted with shock and a sense of bewilderment. ■ The shock became resignation and Britain accepted 'Anschluss' as inevitable. ■ After all, the Austrians were German-speaking.

The Czechoslovak Crisis: September 1938

Introduction

The high watermark of the Appeasement policy was the Munich Conference of September 1938. The photograph of British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, at Heston Airdrome holding aloft his 'scrap of paper' which bore both his 'and Herr Hitler's signature' is one of the iconic pictures of the 20th century. This picture has come to personify the failure of appeasement and of Chamberlain personally. Today politicians strive to avoid being labelled 'appeasers' or for having their own 'Munich' such is the opprobrium of these terms.

Yet Chamberlain's actions were not seen in this light at the time. The British nation welcomed Neville Chamberlain home as a hero and a peacemaker. The two newspaper extracts below give a flavour of the thinking of the time.

The London Times, 1 October 1938:

"...no conqueror returning from a victory on the battlefield has come home adorned with nobler laurels than Mr Chamberlain from Munich yesterday."

Beverly Baxter in the Sunday Graphic, 2 October 1938:

"...because of Neville Chamberlain, the world my son will live in will be a vastly different place... In our time we shall not see again the armed forces of Europe gathering to strike at each other like savage beasts."

Within less than twelve months of these words having been written, Europe was once again at war.

Background to the Czech Crisis

1919:

The state of Czechoslovakia arose out of the ruins of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire.

- Its elongated shape stretched over 800 kms from Germany to Romania.
- It was this fact of geography which would in the long term threaten its very survival. The Czech state was dominated by the Czechs of the west of the country in the former region of Bohemia.
- However, Czechoslovakia also contained two million Slovaks in the east, often looked down on by their more advanced Czech brothers.
- There were 750 000 Magyars (Hungarians), 500 000 Ruthenes and 90 000 Poles.
- However, of even greater importance, there were over three million German speaking people in the western border regions known as the Sudetenland.

1920s/1930s:

Czechoslovakia was almost unique in central and eastern Europe in that it had a fully operating, successful democracy.

- Compared to its neighbours, it had made significant economic and social progress.
- Its President was Tomas Masaryk; he was followed in the 1930s by Eduard Benes.

Mid-1938:

Following the success of the Anschluss, Hitler made it clear that he intended to add the Sudetenland to the Reich and bring home the three million Sudeten Germans to the fatherland.

- The Sudetenland had a local Nazi Party, led by Konrad Henlein.
- The Sudeten Nazis began campaigning for incorporation into the Reich. Propaganda stories began to circulate about Czech atrocities inflicted upon the Sudeten Germans.

Hitler made it clear that he intended using force to gain the Sudetenland.

- "Operation Green" was worked out for this end and Hitler revised its opening sentence to state:

"It is my unalterable decision to smash Czechoslovakia by military action in the near future."

1st October was the date chosen.

Europe began to prepare for war.

- Czechoslovakia had agreements with France and the Soviet Union.
- Its own forces were not inconsiderable, it had the Erzgebirge mountains protecting it and it was prepared to fight to defend itself.

Chamberlain's attitude:

- Chamberlain was horrified by the idea that Britain might go to war and risk the lives of its people over an obscure issue in central Europe.
- He knew how vulnerable Britain was to air attack and dreaded the prospect of German bombs falling on British homes.
- Privately, he confided he had no intention of fighting over Czechoslovakia.
- Chamberlain sent his personal envoy, Lord Runciman, to Prague to investigate the whole situation. Runciman returned with the words Chamberlain wanted to hear:

"I have much sympathy with the Sudeten cause...I regard their turning for help towards their kinsmen and their eventual desire to join the Reich as a natural development in the circumstances."

Encouraged by such thinking, contemptuous and distrustful of the Soviet Union, and prompted by French Prime Minister Daladier, Chamberlain decided to deal with Hitler directly.

- On 15 September 1938, Chamberlain flew to Germany and met Hitler at Berchtesgaden. Hitler demanded that he get the Sudetenland and Chamberlain indicated that he agreed with this 'in principle'.
- Within days Chamberlain had gained the support of his cabinet and the French.
- On 22 September Chamberlain met Hitler again at Godesberg. This meeting did not go well. Hitler was informed he would get the Sudetenland but Hitler now demanded a military occupation and he wanted the region in German hands by 28 September.
- Chamberlain returned to Britain convinced that war was coming. A State of Emergency was called, reservists were called up, civil defence measures put into place. War with Germany seemed inevitable.
- Chamberlain sent his personal advisor, Horace Wilson, to tell Hitler how unnecessary war was, and that Chamberlain was willing to visit Germany a third time. These pleas plus Mussolini's intervention broke the impasse. Hitler invited Chamberlain to attend a conference in Munich.

The Munich Conference

The main players at the Munich Conference were Hitler, Mussolini, Chamberlain and Daladier. The Czechs and the Russians were not invited. Hitler's demands were granted and the Sudetenland ceded to Germany. Czechoslovakia was informed that if it did not accept the agreement, it would face Germany alone in any conflict. In the next few weeks, the Czechs also had to hand over Teschen to Poland and southern border regions to Hungary. The loss of the Sudetenland was considerable for Czechoslovakia. As well the loss of the land and three million citizens, it lost much of its industry and mineral resources, and also its border defences. The Czech state was now helpless.

However, war had been avoided and Britain rejoiced. Before leaving Munich, Chamberlain had a second meeting with Hitler. He persuaded Hitler to sign a second document in which both promised to seek a peaceful resolution of all future issues between Britain and Germany. This second agreement was to be “symbolic of the desire of our two peoples never to go to war with one another again.”

At the time there was a variety of views regarding the Munich Agreement. As noted earlier, the newspapers of the time cheered Chamberlain as a hero. The Daily Sketch suggested its readers go to church and thank god for Neville Chamberlain.

- Chamberlain believed he had gained ‘peace with honour’ and had assured Europe ‘peace in our time.’
- German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop chided Hitler for signing the second agreement with Chamberlain. Hitler was overheard to say to Ribbentrop that it was just ‘a scrap of paper’.
- Some at the time did oppose Munich. First Lord of the Admiralty, Duff Cooper, resigned in protest. A sombre more realistic interpretation of Munich was given by Winston Churchill speaking in parliament on 5 October:

*“...They (the British people) should know that we have sustained a great defeat without a war, the consequences of which will travel with us...And do not suppose that this is the end. This is only the beginning of the reckoning.”*³

Exercise 2.1

Put yourself in the place of each of the following people. In the space provided, write a paragraph in which you explain your views on the policy of appeasing Germany from the perspective of that person.

a) Lord Mildenhead, a Conservative Party member of the House of Lords.

b) A close advisor and supporter of Neville Chamberlain

³ Churchill, WS, The Second World War, Volume 1, Cassell, London, 1948, p294

c) Harry Hobbs, a veteran of the Great War married with teenage sons

The end of Appeasement

Churchill's warnings over what had happened in Munich seemed to have been scare-mongering as his many critics suggested. In the months that followed the Munich Agreement, there was a notable easing of tension in Europe.

- In December 1938, Germany recognised the sanctity of French borders.
- Hitler tried to negotiate a deal with Poland whereby it was offered future gains in the Ukraine for the return of Danzig and permission to build a road across the Polish Corridor to East Prussia.
- Meetings continued between British and German, and British and Italian figures.
- As late as March 1939, much of the British press remained optimistic about the chances of peace.

However, it was Churchill's words which again managed to accurately describe the reality of those early weeks in 1939. After the Anschluss, Churchill had compared the Germans to a boa constrictor. After a boa constrictor had eaten, it needs time to rest and digest its food before it hunts again. Churchill had shown that this is exactly what Germany did after each of its moves. By March 1939, it was ready to eat again.

- On 15 March 1939, German troops marched into the rest of Czechoslovakia. Bohemia-Moravia was incorporated into the Reich while Slovakia became a Nazi puppet state. Hungary took more of the southern region of Ruthenia.
- A week later Germany seized the Lithuanian port of Memel and its surrounding district.
- In April Mussolini annexed Albania.

The Munich Agreement had been ripped up. Churchill had been right all along. Finally, the Chamberlain government was forced to abandon the policy of appeasement.

- On 31 March Britain announced that it would formally guarantee the independence of Poland. Hitler now knew that if he attacked Poland, Britain would go to war. Similar guarantees followed for Romania, Greece and Turkey. France followed.

- In his speech, Chamberlain said that Britain was committed “*in the event of any action which clearly threatened Polish independence and which the Polish government accordingly considered it vital to resist with their national forces...to lend the Polish government all the support in their power.*”
- Chamberlain’s announcement was doubly significant:
 - it brought appeasement to an end;
 - it tacitly allowed a foreign government to determine British policy.

Exercise 2.2

Check your factual knowledge.

1	What was the British government attitude to German rearmament in the 1930s?	
2	What act of appeasement was offered during Mussolini’s invasion of Abyssinia?	
3	What was the common perception in Britain of Hitler’s march into the Rhineland?	
4	What were the three main factors determining Chamberlain’s behaviour during the Czechoslovak crisis?	
5	Where did Hitler and Chamberlain meet?	
6	What was decided at Munich?	
7	What was the immediate public reaction to Munich?	
8	Whose words ultimately told the truth about Munich?	
9	Why did Chamberlain abandon appeasement?	
10	To which countries did Britain offer guarantees?	

What do the historians have to say about “Britain, France and the Policy of Appeasement”?

1. Cato: *Guilty Men*

The earliest analysis of the policy of appeasement came in July 1940. Three journalists – Peter Howard, Frank Owen and Michael Foot (later Labour Party leader) – writing under the pseudonym of ‘Cato’ delivered a blistering attack on the appeasers of the 1930s. Baldwin and Chamberlain are accused of being “blind to the purposes of the criminal new Nazi war power”. They had misjudged Hitler and so neglected Britain’s armaments as to conduct “a great empire, supreme in arms and secure in liberty to the edge of national annihilation”. *Guilty Men* takes for granted British greatness and capability, and assumes British policy-makers had the option to choose alternative policies:

*“...of resistance and confrontation rather than conciliation - had they but the vision, intelligence and competence to do so: the essence of their culpability lies in the fact that they could and should have acted differently.”*⁴

2. Winston Churchill: *The Gathering Storm*

Not surprisingly, Churchill has little to disagree about with Cato. Writing in 1948 while in opposition, Churchill sets out to establish the orthodox (i.e. his) view of appeasement. Through clever use of his speeches and correspondence, he is able to show the failure, ineptitude and naivety of the appeasers. Churchill is particularly scathing when he discusses the Polish guarantee. He argues that Britain was in a far weaker position to defend Poland than it had been six months earlier if it had chosen to defend Czechoslovakia. His assessment of appeasement:

*“...Here is a line of milestones to disaster. Here is a catalogue of surrenders, at first when all was easy and later when things were harder, to the ever-growing German power.”*⁵

3. AJP Taylor: *The Origins of the Second World War*

AJP Taylor takes a totally different line about appeasement. (Taylor will be examined more fully in Chapter Five). Taylor agrees that appeasement failed but for quite different reasons. He agrees Munich was a pivotal moment but that Chamberlain’s error was to be persuaded to follow a more aggressive policy. He argues that a more vigorous appeasement should have been pursued in 1939. Taylor believes that Hitler would have welcomed another Munich over Poland. In fact, Taylor argues that Hitler sought an understanding over Poland in late August 1939 but that communications between the various parties were too slow. Taylor concludes that Britain and France ended up fighting for what they felt was the least defensible part of the peace settlement – the Polish Corridor – and that though Hitler:

4 Finney, P, *The Romance of Decline: The Historiography of Appeasement and British National Identity*, <http://www.history.ac.uk/ejournal/art1.html#a5>

5 Churchill, W, *The Gathering Storm*, Volume 1, *The Second World War*, Cassell, London, 1948, p311

*“...may have projected a great war all along... it seems from the record that he became involved in war through launching on 29 August a diplomatic manoeuvre which he ought to have launched on 28 August.”*⁶

4. John Charmley: *WWII 50 Years on*

Charmley is the author a glowing biography of Chamberlain and a scathing one of Churchill. He has little time for Churchill; his hero is Neville Chamberlain. He believes that Chamberlain achieved the best that was possible for Britain at the time, given the economic restraints and the wide dispersal of British power across the empire. He questions whether the ‘world or freedom was in terminal trouble in the late 1930s’. He makes that point that for decades after 1945, it was possible to combine appeasement and deterrence when dealing with the Soviet Union, so why not with Hitler? He credits Chamberlain with giving the RAF priority in defence spending while suggesting Churchill’s desire to spend on all three services would have led to national bankruptcy. Charmley argues that few liberals in the west believed in the moral validity of Versailles nor in keeping up the military force needed to enforce its terms, and that:

*“...This was Chamberlain’s inheritance, along with a shaky economy, a strategically over-extended empire and a France suffering from terminal loss of nerve.”*⁷

5. R A C Parker: *Chamberlain and Appeasement*

Parker counters the revisionist view of appeasement that suggest that the appeasement policy followed by Chamberlain was both logical and realistic in the context of the situation facing Britain in the 1930s. He argues that there were real alternatives to Chamberlain’s policy and that the popularity of his policy has been greatly exaggerated. Parker believes that Chamberlain could have secured support for a close alliance with France after Anschluss and a policy of containing and encircling Germany. This could even have been done after Munich. However, Parker says that Chamberlain refused to consider this line because he still believed a definitive détente with Hitler was still possible. He still believed this after the invasion of Czechoslovakia in March 1939. Chamberlain obstinately stuck to his line, even informing his colleagues he was pursuing an alternative. Chamberlain totally refused any alignment with the Soviet Union and could not conceive that Germany and the Soviet Union could come together. This leads Parker to conclude that Chamberlain:

*“...could have tried to build a barrier to Hitler’s expansion. After March 1939 British attempts to do so were either half-hearted or too late... Led by Chamberlain, the government rejected effective deterrence. Chamberlain’s powerful, obstinate personality and his skill in debate probably stifled serious chances of preventing the Second World War...”*⁸

6 Taylor, AJP, *The Origins of the Second World War*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1961 p336

7 Charmley, J, *WWII 50 Years On*, *The Independent*, May 1999

8 Parker, RAC, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1993, p 347

Chapter Three:

Significance of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact

Background to Soviet Foreign Policy

The Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939 has been described as one of the most amazing acts of diplomacy in Modern History. Hitler and Stalin detested each other and each other's ideological beliefs. Hitler had made it very plain that he intended to destroy Bolshevism, conquer the Soviet Union and turn its people into slaves. Yet on 23 August 1939, Foreign Ministers Ribbentrop and Molotov put their names to this astonishing agreement and gleefully smiled for the cameras.

Soviet Foreign Policy had been something of an enigma to western observers since the establishment of the Soviet Union:

- Was the purpose of Soviet Foreign Policy the spread of international revolution? Isn't that why the Comintern was set up in 1919 to assist national communist parties to overthrow their national capitalist systems?
- Or was Soviet Foreign Policy no different than that of any other nation, the promotion of the national interest?

Stalin was as great an opportunist as Hitler. The survival of the Soviet Union and then the development of Soviet power were what mattered. If these things could be achieved by promoting revolution, so be it; if it meant signing a trade agreement with one's capitalist enemies, then Stalin would sign.

The Great Depression of the 1930s had been welcomed in Moscow.

- Wasn't this evidence of the collapse of capitalism? Wasn't the Soviet Union the only nation free of economic depression?
- This prompted Stalin to order his brother communist parties in Europe not to cooperate with other parties. Instead he gave instructions to allow fascist parties to come to power as this would worsen social tensions and lead more quickly to a socialist revolution.
- This proved disastrous, especially in Germany. The failure of the SPD (Social Democrat) and the KPD (Communist) to work together was a key factor allowing Hitler to gain and consolidate his power.

By the mid-1930s, Stalin had realised his mistake and now encouraged communist parties to participate in anti-Fascist 'Popular Front' governments, as in France. Stalin also intervened in the Spanish Civil War on the side of the Republicans.

Hitler's unchecked advances during the 1930s alarmed Stalin greatly. If Hitler was to achieve his dream of lebensraum,¹ the Soviet Union had to be destroyed. The Soviet Union was in no state to fight a war in the 1930s:

¹ Lebensraum roughly translates as 'living space'. Hitler's long-term goal was to create a vast Aryan/ German empire in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. (see Chapter 5).

- Stalin had turned the nation upside down as he attempted to rapidly industrialise with a series of brutal Five-Year Plans. The achievements were enormous but war would have been a disaster.
- The Soviet countryside was in a state of virtual civil war as Stalin sought to collectivise agriculture.
- Politically, the Soviet Union tore itself apart during the 1930s as a series of purges saw millions executed or sent to the 'gulag' (Soviet prison/ labour camps). In 1937, the Red Army was purged:
 - Russia's leading general, Marshal Tukhachevsky and some other top army men were shot on 12 June 1937;
 - in all 35 000, half of the officer corps, were either shot or imprisoned.

Military confrontation was the last thing Stalin needed.

Foreign Policy in the 1930s

- In the early 1930s, the Soviet Union signed several non-aggression pacts with its neighbours, including Poland, Finland and Estonia in 1932. Agreements had already been signed with Lithuania and Romania.
- An agreement was signed with France in 1932 and with Italy in 1933.
- In 1934 the Soviet Union joined the League of Nations and established diplomatic relations with the United States.
- In May 1935, the Franco-Soviet treaty of mutual assistance was signed. This was widened to involve Czechoslovakia in 1936, but the Soviet Union was only committed to help Czechoslovakia if France did.
- Things worsened considerably for the Soviet Union from 1936:
 - German rearmament was continuing and German military prowess in Spain had been noted.
 - Hitler had moved into the Rhineland, had achieved Anschluss and in September 1938 had been handed the Sudetenland.
 - The western democracies had made it clear that they had no intention of standing up to Hitler.

Some in Britain like Churchill had suggested joining with the Soviet Union against Hitler.

- Chamberlain was not keen. He stated in May 1939: *"I must profess the most profound distrust of Russia."*
- Stalin remained distrustful of the west; he suspected Britain and France were pushing Hitler eastwards to confront Russia.
- When Britain offered Poland a guarantee in March 1939, and Hitler renounced the German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, a chance of an Anglo-Soviet agreement seemed possible.
- British negotiators were sent to Moscow but they were too junior, lacking in authority and half-hearted. Stalin's biographer, Isaac Deutscher, comments: *"...What is certain is that, if the western governments had wanted to drive him (Stalin) into Hitler's arms, they could not have set about doing so more effectively than they did."*²

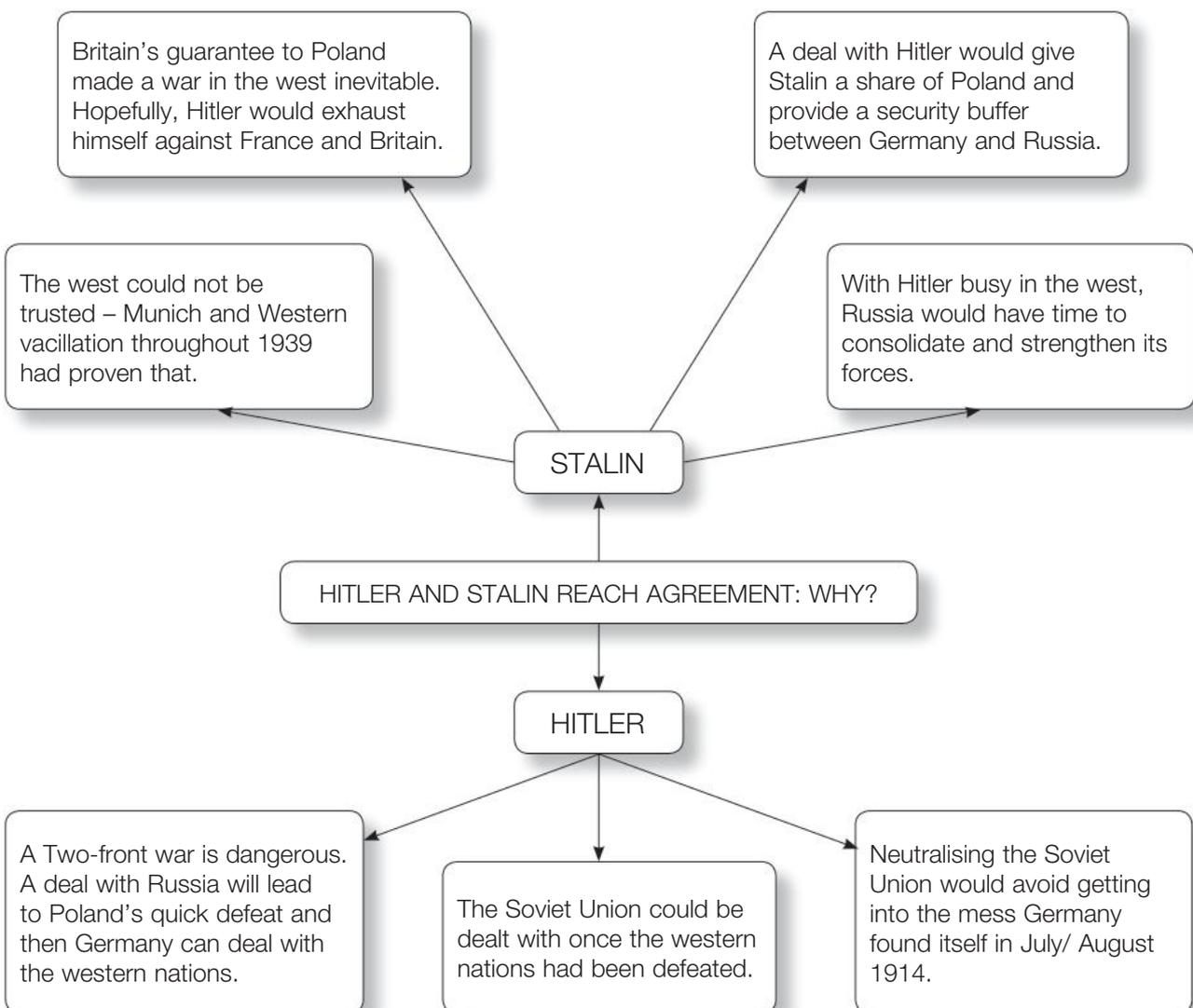
² Deutscher, I, Stalin, Pelican, Harmondsworth, 1969, p425

Stalin was distrustful of the west and Hitler realised an attack on Poland would involve him in a two-front war. Perhaps these arch enemies might come to an arrangement. Both sides began to send out signals to each other:

- Hitler announced in April his intention of dealing with Poland in a major speech and pointedly made no anti-Soviet references;
- Stalin replaced his 'Jewish' Foreign Minister Litvinov, with Molotov;
- In June, via Italian Foreign Minister Ciano, Hitler let Stalin know that an arrangement could be made.
- In early August, Ribbentrop let it be known that Soviet interests in Poland and the Baltic would be respected.
- After a personal exchange of messages between Hitler and Stalin in mid-August, it was agreed that Ribbentrop should fly to Moscow.

Hitler and Stalin still detested each other and most certainly did not trust each other. However, at this moment in time, it suited them both to come to an agreement. Figure 3.1 summarises the reasons why they chose to sign a non-aggression pact.

Figure 3.1 Why Hitler and Stalin signed a non-aggression pact



The Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact: 23 August 1939

Ribbentrop arrived in Moscow on 23 August. Germany and the Soviet Union signed a ten-year non-aggression pact. He and Molotov both knew that by signing the Pact, the green light was being given to a German invasion of Poland.

- Article 2 stated that if either Germany or Russia became involved in a war with a third power, the other would not get involved, i.e. if Germany invaded Poland, Russia would not intervene.
- Article 7 stated the agreement would take immediate effect. Hitler was in a hurry; he had a 1 September deadline for invading Poland.

The Nazi-Soviet Pact also contained Secret Protocols which created German and Soviet spheres of influence.

- Germany would receive western Poland and Lithuania
- The Soviet Union would receive Estonia, Latvia, Finland and Bessarabia (in Romania).

The Soviet Union eventually occupied the Baltic States of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in June 1940. A brief war was fought between Finland and the Soviet Union between November 1939 and March 1940. The Red Army made very hard work of dealing with the Finns.

Exercise 3.1

Examine the following statements carefully.

Rewrite them in the space provided in a logical order that gives a clear understanding of the events surrounding the Nazi-Soviet Pact.

As a result, Stalin became open to the idea of an agreement with Hitler. In March 1939, Britain offered a guarantee to Poland. As Nazi power grew, Stalin sought agreements with France and Czechoslovakia. Hitler made his hostility to the Soviet Union known as soon as he gained power. Chamberlain was not keen on working with Stalin. Germany and the Soviet Union eventually signed an agreement on 23 August 1939. His long-term goal of achieving lebensraum would be at the Soviet Union's expense. Stalin now hoped an agreement could be reached with the western powers. Stalin was concerned at the west's willingness to give in to Hitler, especially after Munich.

What do the historians have to say about the “The Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact”?

1. Philip Bell: *The Origins of The Second World War in Europe*

Bell poses the questions, why did Stalin choose the Germans over the British and French in August 1939. He places much of the blame on Britain’s hesitancy, lack of seriousness and its distrust of Stalin. However, he argues that the decisive reason was that Hitler offered Stalin what he wanted, and offered it immediately. Stalin was involved in skirmishes with Japan in the Far East. The last thing he needed was a two-front war. He sought certain neutrality and hoped for a band of states in eastern Europe which could provide some security to the Soviet state.

*“...Instead of a risk of war, they (the Germans) could offer certain neutrality... spheres of influence... (and were) ready to carve up Poland ... the Germans could deliver the goods forthwith, whereas the British and the French could deliver nothing.”*³

2. Richard Evans: *The Third Reich in Power*

Evans shows that neither Hitler nor Stalin expected the pact to last the full ten years; it lasted less than two. However, it suited the two dictators at the time to drop their mutual distrust and detestation. Evans states that Stalin gained comfort from not having to fight in 1939 (against Germany) and from gaining spheres of influence. It also offered tantalising longer-term prospects.

*“...From Stalin’s perspective, it provided a respite and opened up the enticing prospect of Europe’s capitalist powers, Germany, France and Britain, fighting a war of mutual destruction between themselves...in the longer run, the boundary (the pact) drew in Poland...was to prove permanent.”*⁴

3. Martin McCauley: *The Soviet Union Since 1917*

McCauley highlights Stalin’s distrust of Britain and Britain’s disdain for the Soviet Union to explain the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Stalin believed that a combination of Britain, France and the Soviet Union could defeat Germany. However, Britain negotiated with “little finesse”, sending a second-string negotiating team on a slow boat to Leningrad. The British believed Stalin had no room to manoeuvre, an agreement with Hitler being impossible, and would have to join the west.

*“...at the back of Stalin’s mind was the suspicion that when the decisive moment came the western powers might opt out and leave the USSR alone with the German wolf... The idea of a German-Soviet agreement could only emanate from a madhouse.”*⁵

4. Oleg V. Khlevniuk: *Stalin*

Khlevniuk’s recent biography of Stalin tends to consolidate earlier views on Stalin’s

3 Bell, PMH, *The Origins of the Second World War in Europe*, Longman, Harlow, 1986

4 Evans, R, *The Third Reich in Power*, Penguin, London, 2005, p693

5 McCauley, M, *The Soviet Union Since 1917*, Longman, Harlow, 1981, p100

motivation for signing the non-aggression pact. He had good reason to believe war would not be coming soon.

*“...One of the most convincing reasons was the idea that Hitler would not be so foolhardy as to mire his forces on two fronts by engaging the Soviet Union while he had Great Britain and an increasingly active United States threatening his rear...”*⁶

Contemporary view of the Nazi-Soviet Pact

The world was shocked by the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Hitler had made no secret of his intention to achieve lebensraum at the expense of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union's Slav population comprised racial inferiors whose function would be to act as the slave work force for their Aryan conquerors. Stalin had been purging his political and military elites who were often accused of conspiring with Nazi Germany.



Examine the cartoon:

1. Who are the two men in the cartoon? Where are they walking?
2. They are smiling at each other but each is holding a gun behind his back. What point is the cartoonist making by showing this?



Moscow, 23 August 1939: Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov and Stalin stood behind Nazi Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop as he signs the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact.

⁶ Khlevniuk, O V, Stalin, Yale University Press, 2015, p 187

Chapter Four:

Aims and strategy of German foreign policy to September 1939

Aims of Nazi Foreign Policy

An understanding of the purpose of Nazi Foreign Policy requires a distinction to be made between 'ends' and 'means'. This will be covered more fully in Chapter 5 in which the impact of ideology on Nazi Foreign Policy to September 1939 will be dealt with.

- Hitler's ultimate ambition lay in two areas: territorial expansion and race. These two key elements provide the essence of what Nazism was really about.
 - Hitler's obsession with race meant he sought racial purity and (some historians would argue) a desire to rid the world of the Jewish race.
 - Linked to this was his pursuit of lebensraum – living space. Hitler believed that the Reich was destined to expand into the rich corn and oil lands of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.
 - Here Germany's future population of 250 million would live while the local Slav populations became the servants of the master race.

Everything about Nazism was geared towards the ultimate achievement of these long-term aims.

“Means and Ends”¹

However, Hitler realised that these goals would not be achieved immediately. Consequently, it would be necessary to work towards his short-term goals first, ie he needed at first to take smaller steps. These smaller steps would constitute the '**means**' required to obtain the longer-term aims.

These short-term goals included the following:

- **The hated Treaty of Versailles had to be undone.** Hitler sought to 'revise' the Treaty in Germany's favour and eventually rip it up altogether. This process of revisionism involved several elements:
 - the cancellation of reparation payments; this had effectively been achieved at the Lausanne Conference of 1932;
 - Germany's right to military equality with its neighbours; this involved the rejection of the military clauses of the Treaty of Versailles which had restricted Germany's army to 100 000, denied it conscription, an air force, submarines and imposed other restrictions;
 - the recovery of territory taken from Germany in 1919, eg the land that had been lost to Poland in the east, the remilitarisation of the Rhineland and Anschluss (union) with Austria;

All these things would restore Germany's national pride, end the humiliation of the Weimar years and restore Germany's 'rightful place in Europe'.

¹ This section on "Means and Ends" has been taken from: Webb, K, "Power and Authority in the Modern World 1919-1946, Get Smart Education, Mona Vale, 2018

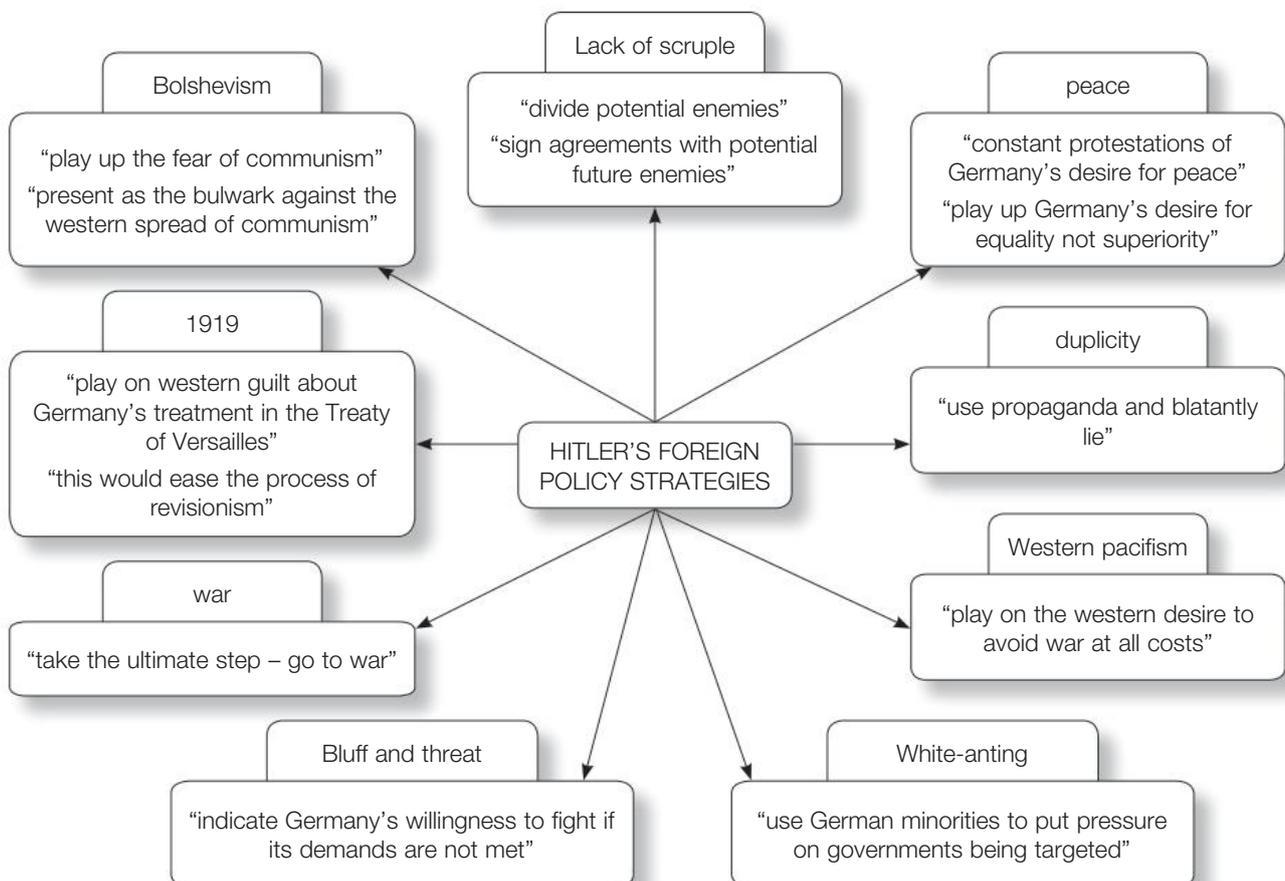
- Revisionism was only the first stage in Hitler’s foreign policy. **The next stage was the creation of a GrossDeutschland**, the bringing together of all German speaking people into the Reich. In 1919, many German speaking people had been separated from Germany and Hitler sought their return:
 - German speaking Austria was not allowed to unite with Germany;
 - the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia contained three million Germans;
 - Germans had been forced to live in the new state of Poland and the creation of the Polish Corridor had separated East Prussia from the rest of Germany.

Creation of a Gross Deutschland would also assist Germany in achieving another short-term aim, or ‘means’, and that was **economic self-sufficiency**.

- Hitler had also made it clear in Mein Kampf that he did not believe Germany’s traditional enemy, **France**, would accept German expansion:
 - Hitler believed a reckoning with France was inevitable;
 - once this had been done, Hitler could then focus on his real goal: lebensraum in the east and the destiny of the master race.

Hitler did not have a carefully worked out blueprint in place when he came to power. He did not plan his foreign policy in advance. The long-term goals were never out of his mind, but the short-term moves were determined by chance and circumstances. **Hitler was a supreme opportunist**. In pursuit of his foreign policy objectives, Hitler used a wide range of strategies. These are summarised in Figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4.1 Hitler’s Foreign Policy strategies



Hitler's Foreign Policy: 1933-September 1939

During his early years in power, Hitler frequently gave speeches calling for peace and international cooperation.

- This is not surprising considering Germany's military weakness.
- It gained a favourable response in Britain where many looked on the Nazi regime admiringly.
- Hitler sought cordial relations with Britain and hoped to eventually be given a 'green light' from London for his expansionary plans in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

In October 1933, Germany pulled out from both the **Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations**:

- Non-membership of the League gave Germany more freedom of action.
- British Prime Minister Macdonald's government was not concerned, believing that it was the French who posed the greater threat to European peace.
- It enabled Hitler to start rearming on the basis of seeking equality only.

In January 1934, Germany and Poland signed a **Ten-Year Non-Aggression Pact**:

- This was a classic example of Nazi dishonesty. The only role Poland had in Hitler's thinking was as a launch pad for his eventual attack on the Soviet Union and for the exploitation of Polish resources and labour.
- It comforted the Poles and showed Hitler in a peaceful light as previous German policy towards Poland had been more belligerent due to the gains that Poland had made in 1919 at Germany's expense.

The Austrian Nazi Party was growing in strength. In July 1934, it tried to seize power and assassinated the Austrian Chancellor, **Dolfuss**.

- Italian dictator, Mussolini, made it clear he would not accept a Nazi takeover of Austria and placed four divisions on his Austrian border. Britain and France also made their opposition to such a move clear.
- Hitler was not strong enough to push the issue and so denied any knowledge of the incident and abandoned the Austrian Nazis, for the time being.

In January 1935, the **Saar** province voted to join Germany. The Saar had been placed under League of Nations jurisdiction in 1919 for fifteen years, its future status to be decided in a referendum.

- The people of the Saar voted overwhelmingly to join Germany.
- The Saar vote was carried out by the League of Nations and provided Hitler with an easy propaganda victory.

One of Hitler's priorities from the beginning had been German **rearmament**. In March 1935, he felt strong enough to announce the Germany army was already 240 000 – above the 100 000 limit allowed by Versailles.

- In this month he announced the reintroduction of conscription which would increase the size of the army to 550 000.
- No action was taken to deal with this breach of the Versailles Treaty. However, Britain, France

and Italy were concerned that there might be future German actions. They met at Stresa in April 1935 and formed the Stresa Front to keep a check on future German behaviour.

In June 1935 the **Anglo-German Naval Agreement** was signed. Germany was allowed to build a fleet up to 35% of the level of the British fleet and was allowed to equal Britain's number of submarines.

- This was a successful move by Hitler. It brought Germany closer to Britain and showed that Britain might allow further revisions to the Treaty.
- Britain's unilateral action angered its Stresa Front partners. Thus, the agreement managed to divide future potential enemies.

On 7 March 1936, Hitler sent his troops into the demilitarised region of the **Rhineland**. This was a blatant breach of the Versailles settlement. Hitler was far from certain he would get away with this and his generals had secret orders to retreat if the French moved against them.

- Britain accepted Hitler's action though it did protest at the manner in which it was done. France's lack of action showed Hitler that the French would not act against him without British support.
- For Hitler the remilitarisation of the Rhineland was a great propaganda triumph and significantly improved Germany's strategic position in the west.

Hitler made other significant foreign policy gains at this time. In 1935, Italy had invaded Abyssinia; preoccupation with Abyssinia had been a factor allowing Hitler to get away with his Rhineland adventure. The League of Nations eventually imposed half-hearted sanctions against Italy.

- The main fallout of the Abyssinia Crisis had been to destroy the Stresa Front; Italy moved into Germany's orbit. ²
- In late 1936, Italian Foreign Minister Ciano's visit to Germany brought into existence the **Rome-Berlin Axis Agreement**. In November Germany and Japan signed the Anti-Comintern Pact which underlined their joint hostility to the Soviet Union.
- In November 1937, Italy joined the **Anti-Comintern Pact**, forming the **Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis**.

Between 1936 and 1939, **Spain** suffered a bloody and bitter Civil War. Germany and Italy both intervened on the side of the Nationalist/ Fascist forces of Franco. ³

- The Germans used the war to try out their new weaponry, seen most clearly in the systematic bombing of the northern Spanish town of Guernica by the German Luftwaffe (air force) in April 1937.
- Italian and German troops fought on the side of Franco who was eventually victorious in early 1939.
- The Spanish Civil War brought Italy and Germany even closer together.

By early 1938, Austrian Nazis had been pressuring for the incorporation of Austria into the German Reich – **Anschluss**. The events that followed provide a classic example of Hitler taking advantage of a situation that he had neither planned nor anticipated.

- The Austrian Chancellor, Schuschnigg, tried to pre-empt a Nazi takeover by calling a referendum to decide Austria's future. Hitler feared possible defeat in such a referendum.

² For more detail on Abyssinia, see Chapter 1.

³ For more detail on the Spanish Civil War see Chapter 1.

- By 11 March German pressure on Schuschnigg led to his resignation and the appointment as Austrian Chancellor of the Nazi, Seyss-Inquart. He immediately 'invited' Germany to occupy the country. Within days Hitler had announced the formal union of Germany and Austria (Anschluss).
- Britain took no action beyond a harsh note, while the French government was in such disarray it could do nothing.

Hitler's next area of interest was Czechoslovakia. Along Czechoslovakia's western frontier lay the region of the **Sudetenland**. The Sudetenland had been given to the new Czech state in 1919 but it contained three million Germans. The local Nazi Party had been agitating for incorporation into the Reich.⁴

- The issue came to a head in September 1938 when Hitler made clear his intention to take the Sudetenland. Czechoslovakia had agreements with France and the Soviet Union, and there was a real possibility that war might break out.
- British Prime Minister Chamberlain desperately hoped to avoid war. He met Hitler at Berchtesgaden, where he had a friendly meeting, and at Bad Godesberg, from which he returned convinced war was inevitable.
- Following Mussolini's intervention, a conference was called in Munich in late September.
 - The conference was attended by Hitler, Mussolini, Chamberlain and French Prime Minister Daladier.
 - Neither the Czechs nor the Soviet Union was invited.
 - The Sudetenland was transferred to Germany; Czechoslovakia was informed that if it did not accept the decision, it would have to fight Germany alone.
 - When Chamberlain returned to England, he was feted as a peacemaker.
 - Chamberlain made much of his 'scrap of paper', a declaration signed personally by him and Hitler in which both leaders stated their desire to never to go war again.

On 15 March 1939, Hitler ripped up the Munich Agreement when he invaded the rest of **Czechoslovakia**.

- The western half was incorporated into Germany while the eastern section, Slovakia, became a Nazi puppet-state.
- This was the first time Hitler had taken what was clearly non-German territory.
- On 23 March German troops seized the Lithuanian territory of Memel which had been taken from Germany in 1919.
- The British and the French now ended their policy of 'appeasement' which had been pursued in the belief that German demands had been fair and reasonable.

Hitler's next target was clearly Poland. Pressure was placed on Poland throughout 1939 to allow a road to be built across the Polish Corridor to East Corridor and for the previously German port of Danzig to be returned to Germany. Stories appeared in the German press about the mistreatment of Germans in Polish territory.

- In late March, Britain and France gave Poland a guarantee that if it was attacked, they would defend it. In April Britain gave similar guarantees to Greece, Romania and Turkey.

⁴ For more detail on the Sudetenland, see Chapter 2.

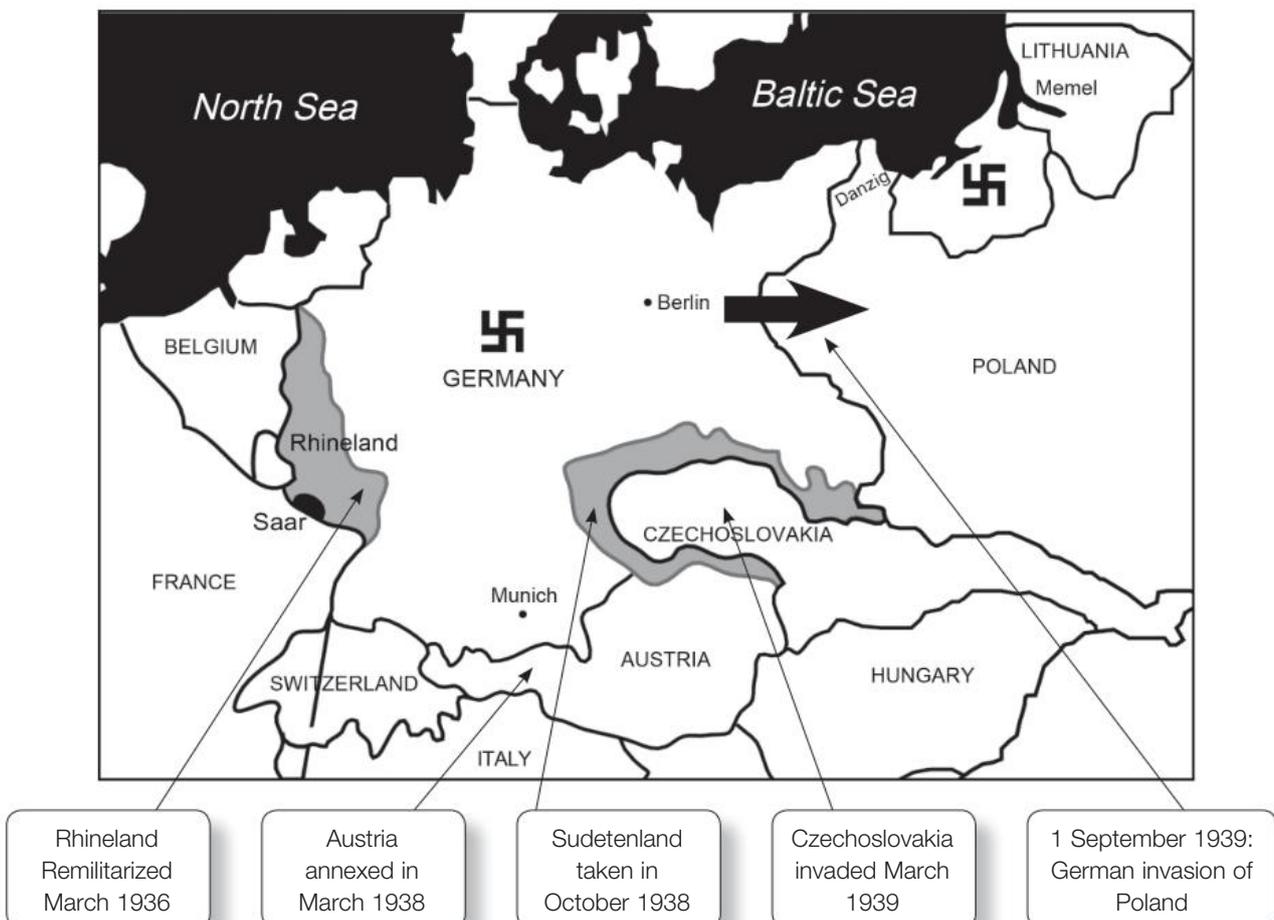
- Hitler viewed the guarantees with contempt. He ordered his generals to draw up plans for an invasion of Poland by 1 September.
- On 22 May 1939, Hitler and Mussolini signed a military alliance which became known as the 'Pact of Steel'.

Hitler was determined to attack Poland. He was not concerned about Britain and France, but what would the Soviet Union do? Britain and France, and the Soviet Union had been involved in negotiations throughout 1939; they got nowhere. Stalin believed that the western powers were not serious about forming an anti-Nazi alliance with the Soviet Union. In classic opportunist style, Hitler offered Stalin an **attractive non-aggression pact**. Hitler and Stalin distrusted and detested each other. However, opportunism ruled: Hitler wanted a quick war in Poland; Stalin wanted no war at all.

- German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop flew to Moscow and on 23 August, he and Soviet Foreign Minister, Molotov, signed the Nazi-Soviet Pact.
 - Hitler could now invade Poland, certain in the knowledge that he would face no challenge from the Soviet Union.
- The Pact contained a Secret Protocol which would later allow Stalin to move into eastern Poland, and in 1940 to move into the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

On 1 September 1939 Germany invaded Poland. On 3 September Britain, and later France, declared war on Germany.

Figure 4.2 German expansion between 1933 and 1939



Exercise 4.1

Match the foreign policy action of Hitler listed in the box below, with the strategy listed. Write the correct answer in the space provided on the right.

Displaying a clear willingness to fight to achieve a foreign policy end	1
Protestations of peaceful intent	2
Signing an agreement with a country Hitler has every intention invading	3
Willingness to retreat if Germany's weak position demanded such a move	4
Pressuring weak governments to agree to Nazi demands	5
Classic act of Hitler's opportunism	6
The ultimate step of war	7
Dividing future potential enemies	8
An example of revisionism	9
Apparent anti-communist intentions	10

German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact	Anschluss with Austria
Behaviour after Dolfuss' assassination	Remilitarisation of the Rhineland
The Sept 1938 Czechoslovak crisis	Anti-Comintern Pact
Invasion of Poland	Hitler's early foreign policy speeches
Anglo-German Naval Agreement	Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact

What do the historians have to say about 'the nature of Nazi foreign policy'?

1. Ian Kershaw: Hitler 1936-45 – Nemesis

Kershaw shows that by mid-1939 Hitler had utterly convinced himself of his genius. His continual success was evidence of the triumph of his will. Surrounded by adulation and yes-men, it would seem that Hitler had started to believe in the Fuhrer Cult which had been built around him. Any limitations that Hitler might have felt about himself were now gone and this affected his foreign policy ambitions. Hitler felt that he had been denied the war he wanted because of the Munich Conference; he would not be denied his war over Poland.

"...This led him to a calamitous over-estimation of his own abilities, coupled with an extreme-denigration of those – particularly the military – who argued more rationally for greater caution." ⁵

⁵ Kershaw, Ian, *Hitler: 1936-45 Nemesis*, Penguin, London, 2000, p 229

2. Alan Bullock: *Hitler – A Study in tyranny*

Bullock shows how Hitler was willing to make nonsense of his previous foreign policy actions if the situation demanded it and if an opportunity presented itself. Also, Hitler was willing to pay a high price to seize his opportunity, presumably in the belief that any price paid would be taken back at a later stage. Such was the case with allowing Foreign Minister Ribbentrop to obtain a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union in August 1939.

*“...Ribbentrop had been prepared to risk straining Germany’s relations with the Italians and the Japanese, to make nonsense of the Anti-Comintern Pact...and to grant sweeping concessions to the Russians in Eastern Europe.”*⁶

3. H Mau / H Krausnick: *German History 1933-45*

Mau and Krausnick highlight the use Hitler made of local German minorities in areas he intended taking. The Sudeten Germans had their own Nazi Party, led by Konrad Henlein. Buoyed by the ease with which he took Austria, Hitler sought to use the local Germans in the Sudetenland. Henlein was summoned to Berlin for instructions. The Sudetens were instructed to make life difficult for the Czech government, even to the point of causing bloody confrontations.

*“...The restraint of the Sudeten Party was dropped...Clearly the object was now to create a situation in Czechoslovakia which would serve as an excuse for German intervention to protect the Sudeten Germans.”*⁷

4. AJP Taylor’s thoughts on the Remilitarisation of the Rhineland

German troops crossed the River Rhine in March 1936. Hitler’s action was totally unlawful and transgressed one of the key clauses of the Treaty of Versailles. German army commanders had been given sealed orders to immediately retreat back across the Rhine if France took action to stop the move. The French took no action.



British historian, AJP Taylor, saw the Remilitarisation of the Rhineland as fundamentally important in the lead up to World War II. He argued that the Locarno Agreement of 1925, which guaranteed western European borders, had restored peace to Europe. Hitler’s action in March 1936 tore up the Locarno Treaty. Taylor sums up his view:

*“...Its (Locarno’s) signature ended the First World War; its repudiation eleven years later marked the prelude to the second...”*⁸

⁶ Bullock, A, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1952, p 531

⁷ Mau, H and Krausnick, H, *German History 1933-45*, Oswald Wolff, London, 1959, pp 86, 88

⁸ Taylor, AJP, *The Origins of the Second World War*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1979, p 82

Chapter Five:

Impact of ideology on German foreign policy to September 1939

Was Hitler so different?

The impact of Nazi ideology on Germany's foreign policy between 1933 and September 1939 was substantial. However, historians have debated the extent to which Nazi foreign policy was not so new, but rather a continuation of traditional German aims.

- Before 1914, a feature of German foreign policy had been the 'Drang Nach Osten' – the march to the east. Were the ideas behind the Berlin-Bagdad Railway and the Pan-German League that far removed from Hitler's later ambitions?
- In March 1918, Germany imposed upon the young Bolshevik state the Treaty of Brest Litovsk. This treaty was very harsh on Russia and it took, be it temporarily, similar expanses of land that Hitler would later take, equally temporarily.
- Gustav Stresemann had been keen to reassert German influence in Eastern Europe in the 1920s. His unwillingness to link the 1925 Locarno Agreement to Eastern Europe suggests that he had hoped for frontier revisions there.
- Research by Fritz Fischer in the 1960s which argued the case for German responsibility for the outbreak of WWI due to its aggressive intentions, suggests further similarity in the foreign policy aims of Imperial Germany and Nazi Germany.

Taking a slightly different tack, AJP Taylor caused something of a storm in the early 1960s when his book 'The Origins of the Second World War' was published. Taylor took a different line from other historians since 1945. The traditional view had been that Hitler was an evil genius who systematically took Europe to war. Taylor's view was that Hitler in fact was no different than other German leaders. In Taylor's eyes:

- Hitler sought to undo the Treaty of Versailles;
- Hitler sought to restore Germany to its rightful place in Europe;
- Hitler had no long-term plan of foreign expansion but rather was an opportunist ready to seize the opportunity as it arose.

If Taylor is right, then the role of ideology in Nazi foreign policy would seem to be negligible.

Alan Bullock presents an alternative line of argument.

- Indeed, Hitler was an opportunist who acted in response to circumstances, but he was only able to do this because he had his long-term goals clearly in mind.
- Hitler could allow himself to be inconsistent because he always knew where he was headed in the long-term.

If Bullock is right, then the case for the role of ideology is heightened.

Nazi ideology ¹

The argument which will be presented here is that ideology played a major role in Nazi foreign policy. It is 'the intentionalist view, with a bit of Taylor and Bullock thrown in'. ²

The main themes of Nazi ideology are dealt with in some detail in Chapter 6.

The argument against the role of ideology suggests that *Mein Kampf* cannot be taken seriously, any more than Hitler's other ravings when he was younger.

- The ranting that can be found in *Mein Kampf* was written in 1924 when Hitler was in prison. In the years immediately after prison, the Nazi Party was in the wilderness.
- When Hitler did gain power, he behaved much as other statesmen, dealing with problems as they arose and taking opportunities if they presented themselves.

However, such a view that totally dismisses the thinking of *Mein Kampf* fails to recognise the similarity of the ideas in the turgid pages of Hitler's book and what came to happen in the 1930s. Ideology played the key role in Nazi foreign policy both in setting the long-term goals and suggesting the short-term strategies. The twin long-term aims of Nazi foreign policy were the achievement of lebensraum in the east and settlement of the Jewish problem. Whether or not this meant the holocaust was inevitable does not detract from the fact that expansion and race were at the root of Nazi foreign policy.

- Hitler always accepted the Social Darwinist view that nations prosper at the expense of others: "Right abides in strength alone".
 - Life is a struggle and if Germany ever felt a need to take from another nation, it was justified in so behaving.
 - 'Strength is always mistress over weakness'.
 - Germany should not be limited by an appeal to scruples. The 'sole earthly criterion of whether an enterprise is right or wrong is its success.'
- On the very first page of *Mein Kampf*, Hitler states that 'Kindred blood should belong to a common empire'. Here is his aim of drawing together all German speaking people into a GrossDeutschland.
- He recognised that the implacable enemy to German ambitions was France which would have to be dealt with. However, he made it clear that war with France was not an end in itself but merely a means to an end: a free hand in Eastern Europe.
 - This free hand would eventually see a German Empire in the east comprising 250 million people.
 - Hitler predicted Germany's frontiers would run from the Atlantic to the Black Sea.
- Hitler's belief in Aryan superiority as the highest human type yet evolved was clear.
 - The earliest civilisations had prospered both as a result of the taming of animals by man, and the employment of inferior races as slaves.
 - This of course was to be the fate of Slavs in a future German empire.

¹ The various elements of Nazi ideology present a complex picture. For the purposes of this chapter, and examining German foreign policy, a limited view of ideology will be taken, and is explained below. Students who seek a far more detailed examination of Nazi ideology can refer to: Webb, K, *Power and Authority in the Modern World 1919-1946*, Get Smart Education, Mona Vale, 2018, Chapter 9; and Webb, K, *Power and Authority in the Modern World*, Nelson, Melbourne, 2018, Chapter 5

² The author acknowledges that there is a range of thinking on this issue. There is Taylor's 'Hitler was just another German leader'. Then there is the thinking of Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial and Education Centre in Jerusalem' which argues that Hitler's ultimate aim was the elimination of world Jewry, for which the elimination of European Jewry was merely a tactical step.

What do the historians have to say about ‘Impact of Ideology on Nazi Foreign Policy to September 1939’?

1. Winston Churchill: *The Gathering Storm*

Writing after the war, Winston Churchill was clear on the importance of *Mein Kampf* in understanding Hitler’s foreign policy. He argued that if there was ever a book that needed to have been read, *Mein Kampf* was that book. Hitler had made clear his intentions from creating a National Socialist state to world conquest.

*“...All was there – the programme for German resurrection...the rightful position of German at the summit of the world. Here was the new Koran of faith and war: turgid, verbose, shapeless, but pregnant with its message.”*³

2. PMH Bell: *The Origins of the Second World War in Europe*

Bell points out that western statesmen believed that there had to be a distinction between ideology and practical politics. They dealt with Hitler as a realist. The mistake they made was that he was more; opportunist he might be, but for him ideology provided direction whereas his peers sought only to turn the next corner.

Bell argues that to deny the role of ideology in Nazi foreign policy is to suggest that Hitler was motivated by purely materialist interests or by impersonal forces. However, to argue this is to reduce Hitler to a mere puppet. Bell says these explanations raise difficulties as they leave:

*“...unexplained the large and important areas of consistency between Hitler’s writings, talk and actions, and in particular those areas where ideology carried the day against the obvious appeal of opportunism and material interest.”*⁴

3. Richard Evans: *The Third Reich in Power*

Evans suggests that the desire for *lebensraum* had less to do with ideology and more to do with economic necessity. He refers to a speech given to army, SA, and SS leaders in February 1934 in which Hitler argued that living space for Germany’s surplus population would be needed because the economic recovery would have run out of steam by 1942. Hitler had spoken to military leaders in a similar vein in February 1933 arguing:

*“...it was pointless trying to boost exports; the only way to a long-term, secure recovery of the German economy was through the conquest of ‘living-space’ in the East, and preparations for this now had to take priority over everything else.”*⁵

3 Churchill, WS, *The Gathering Storm*, Cassell, London, 1948, p 50

4 Bell, PMH, *The Origins of the Second World War*, Pearson, London, 1997, p 84

5 Evans, R, *The Third Reich in Power*, Penguin, London, 2005, p 346

What follows show a difference of opinion re-ideology from two vintage historians.

4. WN Medlicott: *The Coming of War in 1939*

Medlicott argues the line that Hitler never wavered in his long-term aims but that like Bismarck before him, ⁶ he was an opportunist, willing to change policy along the way if the situation demanded. Medlicott argues that there is a consistency in Hitler's thinking from the days of *Mein Kampf* to the Hossbach Memorandum ⁷ to his wartime table-talk.

"...Throughout, from the days of Mein Kampf until 1944, the objective was the black-soil region of Russia and east Europe generally, as living space for German colonists..." ⁸

5. AJP Taylor: *The Origins of the Second World War*

Taylor tackles the issue of lebensraum from a non-racial standpoint. Basing his argument on economics, he suggests that lebensraum offered Hitler nothing. Germany already had a monopoly of trade with South East Europe and did not suffer from a shortage of raw materials. At best, lebensraum offered space.

"...Lebensraum, in short, did not drive Germany to war. Rather war, or a warlike policy, produced the demand for lebensraum..." ⁹

⁶ Chancellor of Prussia/ Germany 1862-90, responsible for the unification of Germany

⁷ Hitler held a meeting with military leaders in 1937 in which he mused about when to go to war to maximise Germany's advantages. General Hossbach's notes of this meeting, "The Hossbach Memorandum", were used at the Nuremberg Trials to prove the Nazis' warlike intentions.

⁸ Medlicott, WN, *The Coming of War in 1939*, The Historical Association (UK), London, 1963, p 11

⁹ Taylor, AJP, *The Origins of the Second World War*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1961, p 140

Chapter Six:

Analysis: Causes of the Conflict

Now eighty years after the event, historians still continue to debate the reasons for the outbreak of the war in Europe in 1939. The specific views of certain historians will be discussed later in this chapter. Countless explanations have been presented over the years. Let us try and narrow some of these down to the following.

1. The outbreak of the war in 1939 was entirely the fault of Hitler (and to a lesser extent Mussolini).

The war was the result of Nazi aggression. Germany had never accepted the Paris Peace Settlement of 1919 and even Weimar Republic governments before 1933 sought to bring about change whenever they could. Stresemann may have signed the Locarno Agreement in 1925 guaranteeing west European frontiers; he never signed an agreement guaranteeing east European borders.¹ Once Hitler came into power, he made it quite clear that his prime objective was to tear up the Treaty of Versailles. Even a cursory look at his actions justifies the view that Hitler had no respect for international agreements and was hell bent on aggression:

- the Versailles armament clauses were discarded as Germany introduced conscription, built up a massive army, created an air force, built heavy guns and submarines; each action a contravention of the Versailles Treaty.
- the remilitarisation of the Rhineland in 1936, Anschluss in 1938 and subsequent actions over Czechoslovakia affirm his aggressive intentions; Poland came as no surprise.

Thus, to fight against Hitler, was to fight for international law, justice, morality and the spirit of collective security and the League of Nations. Historians could point to a large of body of evidence to support this view:

- when the concentration camps were opened and the full horror of Nazism became apparent, this interpretation seemed to require no further justification;
- Hitler had continually reneged on his word in the 1930s; each “I have no further territorial demands” statement was followed by further aggression;
- the documentary evidence further proved Hitler’s sole guilt:
 - *Mein Kampf* made no secret of his intentions;
 - documents such as the Hossbach Memorandum and the minutes of the Wansee Conference² provided further evidence;
- thus, Britain and France had no choice but to fight in 1939.

This view suited both the allies and Germany after the war:

- Britain could argue: “We did all we could to avoid war, look at Munich!”
- Germans could argue: “The war and the camps? It was Hitler and the Nazis, not our fault.”

¹ Gustav Stresemann was German Foreign Minister November 1923-October 1929.

² Conference held in January 1942 where the decision to implement the Final Solution was taken.

2. The outbreak of war was the fault of Britain and France.

Hitler's aggression cannot be questioned. However, the reason war came was because of the weakness of the other powers who chose not to stop him, to in fact allow him to get away with one aggressive act after another. Pressured by pacifist public opinion, fearful of another war and dominated by Nazi-admiring aristocrats, British governments took the line of least resistance:

- German rearmament was allowed in the name of equality and justified by a fear of communism;
- Hitler's territorial claims were always justified on the basis of the unfairness of the Versailles Treaty;
- Britain's armed forces were allowed to run down to the point where standing up to Hitler was no longer an option;
- Chamberlain's obstinate refusal to seriously consider working with the Soviet Union gave Stalin no other choice but to sign the Nazi-Soviet Pact;
- when war did come, so criminal had been the government's neglect of its defences in the 1930s that it was lucky to stave off defeat in 1940.
- This view was an easy one to argue due to its equally self-evident nature and the fact that the opponents of appeasement – Churchill in particular – were able to dominate the historical debate in the years after the war.

3. The circumstances of the 1930s gave western leaders no alternative to the policies they pursued.

Condemning appeasement is simplistic and takes no account of the strategic, economic and political limitations facing the governments of the 1930s. Indeed, the likes of Baldwin and Chamberlain should in fact be given credit for both attempting to maintain peace, and for having the nation as well prepared for war as it did. Evidence in support of such a view is keenly offered by pro-appeasement revisionist writers:

- Britain's strategic burden in the inter-war period was enormous, with commitments stretching from the North Sea, to Palestine to Singapore;
- military leaders were warning the government that there was no way Britain could take on three enemies simultaneously – Germany, Italy and Japan – and that the best policy was to reduce the number of one's potential enemies;
 - hence the logic of appeasement;
- in 1967, the British government began the 30 Year Rule which allowed classified official documents to be opened up to researchers.
 - This opened up a treasure trove of material which suggested that the economic restraints seriously restricted the options of the government in dealing with Hitler.
 - They also suggested that Chamberlain's actions needed to be revaluated in a more positive manner.

A variation on this theme is to see the British government's behaviour in the 1930s as in keeping with traditional British foreign policy. From time immemorial, Britain has not involved itself in European affairs until it became apparent that a single power was about to destroy the balance of power and dominate the continent.

- Before 1914, Britain had kept out of European affairs. It enters the war when it becomes clear that Germany plans to dominate the entire continent.
- Before 1939, Britain attempts a hands-off approach but once it is apparent that Germany intends dominating the continent, it is forced reluctantly to war.

4. War resulted from the failure of the principle of Collective Security and the operation of the League of Nations.

The great hope for European peace after 1919 was the League of Nations. Based on the principle of collective security – the idea that member nations will rally behind a victim of aggression and force the aggressor to back down – there were great hopes for the League. The idea of collective security itself was based on an even more profound principle, that of internationalism – the idea that nations will sacrifice selfish national interest for the common good. Unfortunately, the inter-war period showed that such optimism was utterly misplaced.

- The principle of internationalism never had a chance.
 - The Great War had, in part, been caused by the forces of nationalism.
 - Wartime propaganda had encouraged an acceptance of narrow nationalism.
 - The death and destruction of the war bred a desire for security and revenge, hardly notions conducive to idealistic internationalism.
- The 1920s and 1930s saw a steady rise of far-right nationalistic thinking. This was not restricted to only Germany and Italy. The inter-war period saw a steady demise of democracy and the appearance of right-wing nationalistic dictatorships, including:
 - Pilsudski in Poland, Dolfuss in Austria, Admiral Horthy in Hungary;
 - Fascist parties appeared in Romania, Spain and even Britain.
 - These regimes are the antithesis of internationalism.
- Even the League – meant to be the home of internationalism – in fact was itself rooted in selfish nationalism.
 - Votes in the Council and the Assembly always had to be unanimous.
 - Disarmament was encouraged to the point consistent with national safety which was, as stated earlier, always that point where one was stronger than one's neighbour.
 - Many issues were excluded from League jurisdiction because the powers involved feared for their national interests.

5. International relations is a branch of politics which is intensely personal. War came in 1939 due to the failings of individual statesmen.

To understand the workings of international relations in the 1930s, one needs to examine the decision makers. History is not about abstract developments but about individual people making individual decisions. The historian GR Elton might have put it this way:

*"...history is about the activities of people not abstractions. Of course, people make decisions within a context...But this context does not act as some directing or determining force. What makes history is the human capacity to exercise reason and thought."*³

³ Webb, K, Extension History: The Historian, HTA of NSW, Annandale, 2006, p87

Elton's view of history goes some way to explaining the road to war as this was a period of history not well served by its leaders.

- The dishonest, lying, duplicitous nature of men like Hitler and Mussolini speaks for itself.
 - Their penchant for opportunism did much to poison the international environment; Stalin might be considered in this way too.
- At a time when Britain needed strong leaders, willing to take a stand and make difficult decisions, it had instead the likes of Stanley Baldwin, Neville Chamberlain, Samuel Hoare and Lord Halifax.
 - Baldwin admitted not pushing rearmament in the 1935 election because he knew public opinion would not accept it.
 - Rather than beef up the League over Abyssinia, Hoare sought to do a deal with Mussolini in the Hoare-Laval Plan.
 - Chamberlain's naivety, and obstinacy, combined with his firm control over cabinet, allowed no alternatives to appeasement. Chamberlain often ignored or bypassed his foreign minister and his diplomats, with disastrous consequences.
 - Lord Halifax still sought an accommodation with Hitler in May 1940.

6. To place responsibility for the outbreak of war on the shoulders of individuals is too simplistic.

History is determined by large, sweeping forces over which individuals have little control. The historian EH Carr might have put it this way:

*"...Everything that happens has a cause or causes, and could not have happened differently unless something in the cause or causes had also been different...to understand history one must see the element of determinism in our lives, and thus the past."*⁴

Carr's view of history would attempt to explain the outbreak of war by examining those overwhelming developments of the inter-war period. Some of these have already been considered in different ways:

- the strength of inter-war pacifism;
- the growth of nationalistic right-wing political movements;
- the failure of the principle of internationalism.

Economics is certainly one force which Carr's analysis would support. It can be strongly argued that there is a direct link between the depression of the 1930s and the eventual outbreak of war.

- It was the onset of depression in Germany which finally gave the death blow to the Weimar Republic and gave Hitler his opportunity. Hitler did not get into power because of the depression; however, he would never have become Chancellor of Germany if there had been no depression.
- Japan suffered enormously from the depression; reliance on export markets caused massive unemployment as protectionism grew. Hardship at home was major factor in the decision

⁴ Webb, K, Extension History: The Historians, HTA of NSW, Annandale, 2006, p87

of Japanese leaders to pursue expansionist policies in the 1930s. Japanese aggression had two key effects on Europe:

- it served as an example to Hitler and Mussolini;
- it served to destroy the principle of collective security and highlighted the failure of the League of Nations.
- The depression also had a major impact on the British economy.
 - A major factor determining Chamberlain's policies in the 1930s was the weakness of the British economy as it slowly came out of depression.
 - Revisionist writers argue strongly that economic restraints tied the hands of the British in the 1930s in their dealings with Hitler.

7. The source of the outbreak of war in 1939 can be found in the Paris Peace Settlement of 1919.

The 1919 Peace Settlement provided Europe with the worst of all worlds. In essence it was a compromise which pleased no-one – too harsh for the Americans, too weak for the French, “a stain on the national honour” for the Germans.

- Had the settlement been savagely hard on the Germans, and maintained, a German revival as occurred under Hitler might have been avoided.
- Had the settlement been moderate, accepted the fault of all in bringing about war and allowed Germany to negotiate, the bitterness and resentment which boiled under the surface in Germany might not have developed.
 - The signs that the Peace Settlement was deeply flawed and bore the seeds of future conflict were apparent early on.
- A famous cartoon by Will Dyson called “Cannon Fodder”, produced in 1919 is a case in point.
 - The four main leaders – Clemenceau, Wilson, Lloyd George and Orlando (Italy) are walking together, when Clemenceau stops and says: “Curious! I seem to hear a child weeping.”
 - On the left is an infant boy crying and above his head the words: “1940 class”
 - The point being the infant will be at war in twenty years time.
- The French General Marshall Foch said of the decision to create the Polish Corridor and separate East Prussia from the rest of Germany: “There is the root of the next war.”

AJP Taylor makes the point that the Versailles Treaty failed to deal with the issue of German power. He further argues that it was far less onerous for Germany than domestic propaganda tried to make out. Germany had survived as a united and potentially strong state that was quite capable of dominating the continent of Europe again.

- Geographically it was intact, apart from losing small border areas. Germany had lost only 13% of its territory.
- Its population in 1919 still 65 million, dwarfing France's 40 million.
- Despite the provisions of the Treaty, Germany's economy was still potentially the strongest in Europe.

- As Taylor points out, even the harsher measures of the treaty could only be implemented with German cooperation.
 - eg Germany was to be disarmed but had to do this itself, subject to an Allied Control Commission.

“...Germany had only to secure a modification of the treaty, or to shake it off altogether, and she would emerge as strong, or almost as strong as she had been in 1914.”⁵

What do the historians have to say about the “Causes of the Conflict”?

Several historians have been examined. Here the ideas of some of them are taken a little further.

1. Richard Overy: *The Origins of the Second World War*

Overy’s argument is that the international system which existed during the inter-war period did not reflect the reality of international power. Such a disparity did not mean that another war was inevitable; however, it did mean that the international environment was unstable. It was this unstable environment of which Hitler was able to take advantage, and with which the appeasers had to cope.

- Between 1815 and 1914, there had been no major war in Europe involving more than two great powers.⁶ This was because the powers accepted the concept of the balance of power. A ‘concert of Europe’ operated to ensure disputes could be resolved before they developed into conflict.
 - Before 1848 the Austrian statesman Metternich guided European affairs, seeking to avoid war and revolution;
 - After 1871 it was the job of the German statesman Bismarck.

(The rise of new forces such as democracy, nationalism and German power upset this equilibrium. The Great War was fought in a real sense to deal with these new forces.)

- Cold War Europe, from 1945-1991, saw Europe benefit from another long period of peace.
 - The Yalta Conference of February 1945 divided the continent into spheres of influence.
 - Both the US and the USSR accepted this division and agreed not to intervene in its each other’s sphere.
 - The balance of power reflected international reality and so the result was a period without a European War.

Europe between the wars was not like this. Due to US isolationism, Germany’s early weakness and Russia’s concentration on developing its revolution, the fate of Europe was in the hands of Britain and France. These two nations dominated the League of Nations and European diplomacy. However, this did not reflect the true balance of power in the world.

- After 1919, Britain had become second rate military and economic powers:
 - Britain never recovered its economic strength after the war

⁵ Taylor, AJP, *The Origins of the Second World War*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1961, p48

⁶ Excluding the Crimean War in the 1850s on the periphery of the continent.

- it allowed its defences to run down
- it was preoccupied with imperial matters.
- This left France with the job of upholding the post-war settlement.
 - demographically, economically and thus militarily, France could never be a match for Germany in Europe.
 - this overburdening of France was a key factor that would see the balance of power shift in favour of the Axis powers.
 - in the 1930s, France steadily decayed and ended meekly following Britain's lead.

*"...there was a growing contradiction between the existing international system and the reality of power made more dangerous by the restless political forces released by economic modernisation and the rise of mass politics."*⁷

2. AJP Taylor: The Origins of the Second World War

Taylor has been referred to many times; his ideas are so often interesting and thought provoking. Here is another one which, like much of what Taylor said, caused controversy.

Taylor refused to see Hitler as the embodiment of evil and a unique presence in European politics.

- As far as Taylor was concerned, Hitler was just another European leader like Chamberlain or Daladier.
 - Similarly, Hitler should be viewed as just another German leader like Ebert or Stresemann.
- Taylor argues that Hitler had no long-term plans for war, no preconceived blueprint for taking over Europe.
 - As for Mein Kampf and the Hossbach Memorandum, these things were nothing more than political daydreaming.
- Hitler was an opportunist and when war came in 1939, it was the fault of bungling diplomacy.

*"...(Hitler) aimed to make Germany the dominant Power in Europe...Other Powers have pursued similar aims, and still do. Other Powers treat smaller countries as satellites. Other Powers seek to defend their vital interests by force of arms."*⁸

3. Philip Bell: The Origins of the Second World War in Europe

Bell analyses the internal situation in France and concludes that from both left and right the desire for pacifism was almost irresistible. The impact of the losses of the Great War was far greater in France than in other nations. The population was static and aging; opposition to war was greatest amongst the peasantry which had borne the brunt of infantry losses during the war. Thus, it is not surprising that the French were so willing to follow the British line of appeasement during the 1930s.

- The Socialist Party was the main 'home' of pacifism. Leader Blum believed most of France's problems could be solved by disarmament.

⁷ Overy, RJ, *The Origins of the Second World War*, Longman, New York, 1987, p9

⁸ Taylor, AJP, *The Origins of the Second World War*, Penguin, Penguin, 1964 edition, p27

- The French Right shared this rejection of war. Charles Maurras, the leader of the right-wing Action Francaise said: “And above all, no war. We do not want war.”
- Ribbentrop’s office and other German organisations sought to create links with French ex-servicemen and pacifist groups. Appeals were made to the memory of the war and the need for reconciliation. Right wing sympathy with Nazi Germany was growing.
- Political divisions hindered any firm stand towards Germany in the 1930s:
 - in February 1934, right wing groups nearly over threw the Republic;
 - by the late 1930s, the Socialists were split between the old pacifist groups and those who wanted to stand up to Hitler;
 - the Communist Party was paralysed by its unquestioning subservience to Moscow.

*“...A profound longing for peace, sometimes emerging as pacifism in the strict sense of the total rejection of war or any use of force, exercised a pervasive influence in France during the 1920s and 1930s.”*⁹

4. The Post-Revisionists

From the late 1960s, following the opening of the Cabinet files from the 1930s, there was a move amongst British historians to revise that traditional view of Neville Chamberlain and the policy of appeasement. Chamberlain was no longer seen as an incompetent who slavishly gave in to Hitler. Rather he was a far-sighted statesman who did the best that he could for Britain, given the economic, political and strategic restraints he faced.

However, as the orthodox (Cato/ Churchill) view was revised, so too the revisionist view of Chamberlain and appeasement has itself been revised. One historian who has developed this line is Keith Middlemass. Middlemass is scathing of Chamberlain’s conduct during the 1930s:

- He attacks Chamberlain for running foreign policy as a ‘one-man band’, controlling the Foreign Office and allowing no dissent.
- Appeasement was not underpinned by a defence strategy which protected Britain from air attack or deterred Hitler from using aggressive tactics.
- Chamberlain totally misunderstood Hitler, believing his aims were limited to righting the wrongs of Versailles and that he was a man with whom one could negotiate.

A more recent critic of Chamberlain is RAC Parker.

- Parker accepts that Chamberlain was competent and far-sighted.
- He rejects the notion that Chamberlain had no option but to follow appeasement due to economic and political restraints.
- He says there was a variety of policy options which Chamberlain skilfully hid; instead he pursued appeasement with great obstinacy.
- He ignored expert advice and other suggestions from his critics, preferring to surround himself with yes-men.

*“...Chamberlain’s worst error was to believe he could march Hitler on the yellow brick road to peace when in reality Hitler was marching very firmly on the road to war.”*¹⁰

⁹ Bell, PMH, *The Origins of the Second World War in Europe*, Longman, Harlow, 1986, p90

¹⁰ McDonough, F, *Hitler, Chamberlain and Appeasement*, CUP, Cambridge 2002, p86

ADVICE ON WRITING ESSAYS

(These comments should be re-read when approaching the sections called ESSAYS 1, ESSAYS 2, ESSAYS 3 and ESSAYS 4.)

Introduction to essay writing

People who have been marking the HSC for a few years can read an essay and with little hesitation can say “that’s a ‘B’ level answer, 16/ 25, or that’s a ‘mid-A’ range answer, 23/ 25, or this is a ‘D’ answer, 8/ 25. HSC markers do occasionally disagree about answers but once they share their disagreements, the value of the essay becomes clear. It is one of the comforting things about how Modern History is marked at the HSC, that the legendary level of accuracy is almost scientific.

The reason for this is that essay writing is both a literary and a scientific skill. There is no mystery in writing a good essay. Certainly, some people are better writers than others: they might have a wider vocabulary, they might know more, they might have a better turn of phrase, they might understand the issues more clearly. However, everyone can come to terms with the basics and write a reasonable essay.

So, what makes for a successful essay?

1. Answer the question. This sounds almost trite and an insult to the intelligence, but the majority of responses presented in the HSC which score poorly, do so because they do not answer the question. Failing to answer the question can be done in a variety of ways. In summary it can happen because:

a. A student fails to address the issues presented in the question, ie he or she decides to write about something else. For example in the essay:

How important was the collapse of collective security in bringing about war in 1939?

A student decides to argue that:

- the collapse of collective security had nothing to do with the outbreak of war in 1939
- it was the result of the policy of appeasement which allowed Hitler to expand and whose failure finally forced Britain and France to fight

A nice line of argument, but it is not answering the question. The student could argue ‘appeasement is to blame’ line, but first of all he needs to deal with the issue of the collapse of collective security, even if it is to show that the failure of collective security was not an important factor. He cannot simply ignore the focus of the question because he wants to write about something else.

- he could argue that yes, the collapse of collective security was important in bringing about the outbreak of war in 1939 and show why this is so, and then argue “but of course other factors were also of importance such as.....”
- as a rule of thumb, if you are going to pursue this style of argument, make sure that about half of your essay deals with the subject of the question, in this case ‘collapse of collective security’.

b. A student writes about the issues presented in the question, but instead of providing an argument to answer the question, they simply 'narrate' or 'tell a story'. For example, in the essay:

How important was the collapse of collective security in bringing about war in 1939?

A student fails to present an argument, instead they simply narrate:

- she might describe the stages in the gradual breakdown of collective security from the weaknesses of the League to Manchuria
- she would then bring in Abyssinia, Spain and Hitler expansionist moves

This is all relevant, factual detail but she is merely telling a story and not presenting an argument which is showing how important these events were in bringing about the outbreak of war in 1939.

c. A student does not really understand the question and has so little factual detail they are unable to sustain even a narrative response.

d. A student does understand the question and attempts an argument but has so little factual detail that the argument cannot be sustained.

'c' and 'd' can only be fixed up with solid work and revision on the part of the student; 'a' and 'b' can be learned.

2. Provide an argument in your introduction which will form the basis of the essay. The introduction is the most important paragraph of the essay; if it is written properly it should leave the marker in no doubt what is going to come up in the essay. So, what does a good introduction involve?

a. Avoid the dramatic 'setting the scene' method. For example, in the essay:

How important was the collapse of collective security in bringing about war in 1939?

A student should avoid opening like this:

- Long before war broke out in 1939, the portents of future death and destruction were clear for all to see. Chinese civilians were butchered by the Japanese, Abyssinian peasants gassed by the Italians while the Germans obliterated the town of Guernica. It would not be long before Hitler would hurl the full fury of his war machine against the nations of Europe.

b. Avoid providing lots of factual detail in the introduction. Introduce the broad areas you will discuss, but leave the detail to the body of the essay. For example, in the essay:

How important was the collapse of collective security in bringing about war in 1939?

This is not a good introduction:

- The signs of the failure of collective security were already apparent in the early 1930s. In 1931, Japan invaded Manchuria following an alleged Chinese attack on the Manchurian railway. The League took no action and did not impose sanctions. They sent the Lytton Commission which avoided laying blame. Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia was also allowed to succeed as the League imposed only half-hearted sanctions as the British and the French did not want to lose the Stresa Front. In Spain.....

- c. Be careful with length. Three lines is not an introduction, no argument can be properly introduced in such a small space. However, a page and a half is too long. With average sized writing, 6-8 lines should be enough to present the argument of the essay.
- d. Instead try to present an argument in your introduction. There is no 'right' answer to a Modern History essay question; the right answer is the argument which you have presented, logically developed and backed up with detailed factual evidence. For example, for the essay:

How important was the collapse of collective security in bringing about war in 1939?

A student might try to argue:

- The collapse of collective security was a major factor in the coming of war in 1939. The hopes which had been placed in the League of Nations and the spirit of internationalism proved ill-founded. The growing strength of aggressive nationalism in Europe, the absence of the Great Powers from the League and Anglo-French weakness ensured collective security would fail. This failure enabled Hitler to pursue his aggressive aims and forced Britain and France to pursue the policy of appeasement. Once it became clear appeasement had failed, war became the only option.

3. Provide your essay with a structure. Your introduction should show where the essay will lead, eg the above introduction might lead to the following structure:

- some points about the optimism placed in the League of Nations and a discussion of the principle of collective security
- explain why collective security failed, firstly by examining the weakness of the League of Nations
- then examine the development of aggressive nationalism and Anglo-French weakness leading to this
- points which illustrate the failure of collective security, eg Abyssinia
- the ways in which Hitler took advantage of this in his own policies
- Anglo-French response to the failure of collective security with the policy of appeasement and its ultimate failure
- conclusion: Collective security failed due to the weaknesses of the League of Nations and the nature of international politics in the inter-war period. This failure gave Hitler opportunities which Britain and France responded to with appeasement which ultimately failed. War was the result.

(NB: this is only one of a hundred ways of dealing with this question)

4. Structure paragraphs carefully. There are some simple rules to obey:

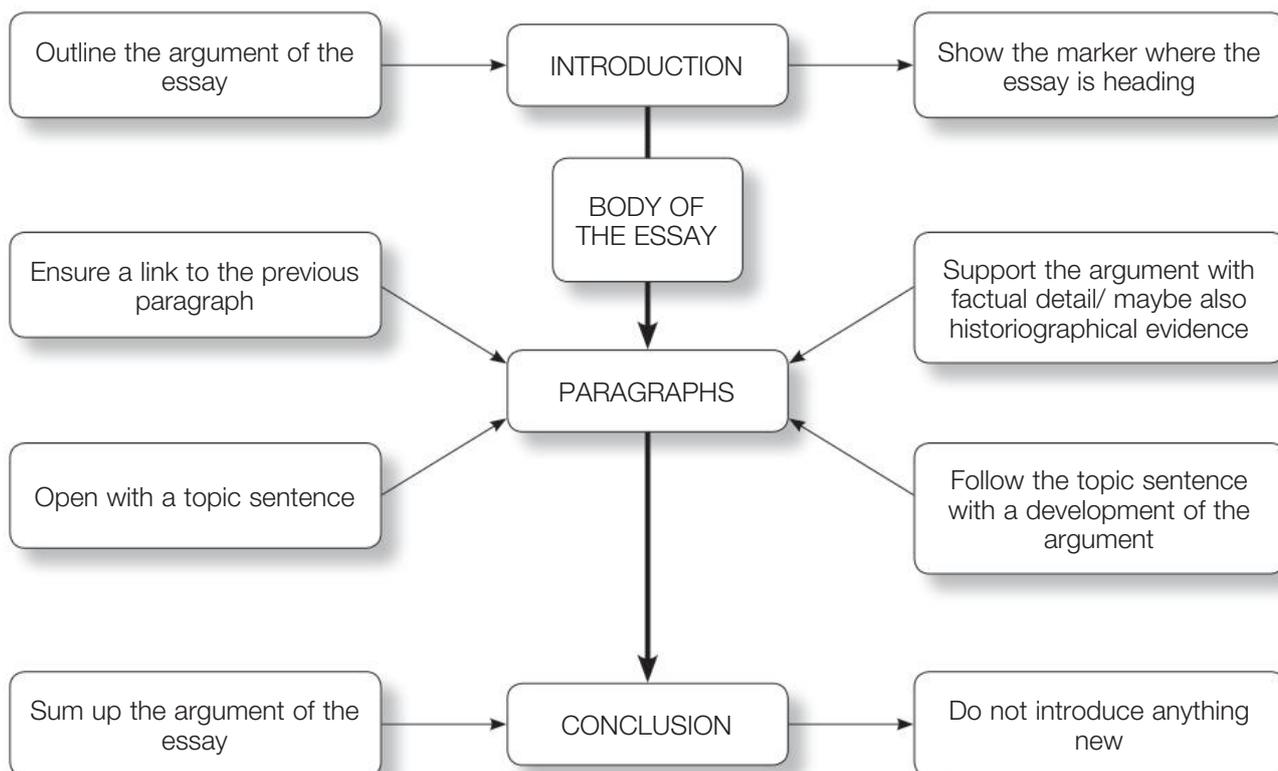
- open with a topic sentence which outlines what the paragraph is going to be about;
- develop the argument presented in the topic sentence;
- support the argument with specific factual detail;
- if appropriate, support the detail with historiographical evidence.
- link your paragraphs – this can be achieved easily with certain stock phrases, eg:
 - “not only was ‘x’ of significance but ‘y’ also had an impact...”
 - “in addition to “a and b”, “c and d” were also to benefit from.....”
 - “in contrast to “e”, “f” reacted quite differently....”

NB: Do not open paragraphs with historiography. The aim should be for the student to show the marker what he knows. Therefore, open with your ideas, back it up with factual detail and then, if appropriate, back up your idea with what a historian has said:

- argument>detail>(maybe) historians’ ideas;
- do not name drop for the sake of it – markers are not fooled or impressed by having lots of historians dropped into an essay when their books have almost certainly never been looked at;
- Fewer historians mentioned is better than lots.

NB: Do not quote, paraphrase! This shows that you understand what the historian is saying; giving a three-line quotation merely shows you have remembered a three-line quotation, whereas paraphrasing the historian’s view in your own words shows that you have understood what you are writing.

The diagram below sums up some of the main ideas the have been discussed in this section.



ESSAYS 1

Causes of the Conflict

The purpose of this section is to provide some ideas for the type of questions which might be asked on the first of the key features “causes of the conflict”, and the early parts of the content section of the syllabus “The Growth of European Tensions” and “German foreign policy”. These outlines are not presented as the ‘be all and end all’ responses to these questions. To provide a sense of reality to this section, what follows is a ‘first draft response’ to each question, ie what were the first ideas that came into the author’s head as he thought about each question?

Essay No 1

“To what extent are the dictators Hitler and Mussolini to blame for causing the tensions that brought on the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939?”

“To what extent questions” often lead to one of three responses:

- a) Yes, Hitler and Mussolini were entirely to blame for bringing on the tensions that led to war in 1939.
- b) No, evil they might be, but they were not blame for the tensions, they were merely taking advantage of opportunities that arose – the blame lies elsewhere. (This approach is to be avoided as it is not dealing with the focus of the question.)
- c) Clearly, the dictators should take some of the blame, but it is too simplistic to place the entire blame on their shoulders. Other factors also played a role.

For the purpose of this question, option c) will be considered.

- In a superficial way, blame clearly lies with the dictators for causing the tensions that led to war in 1939. If Hitler and Mussolini had not pursued an aggressive path, there would not have been a war.
 - The long-term aims of both Hitler and Mussolini involved tearing up the 1919 Peace Settlement. They had no intention of respecting the status quo and made it very plain that they were prepared to go to war to achieve these aims
 - identify the aims and explain their significance
 - Hitler’s actions – Rhineland, Anschluss, Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia – showed him to be bent on European domination. His steady rearmament and threats of war kept tensions high.
 - provide evidence to show this.
 - Hitler’s move threat against Poland would have totally upset the European balance, he clearly could not be trusted and so the western powers had no choice but to stop him.
 - show how Britain and France had endeavoured to maintain peace and were forced to war by Nazi aggression
 - Mussolini’s actions also caused tensions to rise. Actions in Abyssinia and Spain did much to destroy the principle of collective security,
 - Perhaps refer to historians who support these ideas
- However, though Hitler’s and Mussolini’s actions clearly raised tensions and undermined the League and Collective Security, war actually resulted because of the failure of the other powers to stand up to them.

- Introduce appeasement – define it and briefly explain what drove it on
- Explain the argument: appeasement encouraged the dictators in their aggression, the appeasers totally and naively misunderstood the type of men they were dealing with, failure to adequately rearm meant there was little alternative to appeasement
 - provide evidence to show this, use appeasement historiography such as Cato and Churchill
- Debate this issue by suggesting the appeasers achieved what they could and were faced with economic and strategic restraints.
 - refer to the revisionist line of thought.
- The Soviet decision in August 1939 to deal with Hitler rather than stand up to him made a war over Poland inevitable

NB: Do not turn this into a discussion of appeasement – the focus of the question is Hitler and Mussolini, so make sure they take up 40-50% of your answer. Failure to do this will mean your answering your own question rather than the examiner's question.

Essay No 2:

“To what extent was the collapse of collective security the main cause of the tensions that led to the outbreak of conflict in Europe?”

The principle of collective security was the great idealistic hope of the inter-war period. It was believed that the powers, working through the League of Nations, could work together to prevent aggression and a similar chain of events which had led to war in 1914. Collective security collapsed, unable to handle the realities of European and world politics. This collapse meant there was no means to stop the aggression of the Axis powers whose actions increased the tensions in Europe. The only response to this aggression came in the form of appeasement which was doomed to fail.

- Give some background of the League and how it operated – do not get carried away with a lengthy narrative of its progress before 1935. Explain the idea of collective security.
 - Refer to the various League Articles behind collective security:
 - Article 10 – the collective security article
 - Article 12 – the arbitration article
 - Article 16 – the sanctions article
- Collective security was unable to function due to the realities of European and world politics. Refer to why it failed:
 - Failure of internationalism in a world beset with aggressive nationalism
 - Failure of the League to reflect the true balance of power
 - Inability of Britain and France to do the job
 - Lack of any coercive machinery, so nations like Japan could act with impunity
- The failure of collective security enabled the dictators to act without fear of any retribution. Each action of Hitler and Mussolini further acted to heighten tensions in Europe. Manchuria showed them the way.
 - Refer to Hitler's adventures: Rhineland, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Spain
 - Refer to Italy in Abyssinia

- Without collective security, Britain and France resorted to appeasement:
 - Briefly explain, give some examples
 - It merely encouraged the dictators leading to its eventual fall and the events of 1939

Had collective security had the support of all the major powers and had the League been able to overcome the nationalistic urges of the time, tensions in Europe might have been controlled. Its collapse gave the dictators their chance. The western response was appeasement which failed due to its total misunderstanding of the nature of Hitler and Mussolini. In this way the collapse of collective security was the main cause of the tensions that led to the outbreak of conflict in Europe.

Now, let's approach this question in a totally different way:

Essay No 3:

"To what extent was the collapse of collective security the main cause of the tensions that led to the outbreak of conflict in Europe?"

The collapse of collective security had little to do with the rise in tensions that led to the outbreak of conflict in Europe. The collapse of collective security and the failure of the League of Nations were the result of these tensions; their failure was not the cause of them. The tensions were the result of the bitterness caused by the 1919 settlement, the growth of aggressive nationalism, the depression and the personalities of Hitler and Mussolini.

NB: Be careful here – make sure you do not end up arguing your own question. The focus of the question is collective security. Just because the argument is going to suggest the collapse of collective security is not the cause, that does not mean you can ignore it. The beginning of the essay will be very similar to the previous response.

- Give some background of the League and how it operated – do not get carried away with a lengthy narrative of its progress before 1935. Explain the idea of collective security.
 - Refer to the various League Articles behind collective security:
 - Article 10 – the collective security article
 - Article 12 – the arbitration article
 - Article 16 – the sanctions article
- The tensions that existed in Europe after 1919 and which grew in intensity in the 1930s meant that collective security and hopes in the League were doomed. Make the point that it was not so much the failure of collective security that caused the tensions but rather the tensions that caused the collapse of collective security. You might refer to:
 - German bitterness over 1919 – Germany would always endeavour to revise Versailles once it had the chance (maybe Taylor can be used here).
 - Democracy gradually disappeared in Europe to be replaced by aggressive nationalist regimes (give examples). The prevalence of such regimes is not conducive to selfless internationalism.

- The impact of the depression fuelled nationalism. Nations had to look after themselves – this could lead to:
 - Aggressive adventures along the lines of Japan (Manchuria) and Italy (Abyssinia)
 - Or a reluctance of nations to respond to such aggression (see the Lytton Commission, the half-hearted sanctions over Abyssinia).
- Mussolini and Hitler were not men who would take the idea of collective security seriously.
 - Both sought to revise the Versailles settlement unconcerned by the international reaction (give examples)
 - Both believed in aggressive, militaristic nationalism not peaceful conciliation
 - Provide evidence: Italy (Corfu, Abyssinia), Hitler: (Austria, Czechoslovakia).

Collective security was a worthy principle and the League of Nations was a noble experiment. However, neither could survive in the environment of the inter-war world and the determination of men like Hitler. Doomed to failure, the principle of collective security was unable to limit the tensions of the time which ultimately led to war in 1939.

Possible HSC questions on “causes of the conflict”

- a) How significant was the policy of appeasement in bringing about the Second War World?
- b) Assess the role of Germany and Italy in the lead up to war in 1939.
- c) Explain the significance of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact.
- d) Evaluate the importance of Abyssinia and the Spanish Civil War in causing a growth in European tensions before 1939.
- e) Account for the outbreak of war in Europe in September 1939.
- f) To what extent were Britain and France responsible for the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939?
- g) To what extent did the dictatorships in Germany and Italy ensure the collapse of collective security in Europe before 1939?
- h) “Simply blaming Germany for the outbreak of war in 1939 ignores the complexity of the pre-war situation in Europe”.
To what extent is this a fair analysis of the reasons for the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939?

Chapter Seven: German Advances: the fall of Poland, the Low countries and France

Blitzkrieg

Hitler was not planning for a long, drawn-out war. Rather, victory would come with short, sharp attacks. At the beginning of the war, Germany's military victories were quite awe inspiring. The tactic employed by the Germans was referred to as "Blitzkrieg" – or lightning war. Blitzkrieg involved the following:

- The target would be chosen and then offensive weapons, eg tanks, planes and artillery, were concentrated on a narrow area. The aim was to drive a wedge through enemy defences.
- Once this was done, armoured tank divisions would then be able to move into enemy territory and roam around behind enemy lines wreaking havoc and causing panic.
- Air power would be used in a concentrated manner to prevent the enemy from reorganising, resupplying and getting reinforcements to the front.
- Mechanised infantry units would then encircle enemy troops and force a quick surrender. The slower infantry units would be used for "mopping up".

All military encounters are unique. However, this was the essence of blitzkrieg, and with variations depending on geography, this was how Germany managed to win a series of rapid, spectacular victories in 1939 and 1940.

The Fall of Poland: September/ October 1939

The German invasion of Poland began at dawn on 1 September 1939. Britain and France honoured their guarantee to Poland, declaring war on Germany on 3 September.

The Polish forces were no match for the invading Wehrmacht (German army). The Poles had about 370 000 troops, about 900 tanks – of which a third were obsolete - and an air force of less than 400 planes. They were simply no match for an invading German force of almost 1.25 million men, backed by about 2400 tanks, over 2000 planes and almost 10 000 artillery field guns. The Polish troops fought bravely but against the brilliant coordination and mass formations of the German forces, they never had a chance.

- German forces were under the overall command of General von Brauchitsch. General Kuchler led forces from East Prussia while General von Runstedt's forces attacked across the south of Poland.
- The Luftwaffe had destroyed most of the Polish air force within a few days and then was able to work closely with ground forces which had moved deep into the country.
- One by one Polish armies were attacked and surrounded in blitzkrieg style.
- On 8 September German forces became embroiled in a six-day battle near the River Bzura. Exhausted, Polish forces fell back on Warsaw which the Germans then besieged.

- The Poles were hoping for a final stand in the south east of the country and an allied offensive in the west. Any chance of continuing their resistance ended on 17 September when Soviet troops invaded from the east.
 - The Soviet advance met minor resistance as many Poles thought the Russians were coming to help the Polish army. The Russians lost 737 soldiers.
- On 28 September the capital, Warsaw, fell.
- By 5 October all Polish resistance had ended.

Germany had won a dramatic and rapid victory. Stalin's decision to intervene in Poland on 17 September had been prompted by the rapidity of the German success.

German and Polish losses were as follows:

- German losses comprised:
 - 10 500 killed, 30 000 wounded and 3400 missing in action.
- Polish losses comprised:
 - 66 000 dead, over 200 000 wounded
 - Almost 700 000 Poles became German prisoners; 217 000 became Soviet prisoners.

On 28 September German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop flew to Moscow to finalise details of the joint Nazi-Soviet carve up of Poland which had been agreed in the Pact of 23 August. Lithuania was given to Russia while Germany consolidated its hold in western Poland. The western area of Poland (Wartheland and Danzig-West Prussia) became part of Germany while the central area became known as the General Government. It was placed under the brutal administration of Hans Frank. The consequences for Poland were to be ominous. In the two years the Soviets ruled Poland, a fifth of the population was arrested; during their five-year rule in Poland, the Germans managed to kill a fifth of the population. ¹

On 30 November, Soviet forces attacked Finland as Stalin was endeavouring to consolidate his control over the Baltic Sea. Stalin was fighting in support of a pro-Soviet government established under Otto Kuusinen. The Finns fought back gallantly, led by Marshal Karl von Mannerheim. This was not going to be the easy victory Stalin expected. By the end of the year Soviet forces have become bogged down. This 'winter war', as it became known, finally ended in March 1940.

- Soviet losses: 200 000; Finnish losses: 25 000.
- Finland kept its independence but had to surrender 10% of its territory.

The poor performance of the Soviet Red Army was noted, most particularly in Berlin.

The Fall of Denmark and Norway: April 1940

Following the fall of Poland, the war entered a strange, quiet period. Europe was still formally at war but virtually no fighting was taking place. The Americans called this period from October 1939 to April 1940 'the phoney war'; the Germans used the phrase 'sitzkrieg' – sitting war. That is not to say there was nothing happening in these six months:

- Minor skirmishes did occur along the Maginot Line between French and German troops.

¹ Nazi policies in the occupied territories and Nazi treatment of the Jews and other minorities will be covered more fully in Chapter 14.

- The Finnish-Soviet war continued.
- The SS was busy reorganising Poland.
- Significant naval actions took place. German U-boats took a toll of British shipping, sinking the aircraft carrier 'Courageous' while in the South Atlantic the British Navy forced the scuttling the German battleship 'Graf Spee'.

The phoney war came to an abrupt end in April when German forces invaded Denmark and Norway.

Britain had been considering plans to cut off Swedish iron ore supplies to Germany. This would have a major impact on German war production. Swedish iron ore reached Germany via the Norwegian port of Narvik. After considerable discussion and uncertainty, the British finally decided to take action in Norway and began mine laying operations, hoping to disrupt German shipping.

- On 9 April Hitler launched Operation Weserübung, a direct attack on Denmark and Norway.
- Denmark's King Christian X surrendered the next day.
- Allied troops had footholds in central Norway and pounded German positions in Narvik. With the collapse of France (see below), allied troops were withdrawn. Britain lost the aircraft carrier 'Glorious' in the Norway campaign.
- Norway surrendered on 10 June. It would remain part of the Nazi empire for the duration of the war, under the nominal rule of Vidkun Quisling.

The Fall of the Low Countries and France: May/ June 1940

On 10 May German forces attacked the Low Countries – Belgium and the Netherlands – as part of Operation Fall Gelb.

- The Dutch army numbered 400 000, but in reality was much less. As with Denmark the previous month, the Germans quickly cut through the Netherlands. Rotterdam was bombed almost to nothing on 14 May and within days the Netherlands surrendered.
- On 10 May, the Luftwaffe bombed Belgian airfields. The Belgian fort of Eben Emael which was positioned at the northern defence line against the Germans, was captured by 'glider troops'.
- The Belgian army surrendered in late May, two weeks after France had been overrun.

British and French commanders believed that any German attack of France would take a similar form to the Schlieffen Plan of 1914. They expected a massive German advance across Belgium which would sweep through towards the Channel coast and Paris, as had been attempted in 1914. It was believed no rapid German mechanised advance could penetrate the heavily forested Ardennes region of southern Belgium and Luxembourg, and it was further believed that the Maginot Line on France's common border with Germany was too strong to be breached.

All assumptions made by allied commanders proved to be incorrect. Hitler's blitzkrieg tactics and his generals' skill completely routed their allied opponents.

- General von Bock advanced through Belgium with a massive force. Allied commanders could see a repeat of 1914 and Generals Gamelin and Gort ordered half their forces to deal with this threat.

- Von Bock's move was a diversion. On 11 May, General von Leeb started attacks along the Maginot Line which tied down Anglo-French forces there.

In the centre between von Bock's and von Leeb's forces, in the Ardennes and Luxembourg region, General von Rundstedt had been preparing a massive force to cut through into France. He had 46 divisions, masses of tanks, artillery and aircraft and even hundreds of bulldozers to cut a way through. What followed was an eleven-day campaign which is sometimes referred to as the 'Battle for France'.

- Von Runstedt's thrust into France was so dramatic and so decisive that he called his plan the *sichelschnitt* (sickle cut).
- Allied forces to the north in Belgium and to the south around the Maginot Line were now completely separated.
- The German advance was so rapid that forward German units were in danger of being cut off themselves and running out of fuel. German panzer (tank) units now pushed deeper into France and towards the Channel coast.
 - On 20 May German forces reached the coast at Abbeville.
 - The port of Boulogne was taken on 27 May and Calais was surrounded.
- On 24 May Hitler had ordered his forces to halt in order to consolidate their positions.

Dunkirk

At this point British forces were ordered back towards Dunkirk. Hitler had over 300 000 allied troops at his mercy. Prime Minister Churchill ² gave the order for Operation Dynamo – the evacuation of all allied troops to England. The evacuation of Dunkirk is arguably the greatest naval rescue exercise of its kind in history. Some 850 vessels of all kinds, ranging from British navy warships to small personally owned fishing boats, were used to bring out of France almost 340 000 allied troops, including 139 067 French and Belgian soldiers, and civilians.

Much was made of this evacuation. It was an amazing feat. Hundreds of thousands had been saved and the British for generations to come would boast about "the Dunkirk spirit". However, in every other way, the events of May had been a total catastrophe.

- Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg had been lost to the Germans; France was about to fall.
- Remarkable though the evacuation was, it was largely only possible because Hitler inexplicably (and much to Goering's annoyance) decided not to destroy the allied troops as they were evacuated. His view was that the war with Britain was over and peace terms would soon be discussed.
- On 27 May Calais was captured; Cherbourg on 31 May, Dunkirk on 4 June.
- The losses had been considerable:
 - The BEF ³ had suffered over 68 000 men killed, wounded or taken prisoner.

² The blame for the fiasco of the Norway operation fell on Chamberlain's shoulders. He was forced to resign. On 10 May Winston Churchill became Prime Minister. Chapter 8 will deal with this more fully.

³ British Expeditionary Force

- Left in France were: 2472 guns, 90 000 rifles, 63 879 vehicles, 20 548 motorcycles, and 500 000 tons of stores.
- Over 100 aircraft were lost during the evacuation as were six British warships and dozens of smaller private vessels.

The Fall of France

The Germans resumed their attacks against the French on 5 June targeting Paris and areas to the east of the capital.

- Von Bock's and Rundstedt's forces were soon surrounding Paris; French commander, General Weygrand ordered his troops back to the river Seine.
- By 9 June, the French army was in headlong retreat.
- On 10 June, Mussolini declared war on France. Though greatly outnumbering the French, Italian forces struggled to make any headway through France.
- On 13 June, Paris was declared an open city;
- The Germans entered Paris on 14 June.
- German forces now fanned out west, south and east, encircling the final remnants of the French army behind the Maginot Line.

Prime Minister Reynaud wanted to fight on, and had been begging Churchill for more air cover. General Weygrand said the struggle was useless and insisted on an armistice. Reynaud resigned on 16 June and was replaced by the aging Marshal Petain. Petain was eager to sign an armistice. An armistice with Germany was signed on 22 June and with Italy on 24 June; France's war was officially over on 25 June.⁴ France was forced to sign the armistice with Germany in the same railway carriage in which the Germans had been forced to sign the armistice in November 1918. This was Hitler's decision. The railway carriage was then destroyed. The terms of the armistice included:

- France was divided into two zones. The Germans occupied the north and the western seaboard.
- The rest of France was to be administered by a French regime based at Vichy.
 - This regime would collaborate loyally with the Germans throughout the war.
 - France's colonial empire recognised the authority of the Vichy government.
 - The Vichy regime was hated by most Frenchmen who saw its supporters as traitors. Many French people resisted both the Nazis and Vichy in the underground Free French Resistance movement.

One final issue remained unresolved – what to do about the French navy. Britain was concerned that it would fall into the hands of the Germans, though the armistice agreement stated this would not happen. French ships in British ports were easily disarmed as were those at Alexandria in Egypt. However, a major French naval force was free of British control at Oran in North Africa. On 3 July, Admiral Somerville delivered the French naval commander an ultimatum – all French vessels must sail to British ports or 'new world ports' or scuttle

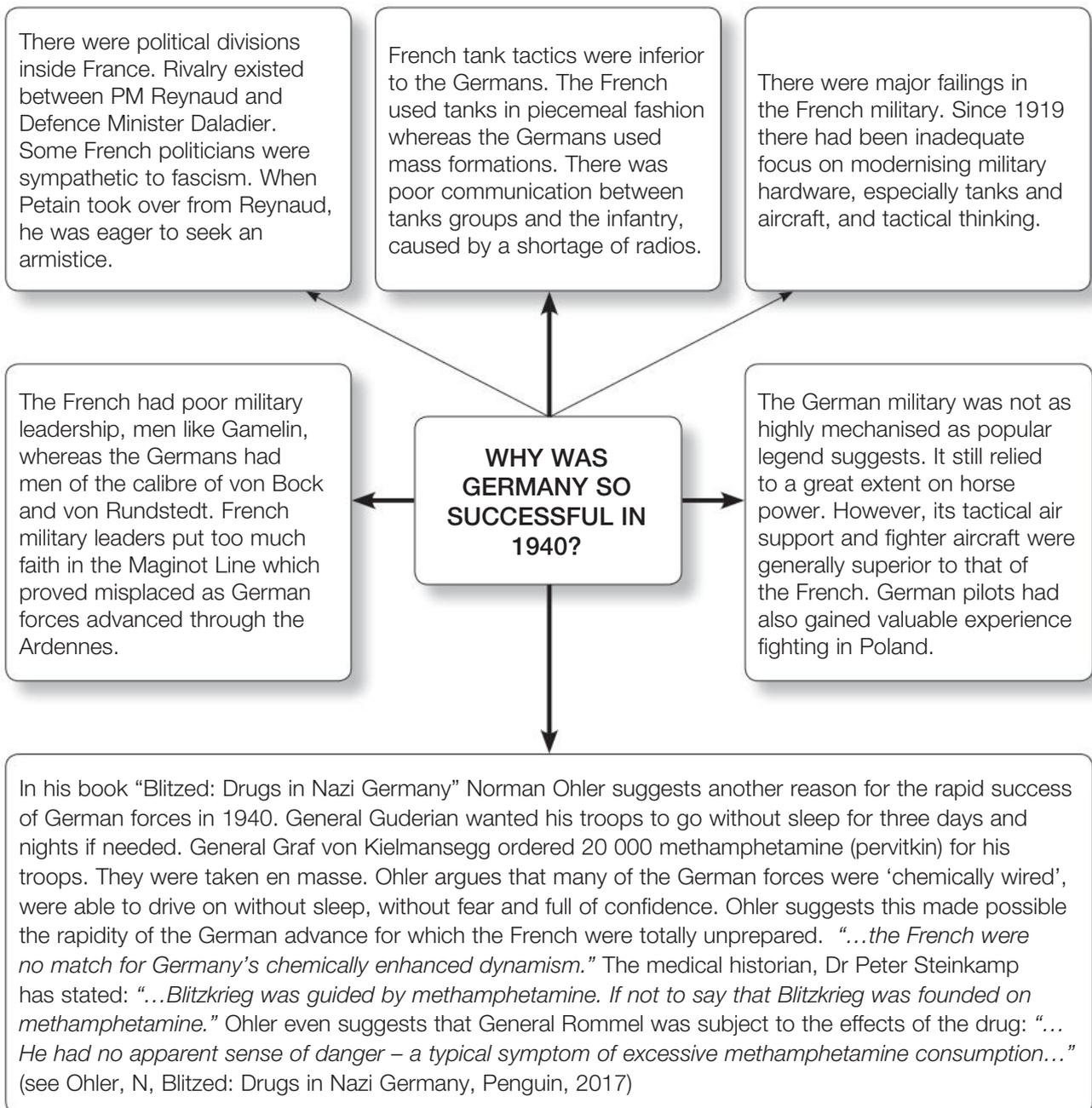
⁴ On 18 June General Charles de Gaulle flew to London and broadcast an appeal to Frenchmen who wanted to fight on to contact him. This was the origin of the Free French Movement.

themselves. The French commander refused. Somerville responded by attacking the French fleet. Over 1300 French sailors were killed and much of the fleet was crippled. French anger over the action was predictably great.

In Britain (and the US), this act of British defiance was roundly supported. Churchill makes this point in his History of the war:

*“...Here was this Britain which so many had counted down and out...striking ruthlessly at her dearest friends of yesterday ... It was made plain that the British War Cabinet feared nothing and would stop at nothing. This was true.”*⁵

Figure 7.1 Reasons for Germany’s success in 1940



⁵ Churchill, W, The Second World War, 4Vol 2, Cassell, London, 1949, p211

Exercise 7.1

Place the events listed in the box below, in the correct chronological order.

Runstedt's advance through the Ardennes	The surrender of the Netherlands
British withdrawal from Norway	Start of Operation Weserubung
Surrender of Denmark	Invasion of the Low Countries
Establishment of the Vichy Regime	The Fall of Paris
The surrender of France	Sinking of the French fleet at Oran

1st event	
2nd event	
3rd event	
4th event	
5th event	
6th event	
7th event	
8th event	
9th event	
10th event	

Exercise 7.2

Match the terms in the box below, with the descriptions provided:

Term describing the rapid and concentrated style of German warfare	1	
The set of highly fortified French defences along the German frontier	2	
The Soviet Union's brief conflict with Finland	3	
The period of apparent quiet between October 1939 and April 1940	4	

The evacuation of allied forces from Dunkirk in May/ June 1940	5	
General Runstedt's dramatic advance through the Ardennes	6	
The term used to describe the French government in non-occupied France	7	
Morale boosting feeling present in Britain from 1940	8	
The opposition forces in France after the surrender of France	9	

The Vichy regime	Operation Dynamo	The Winter War
Blitzkrieg	The Phoney War	The sickle cut
The Free French Movement	The Dunkirk Spirit	The Maginot Line

What do the historians have to say about “German advances”?

1. AJP Taylor: *The Second World War – An Illustrated History*

Taylor makes the point that Hitler had over-extended himself in Poland; Germany had used up to 75 % of its supplies. If France had launched an offensive in the west, Hitler would have been in grave danger as he would have had very little with which to resist it. Indeed, the war might have ended there.

*“...Here was a clear indication, unknown of course in the west, that Hitler, far from preparing for a great war, operated on a narrow margin and counted on quick victories achieved at little cost.”*⁶

2. BH Liddell Hart: *History of the Second World War*

Liddell Hart makes the point that Poland was extremely suitable for the blitzkrieg style of warfare, though not as good as northern France due to Poland's shortage of good roads. Since Czechoslovakia had been annexed in March 1939, Poland was surrounded on all sides by German territory. The Poles' decision to face the Germans in the more open western part of their country was to make German blitzkrieg tactics even more effective. The invasion of Poland provided:

*“...demonstration and proof, in war of the theory of mobile warfare by armoured and air forces in combination...Poland was all too well suited for a demonstration of Blitzkrieg... The Polish plain offered flat and fairly easy going for a mobile invader...”*⁷

⁶ Taylor, AJP, *The Second World War – An Illustrated History*, Penguin, London, 1975, p39

⁷ Liddell Hart, BH, *History of the Second World War*, Cassell, Trowbridge, 1973, p27

3. Winston Churchill: *The Second World War, Volume 1*

Churchill noted as early 1 October that tragic though events had been for Poland, there was a glimpse of light. Hitler now had his second front as German and Soviet troops faced each other across their demarcation line in Poland. The Soviet Union always acted in its national self-interest and surely, Churchill argued, it cannot be in the Soviet Union's interest to have Nazi Germany overrunning south east Europe.

*"...I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia. It is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma...(but it) cannot be in accordance with the interest... of Russia that Germany should plant herself upon the shores of the Black Sea..."*⁸

4. Major General RH Barry: *Western Europe May 1940*

Barry explains how the allied strategy in France and the Low Countries was essentially defensive. Their forces were distributed evenly all along the front and relied upon fortifications and the weight of military hardware. He labels the allied command as slow and unimaginative in thought. The German plan, on the other hand, was bold and risky. However, if Rundstedt's central thrust had failed, or if the allies had reacted more quickly, Hitler would have been in deep trouble. In the campaign in the west, Germany was playing the role of a high stakes gambler.

*"...The Germans staked everything on the success of the methods which had brought them victory in Poland – a concentrated blow at a single point followed by deep, highly mobile exploitation by massed armour with close air support..."*⁹

5. Colonel A Goutard: *The War of Missed Opportunities*

Goutard is scathing of his military leaders' conduct during the events leading to the fall of France. He attacks French military leaders for clinging to outmoded tactics and of being incapable of adapting to the innovative tactics of the enemy. Worse than that, he suggests that such was the overall malaise in the French leadership, that as soon as new tactics and unexpected enemy moves were experienced, the French army leaders resigned themselves to defeat, declaring it was fate. Yet, Goutard argues, the Germans were not overwhelmingly powerful. Petain liked to suggest that France lost because of the nation's moral laxness and pleasure-seeking. Goutard's response is:

*"...it was not the nation's pleasure-seeking which forced the command to cling to a doctrine which was out of date, to work out an erroneous plan of campaign, to adopt faulty general dispositions, and finally to allow itself to be constantly outmanoeuvred by the enemy without attempting the least counter-stroke. And all this at a time when the chance of victory was actually there..."*¹⁰

3 Churchill, W, *The Second World War, Volume 1*, Cassell, London, 1948, P403

4 Barry, RH, *Western Europe May 1940*, in Purnell's *History of the Second World War, Vol 1*, London, 1966, p177

5 Goutard, A, *The War of Missed Opportunities*, in *The Fall of France 1940: Causes and Responsibilities*, ed Osgood, SM, Heath and Company, Boston, 1965, p30-1

Notes

Chapter Eight:

The Air War and its effects

The Battle of Britain

As France went through the process of suing for peace, Britain's Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, spoke to parliament on 18 June 1940 about what the future held for the country.

"What General Weygrand called the Battle of France is over. I expect the Battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilisation. Upon it depends our own British life, and the long continuity of our institutions and our empire." ¹

Churchill rightly expected a Nazi onslaught. However, historians still debate Hitler's intention to invade Britain in 1940. He certainly would have preferred not to have to fight Britain. The British were Aryans, his goal was expansion in the east and so Britain's continued opposition was a major irritant.

- After Dunkirk and the Fall of France, Hitler assumed that logic would dictate that Britain would reach an agreement with him.
- He offered terms he thought Britain could not resist.

Churchill was totally opposed to making peace with Hitler. On 13 May, he had earlier announced:

"...You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: Victory – victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror; victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory there is no survival." ²

In late May, Churchill had to overcome the desire of Chamberlain and Halifax to do a deal with Hitler. With the support of the Labour members of the War Cabinet, Attlee and Greenwood, this was achieved.

Britain's refusal to 'see sense' forced Hitler to attack. Plans were drawn up for the invasion of Britain – Operation Sea Lion. However, no invasion would be possible without German control of the sea and air. Goering convinced Hitler that his Luftwaffe could do the job. The Battle of



German Messerschmitt Bf 109

Britain would rage throughout the summer of 1940 as the German air force sought to overcome the RAF and gain control of the skies over the Channel and South East England.

- The RAF had lost close to 1000 aircraft in France, 477 of them fighters.
- Air Marshal Dowding's Fighter Command had 650 fighters in 52 squadrons.
- Goering had 2800 aircraft, 900 fighters and 300 bombers.

¹ Churchill, W, The Second World War, Vol2, Cassell, London, 1949, p198

² Churchill, W, The Second World War, Vol2, Cassell, London, 1949, p24

Historians have allocated various specific dates to the Battle of Britain, but in essence these were the main events:

- In early July German fighters engaged in probing raids on coastal targets and shipping in the Channel.
- The first major raid on southern England occurred on 10 July.
- Between 8-18 August, attacks concentrated on airfields used by RAF front line groups.
- Goering nominated 15 August as Eagle Day and launched 1790 sorties against targets along the east and south coasts of England.
- On 24 August inland sector stations were attacked.
- By late August, Fighter Command was running out of aircraft and pilots.
- On the evening of 25/26 August, RAF bombers launched a minor attack on Berlin. Hitler was furious. He ordered that the Luftwaffe switch its attack from airfields and control centres to London itself.

Germany failed to gain air superiority.

- During August and September, the Luftwaffe suffered the loss of 1244 planes and crews; the RAF had lost 688.
- On 15 September alone Goering lost 56 planes;
- on 17 September Hitler called off Operation Sea Lion indefinitely.



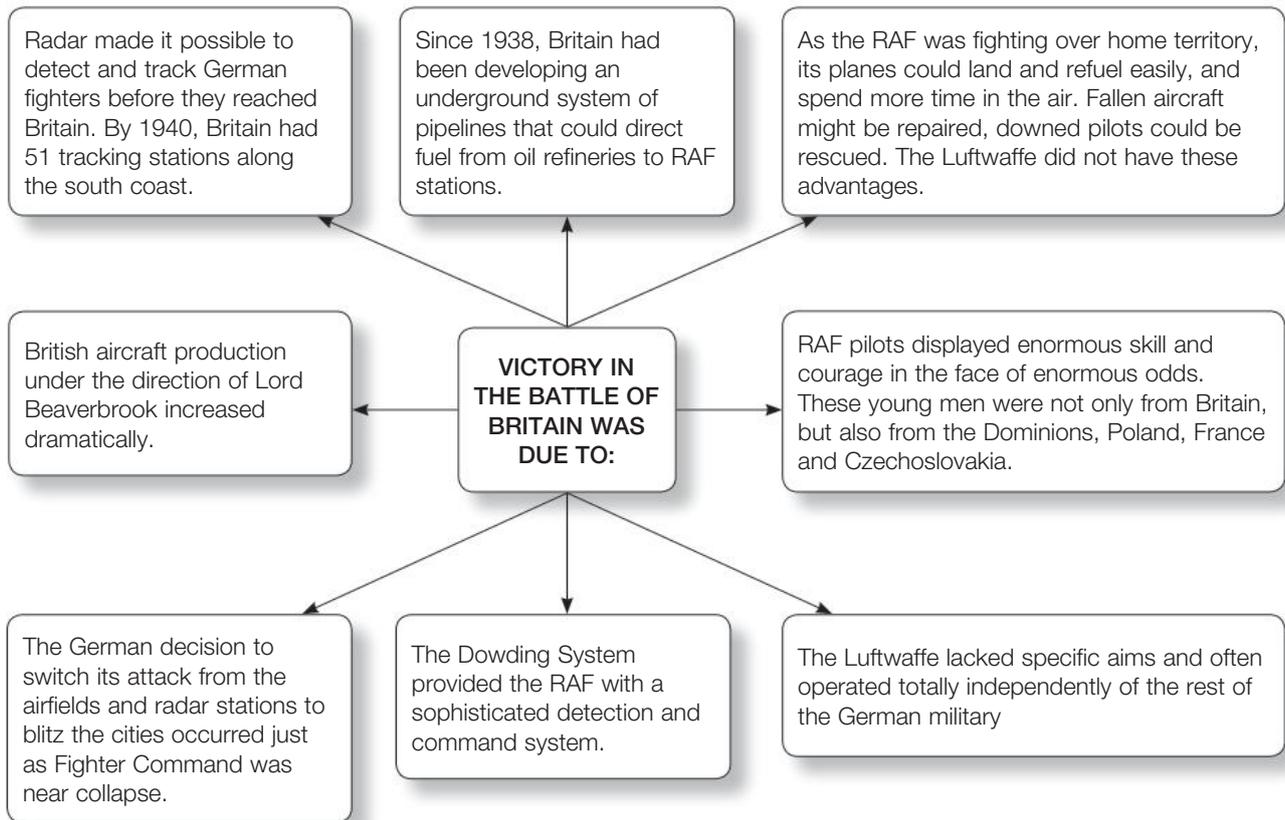
RAF Hawker Hurricane



Spitfire Supermarine

Several factors combined to explain the British success in the Battle of Britain as Figure 8.1 shows.

Figure 8.1 Reasons for Britain's victory in the Battle of Britain



The Battle of Britain was a key turning point in the war! It did not mean that Hitler would lose the war. In fact, a kind of stalemate now ensued: Hitler had failed to defeat Britain, but Churchill was not strong enough to attack Germany. However, the survival of Britain had major implications for the future course of the war. Had Britain surrendered or been defeated in 1940:

- Hitler would not have had to face a two (and later three) front war.
- His invasion of Russia would have had a much greater chance of success (and it should be remembered success was tantalisingly close – see Chapter 9).
- Italian and German forces would have taken North Africa and gained control of Middle East oil supplies and the Suez Canal.
- The USA would not have been able to base itself in Britain. There could have been no invasion of Normandy and there would have been no constant bombing of Germany by British and American forces.

It is perhaps not exaggerating to say that a German victory in 1940 would have spelled a German victory in World War II. Churchill understood this:

*"...At the summit the stamina and valour of our fighter pilots remained unconquerable and supreme. Thus, Britain was saved. Well might I say in the House of Commons: 'Never in the field of human conflict, was so much owed by so many to so few'."*³

There was also an important political result to victory in the Battle of Britain. From our standpoint today, Churchill is seen as the great hero of 1940. However, his own Conservative

³ Churchill, W, *The Second World War*, Vol2, Cassell, London, 1949, p300

Party would have removed him from power if it could; Chamberlain still had many followers. As stated earlier, Chamberlain and Halifax favoured coming to terms with Hitler. Had the RAF failed in the Battle of Britain, Churchill's career would almost certainly have ended. Thus, victory in the summer of 1940 saved not only Britain, but Churchill himself and he was to be able to fight another day.

The Blitz

On 15 September, Germany launched a massive daylight bombing raid on London. Daylight attacks lasted until 30 September. After this date, German bombers switched tactics attacking at night. The Blitz was in full swing.

The Luftwaffe's attention was now on Britain's towns and cities and its centres of production. In 1940, London was the main target and between 7 September and 13 November was bombed almost every night. On 14 November the city of Coventry was hit. German attacks were now aimed at not only the symbolic target of London, but across a wide range of industrial and communications centres across Britain.

The main force of the Blitz occurred between September 1940 and May 1941. By May, Hitler's attention was fully focused on his plans for Russia and he needed his air force in the east, though Britain would continue to be bombed intermittently throughout the war.

- As well as London, German bombers attacked Liverpool, Birmingham, Plymouth, Bristol and other industrial centres and ports.
- In the nine months of the blitz, the Luftwaffe had dropped about 55 000 tons of bombs on Britain.
- Over 40 000 civilians died, 86 000 were seriously injured and 150 000 slightly injured.
- Over two million houses were destroyed or damaged; 60% in London.

Despite the loss of life and the damage done, there were some positive aspects to the Blitz campaign for Britain. Industrial production had not been drastically hurt, industry was able to recover and Britain's ports were still able to function. Indeed, there were some significant non-material advantages.

- The worse the bombing got, the more British resolve hardened. From Churchill down to the East Enders of London who suffered most, there was a resolve to fight on. Londoners like to boast: "We can take it."
- Buckingham Palace was hit during the Blitz. Queen Elizabeth commented that she could now 'look the East Enders in the eye'. Churchill's visits to bombed areas were well received.
- The worst night of bombing for London was 29 December 1940. Much of London was in flames that night but one building to survive was St Paul's Cathedral. The immortal photograph of St Paul's standing amidst the smoke and flames became a symbol of Britain's will to resist.
- Perhaps of even longer-term significance, was the reporting of American journalist Edward Murrow. Murrow's radio broadcasts during the Blitz did much to gradually create sympathy and admiration in the US for Britain. In 1940, the US was strongly isolationist and keen to avoid being dragged into the European war.

Exercise 8.1

Read each of the following statements. Circle either the words THIS IS TRUE or THIS IS FALSE as it applies to the statement.

1. Hitler was eager to invade Britain and take on the British army on its own territory.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
2. Historians are divided about Hitler's real intention about invading Britain.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
3. The Luftwaffe's early attacks during the Battle of Britain were aimed at radar stations and airfields.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
4. Radar gave Britain, at best, only a marginal advantage in the Battle of Britain.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
5. Germany's decision to switch to bombing British cities was a major error in strategy.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
6. The Blitz did much to break the morale of the British civilian population.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
7. German air attacks had a major long-term effect on Britain's ability to wage war.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
8. The worst of the Blitz was over by the middle of 1941.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
9. Britain's survival through the Battle of Britain and the Blitz made certain of Hitler's defeat in the war.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
10. Hitler scaled down the Blitz because he was contemplating the invasion of Russia.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE

The Bombing of Germany

The architect of the allied bombing campaign over Germany was "Bomber" Harris. Air Marshal Arthur 'Bert' Harris was appointed Commander-in-Chief of Bomber Command in February 1942. Harris put great faith in bombing, arguing that the surest way to defeat an enemy was to destroy its war potential. Harris was later greatly criticised for his strategy of 'area bombing', attacking entire cities rather than specific targets. Memory of him lasted. When a statue of "Bomber" Harris was unveiled in London in 1992, it had been defaced with red paint within twenty-four hours.

Early attempts at using bombing as a tactic were mixed at best:

- On 15/16 May 1940, a 96 strong force of British two engine bombers attacked the Ruhr industrial area. Only a quarter of crews claimed to have actually found the target area!
- Night bombing in 1940 was inaccurate and ineffective. However, attacks on German cities so angered Hitler he ordered the switch to the Blitz which was a key factor that helped Britain win the Battle of Britain.
- In 1941, reports of the ineffectiveness of Bomber Command were very alarming. In that year 1034 bomber aircraft were lost but German anti-aircraft guns accounted for only a third of these losses. Night flying and poor navigation equipment accounted for most of the losses.

*“By the end of the year losses were running at such a rate that Bomber Command was facing difficulty in replacing aircraft...By the last months of 1941 the bombing offensive was petering out.”*⁴

Once Harris took over, things began to change. Harris was firmly convinced of the efficacy of bombing and earlier mistakes had done nothing to dampen his zeal. He realised that it was concentration of force that would work.

Throughout 1942 and 1943, several developments occurred to assist Harris:

- Aircraft production was in full swing. By the end of 1942, Harris had over 1000 bombers at his disposal, including 178 of the new four-engine Lancasters. These planes were able to fly a greater distance and could carry a much greater bombload.
- There were improvements in navigation equipment.
- At the end of May 1942, Harris sent the first 1000 bomber raid to attack Cologne when over 1500 tons of bombs were dropped.
- He improved flying techniques, including adding bomb-aimers to crews and pioneered the ‘pathfinder’ crews who led bombing groups to targets.
- From August 1942, the American Air Force had joined the RAF. American involvement widened the bombing options – the B17 Flying Fortresses flew in daylight – and greatly increased allied power in the bombing campaign.
- A multitude of technological improvements occurred. This is not the place to become bogged down with technological minutiae, but one example will suffice to illustrate how effective these changes could be.
 - Bomber Command developed a device known as ‘window’.
 - Hundreds of strips of aluminium foil would be dropped and on German radar this simulated a Lancaster bomber.
 - When thousands of these were dropped, German radar became ineffective.

In January 1943, Churchill met US President Roosevelt at Casablanca. Here it was decided to give the bombing campaign priority and to seek *“the progressive destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial and economic system, and the undermining of the morale of the German people to a point where their capacity for armed resistance is fatally weakened.”*⁵

Over a five-day period in late July, Hamburg was pulverised by a massive concentrated attack.

- The city turned into a fireball as the fires caused by incendiary bombs merged together.
- 40 000 people died and one million people became homeless.

However, the ‘success’ of the attack on Hamburg did not mean that Bomber Command had gained control of the air over Germany. By the end of 1943, German air defence tactics had turned the tables on the allies. Bombing raids were now suffering massive losses as seen at Schweinfurt when out of a US force of 220 bombers, 198 were destroyed or damaged.

⁴ Overy, R, *Why the Allies Won*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1995, p112

⁵ Details of the directive in ‘The Combined Bomber Offensive from the UK as approved by the Combined Chiefs of Staff’, 14 May 1943 (from Overy, R, *Why the Allies Won*, Jonathon Cape, London, 1995, p116)

It took more innovation to put the balance back in favour of the allies. A system of disposable fuel tanks was developed to give fighters greater range and allow them to accompany bombers on longer missions.

“...The long-range escort fighter transformed the air war overnight.”⁶

In early 1944, German fighter losses were enormous and it was proving hard to replace them. Front-line fighter aircraft had to be withdrawn from the battle fronts to protect Germany itself. This weakened the German military position on the Eastern Front against Russia, and later in France against the allied invasion. When the allies invaded France in June 1944, they had 12 000 aircraft; Germany had 300. Towards the end of the war, Germany’s only aerial response came with the development of the V1 and V2 rockets. Many of these were fired into Britain, causing great alarm but they had no bearing on the outcome of the war.

By the middle of 1944, Overy suggests that the defeat of the German air force had become an accomplished fact. Allied bombers were now free to wreak their havoc on German cities.

- In the last year of the war, allied planes dropped 1.18 million tons of bombs on Germany.
- The bombing of Dresden in February 1945 illustrates how defenceless German cities had become.
- Bombing gradually destroyed Germany’s economic base. Oil supplies were reduced, chemical production cut, the railway system severely weakened. German industry relied on stockpiles and desperate underground production employing slave labour. (see Chapter 12 for greater detail)

Many came to question the morality of allied bombing years after the war. However, there is no denying its effectiveness on weakening Germany’s ability to wage war.



*Avro Lancaster Major Heavy Bomber.
7377 were built during the war.*



*B24 Liberator
The US built 18481 of these aircraft
between 1940 and 1945*

Bomber command crews faced great danger. The death rate of the young crews was over 45% - roughly 55 000 killed out of 125 000 crew.

⁶ Overy, R, Why the Allies Won, Jonathan Cape, London, 1995, p123

Exercise 7.2

Using the answers provided in the box below, complete the following passage.

At the beginning of the war, the allied bombing of Germany was _____. This was due to poor _____ equipment and difficulties in _____-flying. In February 1942, _____ took control of Bomber Command. The effectiveness of Bomber Command increased with the introduction of the _____ bomber, new technology and the addition of American _____. In July 1943, the city of _____ was almost totally destroyed by allied bombers. However, German air defence improved and by late _____ Bomber Command faced major losses. However, the development of long-range _____ aircraft switched the balance back in favour of the allies. By the beginning of 1945, Germany was defenceless against allied bombing, seen clearly when _____ was attacked in February 1945.

Harris	1943	fighter-escort	Dresden
Lancaster	ineffective	navigation	Hamburg
night	Flying Fortresses		

What do the historians have to say about “The Air War and its Effects”?

1. Denis Richards: *Battle of Britain*

Richards makes the point that victory in the Battle of Britain did not mean the end was in sight. He comments that had Hitler succeeded in Russia, Britain would have almost certainly faced another German onslaught. However, the Battle of Britain was a major turning point. The fighter pilots and the presence of the navy in the Channel had halted Hitler’s path of conquest and in so doing had saved more than Britain by their efforts.

*“...By earning Britain a great breathing space in which the further progress of events was to bring her the mighty alliance of Russia and the United States, they made possible the final victory and the liberation of Europe from the Nazi terror.”*⁷

2. AJP Taylor: *The Second World War*

Taylor explains that a major factor in the British victory in the Battle of Britain was due to the lack of clarity in German strategic aims as compared to Dowding’s certainty of purpose. Goering could not decide whether the target should be British fighters or

⁷ Richards, D, *Battle of Britain*, in Purnell’s *History of the Second World War*, Vol 1, London, 1966, p318

whether he should continue with bombing regardless of fighter attacks. Dowding on the other hand was in no doubt.

*“... (Dowding’s) sole aim was to cripple the German bomber force. Dowding husbanded his fighters with the utmost economy ... In direct fighter comparison, the British lost more than the Germans. This was eclipsed by the enormous losses in German bombers.”*⁸

3. Richard Overy: *The Battle*

Revisionist writers in recent years have sought to minimise British achievements in World War II and the story of the Battle of Britain has not been free of this. Richard Overy does not engage in this practice, but he does offer some interesting insights. He points out that Churchill’s ‘few’ were in fact not that few and that the two sides were probably evenly matched. Britain in fact had many advantages including better organised air defences and equipment. He suggests that an invasion of Britain was never likely. However, Overy sees the Battle of Britain of key importance. The American Heritage website posted a piece in September 2006 which eloquently and dramatically sums up the inestimable importance of 1940 while discussing Overy’s book.

*“... Although Overy shies away from even the mildest rhetorical flourishes as he describes the Battle, he is perfectly aware that the stakes could not have been higher... (only) the little metal monoplanes (of the Battle of Britain)... stood between (Hitler) and a viciously racist world-empire studded with crematoria, lit by lamps shaded with human skin.”*⁹

4. Basil Liddell Hart: *History of the Second World War*

Many historians make the point that despite the Blitz, British industrial production was not seriously hampered and tonnage through the ports not badly affected. However, Liddell Hart argues that the damage inflicted and disruption caused by the Luftwaffe was greater than was admitted. Indeed, if the Luftwaffe had been allowed to persist in its campaign of attacking industrial centres, the damage could have been even greater. However, of Germany’s campaign of air attacks from July 1940 to May 1941, he concludes:

*“... it had not succeeded in its object of destroying the RAF’s fighter strength and the British people’s morale.”*¹⁰

5. Richard Overy: *Why the allies won*

Overy suggests that debate over the morality of allied bombing has turned the focus away from how successful it had been. He makes the point that it had always seemed implausible to him that a nation, whose industry was stretched and whose people were

⁸ Taylor, AJP, *The Second World War: An Illustrated History*, Penguin, 1975, p69

⁹ http://www.americanheritage.com/blog/20069_17_448.shtml

¹⁰ Liddell Hart, B, *History of the Second World War*, Cassell, Trowbridge, 1973, p108

war-weary, would not be affected by the dropping of 2.5 million tons of bombs on its territory. As Albert Speer had put it, allied bombing had turned Germany into one gigantic war front. Only the infantry was missing. Overy concludes:

*“...German forces lost half of the weapons needed at the front, millions of workers absented themselves from work, and the economy gradually creaked almost to a halt.”*¹¹

6. Richard Evans: *The Third Reich at war*

Evans makes the point that debate will continue to rage over the morality of the allied bombing of Germany. Referencing the work of Anthony C Grayling (*Among the Dead Cities: Was the Allied Bombing of German Civilians in WWII a Necessity or a Crime?*), he states that the indiscriminate nature of allied bombing was too “indiscriminate to be justifiable”. However, he does show that the impact on German morale – obviously one of the key aims of the bombing campaign – was enormous. German civilians sometimes took out their anger about the bombing on allied airmen who had been forced to bale out over German territory. On 26 August 1944, seven US airmen were beaten to death by an angry German crowd at Russelsheim. Over 350 allied airmen were lynched during the last two years of the war. Fifty eight allied airmen who escaped from a POW camp near Sagen in Lower Saxony, when recaptured were shot on the explicit order of Himmler.

*“...Asked after the war what the hardest thing had been for civilians in Germany to put up with, 91 per cent said the bombing; and more than a third said that it had lowered people’s morale, including their own. It did even more than the defeats at Stalingrad and in North Africa to spread popular disillusion about the Nazi Party.”*¹²

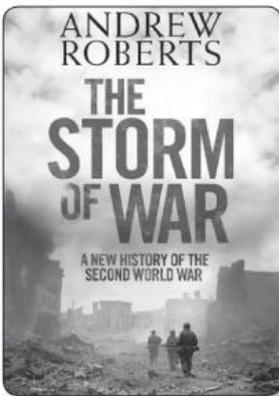
¹¹ Overy, R, *Why the Allies Won*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1995, p133

¹² Evans, R, *The Third Reich at War*, penguin, London, 2008, p 463

By 1940, Britain had in place sophisticated ground-to-air communications. RAF fighter squadrons were able to be constantly updated in “real time” about Luftwaffe positions. There were tensions between Dowding and the Air Staff in Whitehall, but as Roberts states: “*The life-or-death stakes generally surmounted the usual pleasures of departmental infighting and blame-gaming.*” (p 95)

Roberts quotes fighter pilots of the time to prove the importance of radar. Luftwaffe pilot Colonel Adolf Galland stated: “*When we made contact with the enemy our briefings were already three hours old; the British only as many seconds old.*” (p 95) The son of Lord Beaverbrook, Max Aitken believed that: “*Radar really won the Battle of Britain... We wasted no petrol, no energy, no time.*” (p 95)

Though British aircraft numbers were tight, they were never as bad as the German commanders believed they were. Colonel Schmid of Luftwaffe Intelligence advised his superiors that by mid-August 1940, the British were down to their last 450 aircraft. In fact, due to a spurt in British aircraft production, brought on by Beaverbrook’s planning, the British had 1438 aircraft. (Roberts, p 98)



Hitler’s failure in The Battle of Britain was a crucial moment during World War II. In his book ***The Storm of War***, historian Andrew Roberts explains why events turned in Britain’s favour. (Roberts, A, *The Storm of War*, Penguin, London, 2009)

The British were able to intercept almost every German bombing raid during the Battle of Britain. This was the result of radar and the aircraft-spotters of the Observer Corps. However, probably of equal importance were the advantages the British had in the area of intelligence. The code-breaking facilities at Bletchley and of Y Department in Bomber Command made possible British eavesdropping of German telegraph traffic. (p 99)

Hitler made the most fundamental strategic error during the Battle of Britain. Just when Fighter Command was on its knees, Hitler ordered Goring to send his forces against Britain’s cities, in particular London, rather than RAF air fields. This gave Fighter Command “a desperately needed breathing space in which to repair its heavily damaged bases”. (p 100)

Germany’s change in strategy came as Hitler fell for the trap set for him by Churchill. On 25, 28 and 29 August, Churchill ordered British bombers to attack Berlin. The attack was really symbolic, a reaction to a mistaken German bombing of London by a lost Heinkel He-111. The action infuriated Hitler. Having told his people Berlin would never be attacked, in a state of irrational fury, Hitler ordered the attack on London, (p 100)

The breathing space allowed by Hitler’s strategic error allowed Fighter Command to fix up runways, repair planes in hangars now not under attack and to put communication lines back into operation. At the same time, more and more planes were arriving from the factories than there were pilots to fly them. Britain had more operational fighters at the end of the Battle of Britain than at the beginning. (p 101)

Notes

Chapter Nine:

Operation Barbarossa, Stalingrad and the significance of the Russian Campaign

Operation Barbarossa

Background to Barbarossa

On the morning of 22 June 1941, German forces invaded the Soviet Union under Directive 21 which had been issued in December 1940. Hitler called the invasion of Russia “Operation Barbarossa”, after the German 12th century Holy Roman Emperor.

The invasion of Russia should have come as no surprise as Hitler had made clear his intention to invade on many occasions. His motives were ideological, racial, strategic and economic:

- Lebensraum had always been Hitler’s long-term aim. His dream of creating an Aryan empire of 250 million required living space, and he had made it clear that this would be found in the vastness of Russia.
- The Slavs of Russia were racial inferiors who would become a future slave force for the master race. Racial purity would be ensured by ‘dealing’ with the problem of five million Jews living in Russia (see Chapter 14).
- Russia would provide not only land, but also grain, oil and other resources needed by the Reich.
- The defeat of Russia would totally isolate Britain which Hitler expected to bring to its knees anyway with his submarine forces. ¹

By the spring of 1941, Hitler’s control of Europe was almost complete with German power extending from the Arctic to the Sahara Desert, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Russian frontier. By May 1941, Hitler had consolidated his position in Eastern Europe.

- Czechoslovakia had been dismembered by March 1939.
- Poland was defeated by October 1939 and carved up with the Soviet Union.
- Hungary was a willing ally and joined the German attack on Russia.
- Bulgaria joined the Axis in March 1941.
- Pressure was placed on Romania to side with the Axis; Hitler was worried about maintaining oil supplies from the Ploesti Oilfields.

Events in Yugoslavia did not go so smoothly and this was to have a bearing on the fate of Operation Barbarossa. On 25 March 1941, Yugoslavia joined the Axis powers when it signed a Tripartite Pact. However, a few days later, Prince Paul’s pro-axis government was overthrown.

- Hitler was alarmed and issued Directive No 25, the invasion of Yugoslavia, to commence with his attack on Greece.
- On 6 April, German, Italian and Hungarian forces attacked Yugoslavia.

¹ Churchill stated that his greatest fear during the war had been German submarines. By early 1943, Britain was down to two months supplies of oil; in 1942, the allies had lost 1662 ships to German U-boats.

- By late May, Axis forces had taken control of Yugoslavia and Greece, and had expelled allied forces from Greece and Crete.

It had been a spectacular German victory, but actions in the Balkans had delayed the invasion of Russia by a month. This was to be of critical importance!

The attack

Stalin had been warned by British intelligence and his own sources that an invasion was imminent but chose not to believe them. In fact, only a week before the German attack, Russia was sending goods to Germany. The German attack on Russia was of monumental proportions. It comprised 3.2 million men, 600 000 trucks, 3350 tanks, and 2000 combat aircraft. Thousands of Romanian, Hungarian and Italian troops joined the attack.

German forces were divided into three great armies:

- General von Leeb and Army Group North drove north east through the Baltic states with Leningrad as the target; Finnish forces joined the attack on 26 June.
- General von Bock and Army Group Centre advanced through the centre of Russia with Moscow as the target.
- In the south, General von Runstedt and Army Group South headed towards the rich grain lands of the Ukraine with Kiev as the target.
- In the far north, General Falkenhorst attacked from Norway to cut the Murmansk-Leningrad railway link.

The Germans needed a quick victory. The longer the Russian campaign lasted, the greater was the chance for defeat: Russia was vast, its resources were limitless and the virulent Russian winter had seen off invaders in the past. Blitzkrieg tactics, with the aim of destroying the Red Army in the field, would finish off the Soviet Union.

The Soviet forces were totally unprepared for the onslaught. Major sporting events had been planned for 22 June which meant many troops were off 'training' while others were involved in amateur theatricals. Indeed, it took hours for the Soviet forces to realise they were under attack. As German troops entered some towns, trams were still running and people cheered them, thinking they were Red Army forces.

German forces made spectacular progress.

- By noon on the first day, 1200 Soviet aircraft had been destroyed.
- By the end of July, German forces had captured Bialystok, Minsk, Uman and Smolensk.
- By mid-July, Army Group North was within 100 kms of Leningrad but Hitler ordered it to pause while infantry forces mopped up in the Baltic states.
- Within a month, the Wehrmacht had taken an area twice the size of Germany. By the end of September, Soviet forces had lost over three million men, most of its aircraft and thousands of tanks.
- Army Group Centre was similarly stalled in its advance on Hitler's orders. He insisted that tank divisions under General Guderian should head south to assist in the capture of Kiev. Hitler's generals argued that they should be allowed to push on to Moscow but Hitler argued that Kiev had to be taken to secure the food supplies of the Ukraine. Also, it would provide a springboard from which to move on the oil wells of the Caucasus.

- On 19 September Kiev was captured in a brilliant campaign.
- In the south Odessa fell on 16 October, Kharkov on 24 October and Rostov on 20 November.

However, despite victory after victory, the momentum of the German forces had slowed. Leningrad was not captured and instead both sides settled in for a horrific three-year siege. In October, Hitler finally launched Operation Typhoon, the attack on Moscow. Within days Red Army forces were defeated around Vyazma and Bryansk with the loss of a further 650 000 prisoners. However, things now began to work against Hitler. Autumn rains turned Russia's poor roads into quagmires which slowed progress. By November the Russian winter was beginning to play its role. At first, the frosts assisted German forces as it became easier to move across the hardened ground. However, as temperatures plummeted, the advance ground to a halt. German soldiers were neither equipped nor trained for such freezing conditions.

- Inadequate clothing and lack of supplies lead to hundreds of thousands of cases of hypothermia, frostbite and trench foot. Disease was rampant.
- Engine sumps froze, tank mechanisms broke down, power lines snapped.
- Goering had promised the Luftwaffe would keep the German army supplied. He again failed. Landing in freezing conditions became very dangerous and so parachute drops had to be employed to deliver supplies. Soviet anti-aircraft guns forced German aircraft to fly high and so supplies were often lost or fell into Soviet hands.

Just when it was within sight of Moscow, the German army found itself at its most vulnerable, desperately short of food, medicines and ammunition. It was at this moment that Soviet forces were ready to strike back.

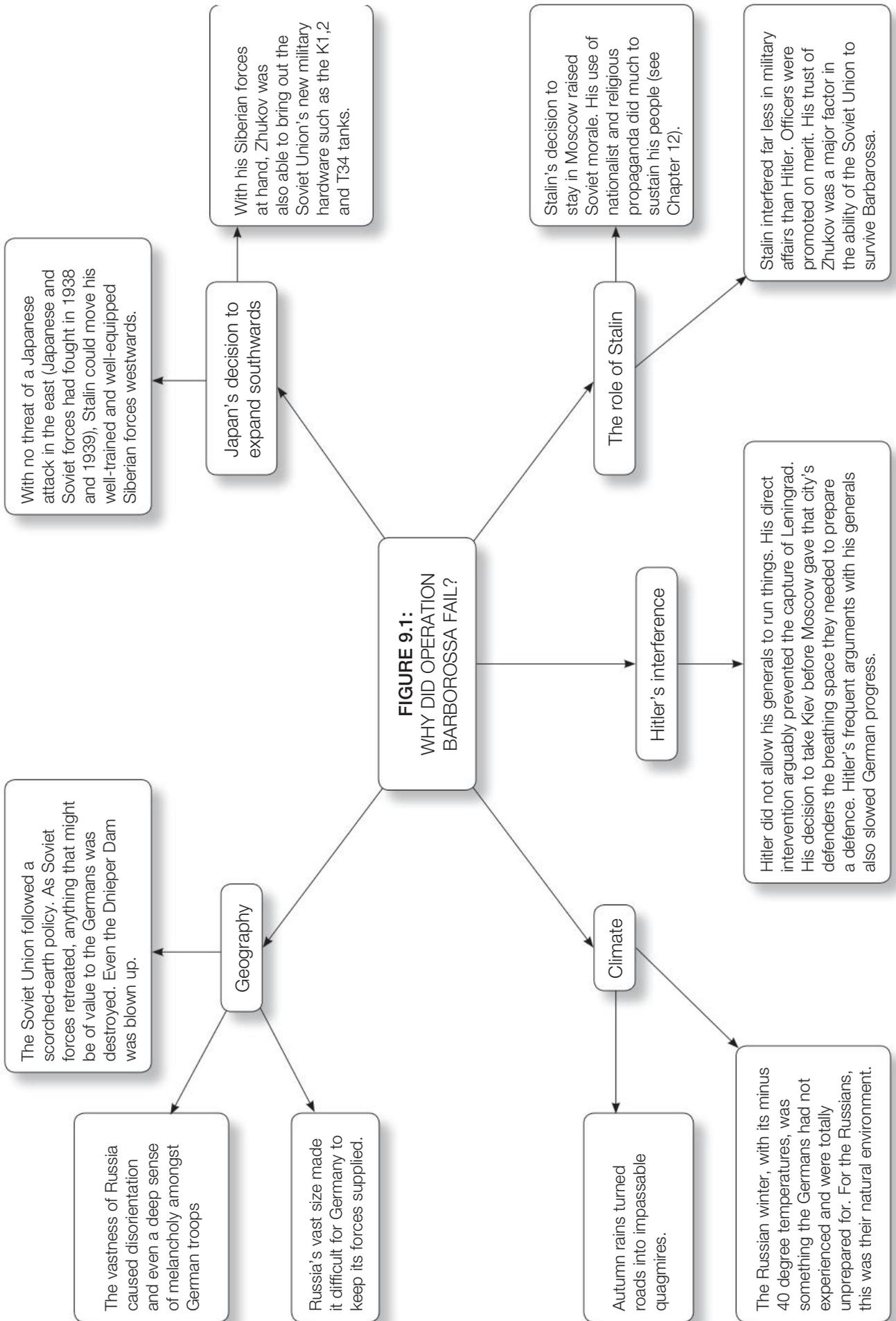
For a brief time in mid-October, Moscow was in a state of panic; even Stalin fled the city temporarily. However, any chance the German army might have had faded. Stalin had placed General Georgi Zhukov in charge of the defence of Moscow. Unlike Hitler, Stalin was more willing to listen to his generals, in particular Zhukov. Zhukov organised a series of anti-tank defences around Moscow to slow the German advance. Zhukov's organisational skills plus weaponry appropriate to Russian conditions would turn the tide against the Wehrmacht. In addition, Stalin learned from his intelligence forces that Japan was planning an attack on the United States. This time Stalin chose to believe the advice he received. He moved his entire Siberian Army Corps of 750 000 men west to face the Germans. Trained and equipped for severe winter conditions, their appearance in battle greatly lowered German morale.

Using his Siberian troops and new KV1, KV2 and T34 tanks, Zhukov launched a counter-attack on 5 December. The Germans were forced back up to three hundred kilometres in places. Germany had not been defeated and defeat on the Eastern Front was not inevitable. However, Moscow had been saved, Blitzkrieg had failed and Hitler now faced a drawn-out campaign against a revived Red Army.

Russia faced defeat throughout much of 1941. German military skill, Soviet unpreparedness, low morale and defeatism amongst the Soviet population, combined with massive military losses made defeat seem certain. Some of the Soviet Union's non-Russian population actually welcomed the Germans as liberators.² Stalin's order to not retreat often led to massive unnecessary losses. Yet, despite all this, the Soviet Union survived Barbarossa.

Figure 9.1 summarises the reasons for the failure of Operation Barbarossa.

² National groups inside the Soviet Union, eg the Ukrainians, had been cruelly persecuted by Stalin in the 1930s.



reality as he ignored warnings and appeals over the Russian campaign. The German army had to push on, regardless of the cost. On 2 December Kluge's 4th Army made one final desperate lunge at Moscow, actually reaching an outlying suburb. However, Zhukov's counter-offensive a few days later changed everything and Bullock argues one thing was clear as the German troops:

*"...already driven to the limit of endurance, wavered; for a few days there was great confusion and the threat of a Russian break-through... the great gamble had failed and 1941 would end without the long-heralded victory in the east."*⁴

3. Ian Kershaw: Hitler – 1936-45: Nemesis

Kershaw explains that the war in the east became intensely ideological in nature. He says that Barbarossa and the war in the east was definitely Hitler's but that it was not a case of a tyrannical dictator inflicting war on an unwilling country. He suggests that it was acceded to, indeed welcomed, by all sections of both the Nazi and non-Nazi elites. Ordinary Germans too, were carried away with the 'crusade against Bolshevism'. The more ideologically committed Nazis believed that Europe needed to be freed from the 'Bolshevik hordes' and that 'Jewish-Bolshevism' had to be rooted out and destroyed.

*"...The path to the Holocaust.. (was) intertwined with the showdown with Bolshevism... The legacy of over two decades of deeply rooted, often fanatically held feelings of hatred towards Bolshevism, interlaced with anti-Semitism, was about to be revealed in its full ferocity."*⁵

The Battle of Stalingrad

Background

Though Barbarossa had failed, that did not mean the end of things on the Eastern Front. Hitler had no choice but to press on with another offensive. There was little chance of Army Group North making a breakthrough. Leningrad was bleeding for sure – almost a million Leningraders would die by the time of the lifting of the siege in January 1944 – but a Russian surrender here was not going to happen. Similarly, the chance of Army Group Centre breaking into Moscow was not likely. However, the situation for Army Group South looked more promising. It was in the south, once the spring thaw arrived in 1942, where Hitler launched another major attack.

- On 29 May German forces scored a major victory near Kharkov, taking 214 000 prisoners, 1200 tanks and 2000 guns.
- Further victories followed at Kerch and Sevastopol in June, and at Rostov on the River Don in late July.

In April, Hitler had decided on a major thrust into the south of Russia. Known as Operation Blue, this plan involved dividing Army Group South and launching a two-pronged attack:

- General von Kleist was to lead a force (Army Group A) into the Caucasus with the intention of capturing Soviet oil wells in that region.

⁴ Bullock, A, Hitler: A Study in Tyranny, Pelican, Harmondsworth, 1952, p 661

⁵ Kershaw, I, Hitler: 1936-45 – Nemesis, Penguin, London, 2000, p389

- Hitler's reasoning was that by denying Stalin his main oil supplies, the Soviet war effort would be greatly disadvantaged.
- A second force (Army Group B), led by General Paulus, would cut off the River Volga by capturing the city of Stalingrad.
 - The logic behind this operation was twofold: the Volga was a key communications artery and Stalingrad was a significant industrial centre.

In fact, taking Stalingrad was unnecessary as the city was not strategically important and the Volga could have been more easily cut further south towards Astrakhan. It seems that Hitler became mesmerised by the name – Stalingrad – and gave the city far greater significance than it militarily deserved.

The Battle

When Paulus began his attack on Stalingrad, Soviet forces there were outnumbered about four to one. In August Paulus launched a massive two-day aerial bombardment which destroyed more than three quarters of the city. The ruins of Stalingrad would now witness one of the great battles of the war. At one stage, the Germans occupied 90% of the battered city. Fighting involved not grand, sweeping movements but bitter street by street, house by house, room by room fighting. German and Soviet troops often ended fighting in hand-to-hand combat. Lone snipers became key figures in the fighting.

General Zhukov saw an opportunity at Stalingrad and on 19 November he launched Operation Uranus. Paulus was in a perilous position as Army Group A had become bogged down in the Caucasus, the Luftwaffe was finding it next to impossible to supply his forces, his north eastern flank (which comprised Italian, Hungarian and Romanian troops) was exposed and then the winter arrived.

- Zhukov ordered his forces at Stalingrad not to give up an inch of territory.
- His plan was to encircle Paulus' 6th Army in a giant pincer movement, trapping the German forces:
 - from the south would come General Vatutin's forces;
 - while from the north came a larger force complete with 900 tanks to attack Paulus' vulnerable north eastern flank.
- On 23 November the two Soviet forces met at the Kalach Bridge, thus completing trapping Paulus' men inside the city.
- An attempt was made to relieve Paulus with a force led by General Manstein on 12 December (Operation Winter Tempest). However, the force was too small and could not reach the city.

Paulus sought permission from Hitler to surrender. Hitler refused, ordering him to fight on and, at the same time, promoting him to the rank of Field Marshal – no German Field Marshal had ever surrendered. Freezing, starving, disease-ridden and virtually out of ammunition, the German 6th Army surrendered in late January 1943. A German force of almost 300 000 men was lost. Over 200 000 Axis soldiers were dead and 91 000 were marched off to horrific Soviet imprisonment. Only a few thousand of these would ever see Germany again, and that was not until many years after the end of the war.

What do the historians have to say about “The Battle of Stalingrad”?.

1. Martin McCauley: *The Soviet Union Since 1917*

McCauley argues that the significance of Stalingrad was undeniable. Clearly, the defeat owed much to Hitler’s stubbornness, his refusal to face reality, the long lines of communication and again the climate. However, McCauley says that none of this should detract from the immensity of the Soviet achievement. Red army morale was boosted, the High Command showed that it could match battle tactics with the best of them and never again did Soviet troops flee a battle.

*“...Germany’s greatest defeat was a turning-point. From now on it was not a matter of how the war would end, but when.”*⁶

2. A M Samsonov: *Stalingrad – The Relief*

Soviet historian Samsonov, writing in the 1960s, predictably has high praise for the efforts of the Soviet people and the Communist Party. However, he has a point. In the second half of 1942, Soviet industry had managed to produce 25 000 aircraft, 25 000 tanks and 30 000 field guns. This was far more than Germany could produce at the same time. Like McCauley, he argues that the success of the Red Army at Stalingrad owed much to the élan of the Soviet forces and the ability of its generals to plan major campaigns. As to the significance of Stalingrad, Samsonov argues:

*“...It would be difficult to overestimate the effect of these events in strengthening the forces of the anti-Nazi coalition. The impressive results of the Stalingrad battle created favourable conditions for operations by Anglo-American forces against Nazi Germany and its allies.”*⁷

3. R J Overy: *The Dictators – Hitler’s Germany Stalin’s Russia*

When discussing the Battle of Stalingrad and events after, Overy draws a clear difference between the way Hitler and Stalin related to their generals. Stalin came increasingly to accept the arguments of his generals, particularly Zhukov. Zhukov realised that firmness, clear arguments and mastering the detail were enough to win over Stalin to his point of view. Hitler, on the other hand, increasingly saw himself as the only person with any military foresight and as the only person not to lose his nerve. These two factors – Zhukov’s insight into military matters and Hitler’s increasingly misplaced self-confidence – were to be of crucial importance for the outcome of the war. The balance of responsibility achieved between the Soviet military and Stalin:

*“...reduced, though it did not completely eliminate, the damaging effects of Stalin’s naïve grasp of operational planning...(whereas Hitler) took it upon himself to order the deployment of even the smallest military units...(and) refused to accept his limitations...”*⁸

⁶ McCauley, M, *The Soviet Union Since 1917*, Longman, Harlow, 1981, p116

⁷ Samsonov, AM, *Stalingrad: The Relief*, in Purnell’s *History of the Second World War*, Vol 3, London, 1966, p1304

⁸ Overy, RJ, *The Dictators: Hitler’s Germany Stalin’s Russia*, Penguin, London, 2004, p532

The Significance of the Russian Campaign

The war in the east was far from over despite the Soviet victory at Stalingrad. Millions more would die and it was not until Hitler's failure at Kursk in July 1943 that the initiative finally and forever fell to the Russians.

- Kharkov was captured by a Soviet offensive but by mid-March, it and Belgorod were again in German hands.
- As 1943 wore on, Soviet forces began to gain a real edge in the quantity and quality of their equipment.
 - Mention has already been made of Soviet tanks.
 - Soviet production was greatly rationalised so that only a small number of different types of aircraft were produced, but on a mass scale.
 - American supplies granted to Russia through the Lend-Lease scheme were beginning to make themselves felt.

In mid-1943, Hitler committed his forces to a massive contest at Kursk, codenamed Operation Citadel, which was to last from 5-12 July. Soviet forces had established a salient around Kursk and there was a temptation for them to push it even further, a temptation Stalin resisted. Equally, there was a temptation for the Germans to cut it off, a temptation Hitler could not resist. This bulge in the front line was to be the site of the greatest tank battle in history.

- The Russians were now superior in numbers and equipment. Their commanders had learned their lessons well.
- By early July, defence lines comprising mines, tank defences and masses of heavy guns stretched for fifty miles. There was no weak spot in the Russian line.
- On 5 July, German forces attacked the salient from north and south. However, the days of Blitzkrieg were over, German tanks did not slice through the enemy 'like a knife through butter'. Instead they used a technique called 'Panzerkeil' – attacking by means of an armoured wedge against an equally powerful force.

*"...With tanks fighting tanks there was no room for the infantry, and the German guns could not fire. Instead of a breakthrough there was a slogging match."*⁹

- Battle was joined with 1500 tanks on each side – the greatest tank battle in history up to this point. Though very close to victory at one stage, Hitler broke off the engagement on 12 July to deal with Anglo-American landings in Sicily.
- Losses on both sides were colossal but the Red Army could make up its losses; the Wehrmacht could not.

The Battle of Kursk was a true turning point of the war. Never again would German forces launch great offensives on the Eastern Front. The initiative there had truly passed to the Red Army. All Hitler could do in the east now was to delay the advance of Soviet forces; victory was no longer an option. Following Kursk, Soviet victories began to multiply.

- On 5 August the Red Army captured Belgorod.
- On 23 August Kharkov was retaken.

⁹ Taylor, AJP, *The Second World War: An Illustrated History*, Penguin, London, 1975, p180

- Donetsk fell on 8 September; Mariupol on 10 September.
- By late September Smolensk was retaken.
- On 6 November Kiev was captured.

The German army was being worn down. *“Attrition not strategic penetration, was the Russian method, and it was succeeding.”*¹⁰

Exercise 9.2

Match each term or personality on the left, with the matching phrases given in the box below.

1	Operation Barbarossa	
2	Operation Typhoon	
3	Operation Blue	
4	Operation Citadel	
5	Operation Uranus	
6	Operation Winter Tempest	
7	General von Kleist	
8	General Vatutin	
9	General Zhukov	
10	General Paulus	

German battle plan at Kursk	Russian battle plan at Stalingrad
German commander at Stalingrad	Stalin’s number one commander
Mannstein’s attempt to relieve Stalingrad	Hitler’s plan for the invasion of Russia
Hitler’s plan for attacking southern Russia	German commander in the Caucasus
German plan to take Moscow	Soviet commander at Stalingrad

¹⁰ ibid

What do the historians have to say about “The Significance of the Russian Campaign”?

1. Richard Overy: *Why the Allies Won*

Overy places great significance on the outcome of the battles in the Russian campaign, in particular the Battle of Kursk. General Guderian had described Kursk as a decisive defeat. Losses suffered at Kursk could not be easily replaced, while the balance in armoured vehicles moved in favour of the Soviet forces. By August, the German army could place only 2500 tanks into battle as against the Red Army's 8200.

*“...The struggle for Kursk tore the heart out of the German army...Soviet success at Kursk, with so much at stake, was the most important single victory of the war..It was the point at which the initiative passed to the Soviet side.”*¹¹

2. Richard Overy: *Why the Allies Won*

Overy makes a further point about the Eastern Front. He states that there is little debate on either the German or Soviet side that the campaigns at Stalingrad and Kursk changed the course of the war and effectively determined the outcome. He suggests the dispute comes when explaining why. He acknowledges various arguments that have been put forward – the personal responsibility of Hitler, improvements in Soviet industry and military capability. However, he suggested that the real answer lies in the collective effort of the Soviet people. Certainly, many Russians were forcibly conscripted to work. However, this cannot explain the superhuman efforts of the Soviet people. The war in the east was quite different to elsewhere. It was carried on with a savagery and depth of hatred not present in most other theatres of war. Both sides were guilty of great acts of barbarism. Overy sees this as a major factor in the Soviet success as no other society during the war:

*“...was mobilised so extensively, or shared such sacrifice...The drive to succeed in the battles in 1943 stemmed from violent emotions, directed hatred...The Soviet people were the instrument of their own redemption from the depths of war.”*¹²

3. B Liddell Hart: *History of the Second World War*

Liddell Hart argues that the Russian campaign highlighted one of the major flaws of the German command structure. He expresses admiration for the German ability to resist often numerically stronger forces. However, the problem lay in Hitler's refusal to allow retreats without his permission, permission which was rarely given. Commanders were threatened with court-martial; junior officers became paralysed and it was said battalion commanders dare not even 'move a sentry from a window to a door'. This inflexibility, argues Liddell Hart, allowed the German Army to survive the first winter. However, its continuation merely 'cramped the essential flexibility' needed by commanders. Liddell

¹¹ Overy, R, *Why the Allies won*. Jonathan Cape, London, 1995, p96

¹² Overy, R, *Why the Allies won*. Jonathan Cape, London, 1995, pp99-100

Hart makes the point that the repeated successes of German forces to stand up to superior forces:

*“...indicated how the war might have spun out, and the Russians’ strength exhausted, if the defensive strategy had matched the tactics.”*¹³

4. Antony Beevor: Stalingrad

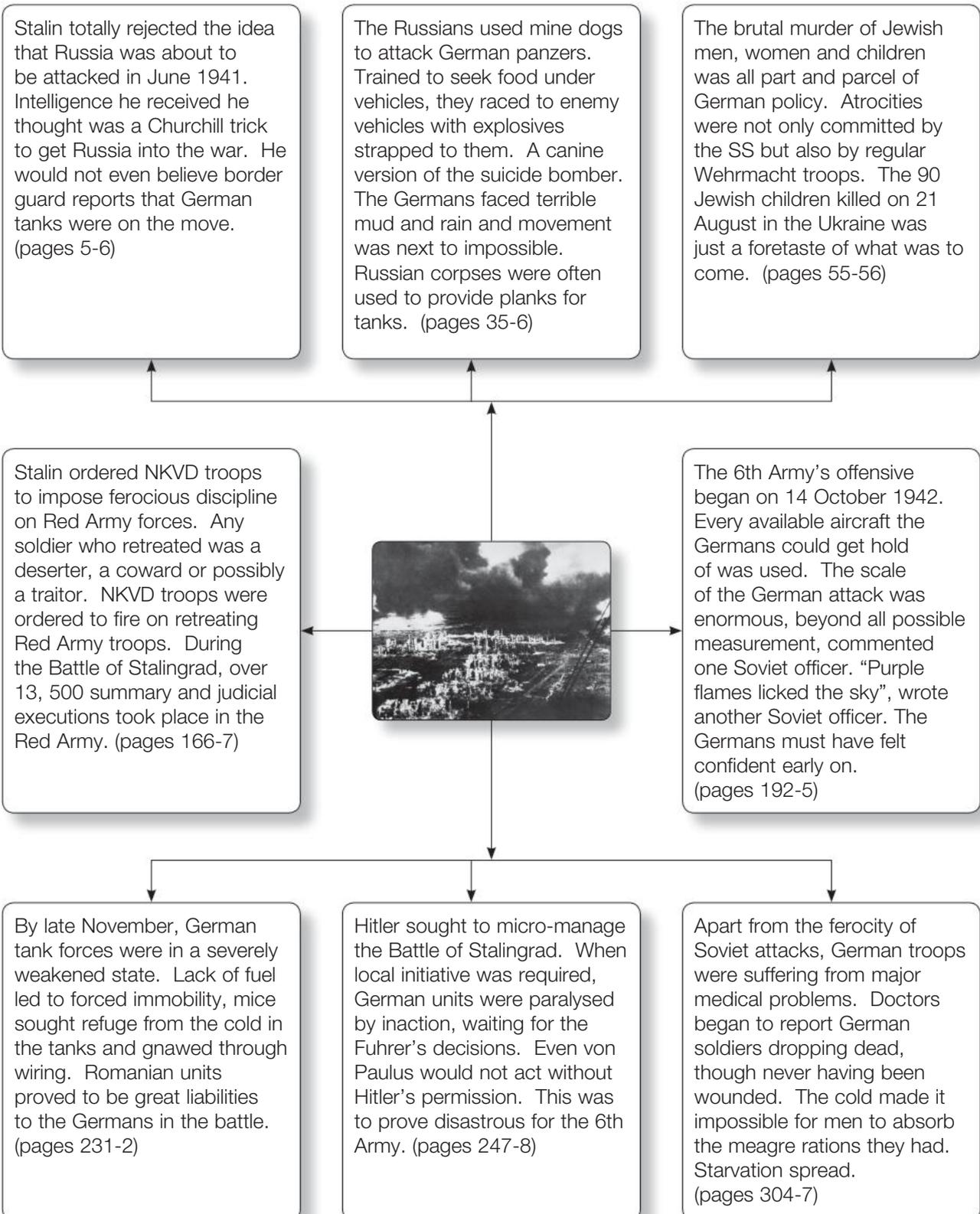
In explaining the Soviet success at the Battle of Stalingrad, Beevor points to a variety of factors including, the Soviet skills of secrecy and deception, Hitler’s obstinacy and his gross misconceptions about Soviet tactics and strength, and Zhukov’s supreme skills of generalship. However, of arguably even greater importance was the impact of Soviet war production. Hitler refused to accept that the Soviet Union was capable of the production feats it achieved. By late 1942, Soviet industry was producing 2200 tanks a month; aircraft production for the second half of 1942 exceeded 15 800. Beevor also points to other factors.

*“...Nazi leaders had always refused to acknowledge the strength of Russian patriotic feeling. They also underestimated the ruthless program of evacuation of industry to the Urals and the militarisation of the workforce... the collective sacrifice (of the Soviet people) – both forced and willing at the same time – represented a terrifyingly impressive achievement... Even the slave-labour camps devoted to munitions production achieved a far higher output than their equivalents in Germany...”*¹⁴

¹³ Liddell Hart, B, History of the Second World War, Cassell, London, 1970, p497

¹⁴ Beevor, A, Stalingrad, Penguin, London, 1998, pp 223-5

Antony Beevor's book, *Stalingrad*, is a fantastic read for anyone wanting to know about the enormity, the horrors and the significance of the Battle of Stalingrad. The diagram below gives some examples of aspects of the battle, its background and its outcome as presented by Beevor. Page references are provided for those who wish take their research further. The edition used is that footnoted on page 96.

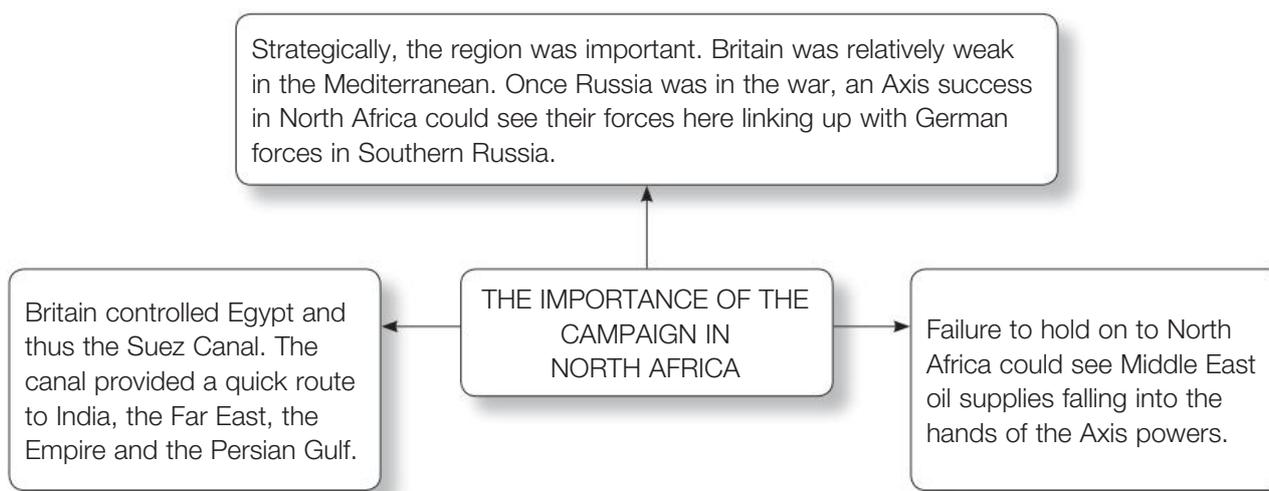


Chapter Ten:

The Battle of El Alamein and the significance of the conflict in North Africa to the European War

Isolated and alone against Nazi Germany, the continent under Hitler's control and facing constant bombing during the Blitz, Britons had little to rejoice. Churchill's stirring oratory could go only so far. It was against this background that the war in North Africa was to take on a special significance for Britain.

Figure 10.1: The importance of the North African theatre of war



Background to the North Africa Conflict

(1) *Italy enters the war*

Italy had entered the war on 10 June 1940, eager to capitalise on Germany's swift defeat of the French. Italian forces during the war were rarely able to live up to the martial rhetoric Mussolini enjoyed delivering. On many occasions Italian troops had to be saved from disaster with the timely intervention of the Germans. Indeed, Italy's early wartime performance must have been a cause of concern for Hitler:

- Italy's thirty-two divisions struggled against France's six divisions in June 1940. A small advance into France was only achieved with the help of German forces attacking the French rear.
- In June 1940 the Italian base at Tobruk in Libya was attacked by British naval forces.
- In July 1940, the Australian ship HMAS Sydney sank the Italian cruiser Bartolomeo Colleoni.
- In September two Italian destroyers were sunk at Benghazi in Libya.
- In October 1940, Italian forces attacked Greece.
 - Mussolini hoped to emulate Hitler's success; instead his army got bogged down in the mountains of northern Greece and thousands died from the cold winter.
 - Italian forces were driven back into Albania by December.
- In November 1940, British naval forces sank three Italian battleships at their base in Taranto.
- By May 1941, British forces had taken all of Italy's East African Empire.

(2) Early actions in North Africa

Since 1911, Italy had had possession of the colony of Libya in North Africa. Libya was situated to the west of Egypt, at this time under British control. In September 1940, a strong Italian force under General Graziani invaded Egypt and set up fortified camps. Britain's Commander in Chief in North Africa, General Wavell, launched an attack against these camps.

- On 10 December 1940, Sidi Barrani was captured, along with 34 000 Italian prisoners.
- In early January 1941, the Australian 6th Division led an attack into Libya. Bardia was captured, along with 70 000 Italian prisoners.
- On 22 January, British and Australian forces captured Tobruk. As well as port facilities and large stores of supplies. Another 30 000 Italian prisoners were taken.
- In early February the town of Benghazi was captured.

Within two months, numerically stronger Italian forces had been completely defeated. The British had advanced 500 miles, taken over 130 000 prisoners, 400 tanks and 1290 guns. British losses were 500 dead and 1300 wounded.

Hitler decided in February 1941 to send the first detachments of General Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps to Libya.

(3) Rommel in North Africa

In March 1941, Rommel launched a counter-attack against British forces, driving them out of El Agheila back towards Tobruk. In April, Rommel's joint German-Italian forces launched a three-pronged attack against British forces. The Italians retook Benghazi. On 7 April, Rommel captured the town of Derna; he also captured British Generals Neame and O' Connor. The British position had been weakened because many troops were now in Greece involved in the failed attempt to defend that country.

In mid-April, Rommel began the siege of Tobruk.

- Tobruk was important because it was the only base in allied hands between Alexandria in Egypt and Sfax in Tunisia – a distance of 1600 kms.
- Its strategic value for the future of the North African campaign was recognised by both sides. The allies were desperate to hold it; Rommel was desperate to take it.
- For the next eight months allied troops, mostly Australians, held on grimly against constant Axis air, sea and land attacks. The Germans contemptuously described the defenders of Tobruk as 'rats'. The term 'rats of Tobruk' came to be a mark of honour for North African veterans.
- In June General Wavell launched Operation Battleaxe in an attempt to relieve Tobruk. It failed, with Wavell losing 90 of his 190 tanks. Wavell was replaced by General Auchinleck.
- In mid-November the British 8th Army under General Cunningham launched Operation Crusader to relieve Tobruk; British light tanks suffered great losses. Rommel launched an attack on Cunningham's forces but he also suffered heavy casualties. Rommel withdrew his forces on 7 December. Tobruk was saved though the cost had been high for both sides.
- In December, allied forces were able to evacuate troops from Tobruk.

- In January 1942, Rommel began a second desert offensive, moving from El Aghelia to Agedabia, and succeeded in driving the British back. Benghazi fell again on 29 January. For the next four months, each side held their ground, building up supplies and fortifying their positions.
- In June Tobruk fell to the Germans; 30 000 men were taken prisoner.
- In July 1942, Rommel pushed his Afrika Korps deeper into Egypt and now threatened Cairo. What followed became known as the First Battle of El Alamein.
 - Auchinleck set up a 60 km defensive line stretching from the small town of El Alamein on the coast to the impassable Quattara Depression.
 - For almost a month, both sides battled it out with neither emerging a winner. The conditions were atrocious: heat, flies, sandstorms, dysentery, disease affecting both sides.
- By August 1942, a stalemate seemed to have ensued in the desert war.
- Churchill decided to change his military leadership in Egypt. Auchinleck was replaced by General Alexander and General Montgomery was placed in charge of the 8th Army.

Background to the Battle of El Alamein

Rommel had fortified his position west of El Alamein with masses of anti-personnel and anti-tank mines; German troops referred to this area as 'the devil's garden'. However, Rommel was known for his desire to take the offensive and he had no intention of sitting tight. However, his position in North Africa was deteriorating and Rommel knew that the longer he delayed attacking the British position, the less chance he had of success. There were several reasons for this:

- In late August, British and Axis tank strength was about equal but in the weeks to follow, the balance moved in favour of the British.
- Rommel's long lines of communication made them vulnerable to British air attacks.
- Rommel's attempt to outflank the British position at El Alamein in late August 1942 failed as his forces faced dense minefields, strong resistance and repeated air attacks.
- Reinforced by men and material, Montgomery's position was getting steadily stronger.
 - By October he had 195 000 men, 1000 tanks, 900 guns and 1500 anti-tank guns.
 - Rommel was outnumbered two to one, and many of his troops were Italian infantry. More than half his armour comprised worn out Italian vehicles.
- Tank battles relied on plentiful supplies of fuel; Rommel's Afrika Korps was critically short of fuel. Rommel had to hope for a short battle.



The Battle of El Alamein

Montgomery attempted to mislead his enemy. Throughout October, he carried out various ruses to confuse enemy reconnaissance such as establishing forward positions which he would then abandon. However, for all his skills as a general, Montgomery's battle plan was strongly reminiscent of the Great War. He intended to launch a massive frontal attack against Rommel's central, most strongly defended position. A massive artillery bombardment would be followed by an infantry advance while his tank forces would defend the flanks.

- The Battle of El Alamein opened with a massive artillery bombardment along a 10 km front late in the evening of 23 October. 900 British guns hammered Rommel's position. Masses of incendiary and explosive shells rained down.

Rommel was in Germany when the attack began, receiving medical treatment. He returned on 25 October only to find that his commander General Stumme had died of a heart attack.

- Battle raged for ten days. It was a horrific affair, ranging from slogging tank duels, mass infantry advances to bloody hand to hand fighting.
- By 2 November, Rommel's tank strength was dangerously low; he had lost 350 tanks and over 15 000 men. British casualties had reached 24 000 dead or wounded, with 500 tanks destroyed.
- Rommel sought Hitler's permission to withdraw. Hitler refused. Realising the hopelessness of the situation, Rommel withdrew.

The end of the conflict in North Africa

As well as having to cope with Hitler's fury at disobeying an order, Rommel also learned that on 8 November, a 120 000 strong Anglo-American force under Generals Eisenhower and Patten had landed in Morocco and Algeria as part of Operation Torch.

Figure 10.3: Celebratory plaque regarding Operation Torch in Gibraltar



Rommel now faced the real possibility of being trapped between allied forces moving east and west across North Africa. He retreated towards Tunisia. Poor planning, slow movement and torrential rain had slowed the movement of allied troops from the west while Axis reinforcements were arriving daily. By January 1943, a stalemate had developed in Tunisia.

- In late January, again disobeying orders, Rommel abandoned Tripoli and retreated to Mareth in southern Tunisia.
- In February Rommel's forces attacked US forces at the Battle of Kasserine Pass in western Tunisia. He lost 2000 men; US losses were 10 000.
- In March, Montgomery defeated a German attack at Medenine in the south of Tunisia. Rommel, now quite ill, finally left North Africa.
- In late March, Montgomery succeeded in driving Axis forces north from the Mareth Line.

By early May, the remaining Axis forces in Tunisia were vastly outnumbered, short of fuel, food and other supplies. On 13 May, the Axis forces surrendered. A few hundred had escaped, but 130 000 were taken prisoner. The allies were now in control of all of North Africa.

The Significance of the Conflict in North Africa to the European War

Figure 10.2 summarises the importance of the North Africa conflict for the wider war in Europe.

What do the historians have to say about the “Battle of El Alamein and the significance of the conflict in North Africa to the European War”?

1. David Thomson: *Europe Since Napoleon*

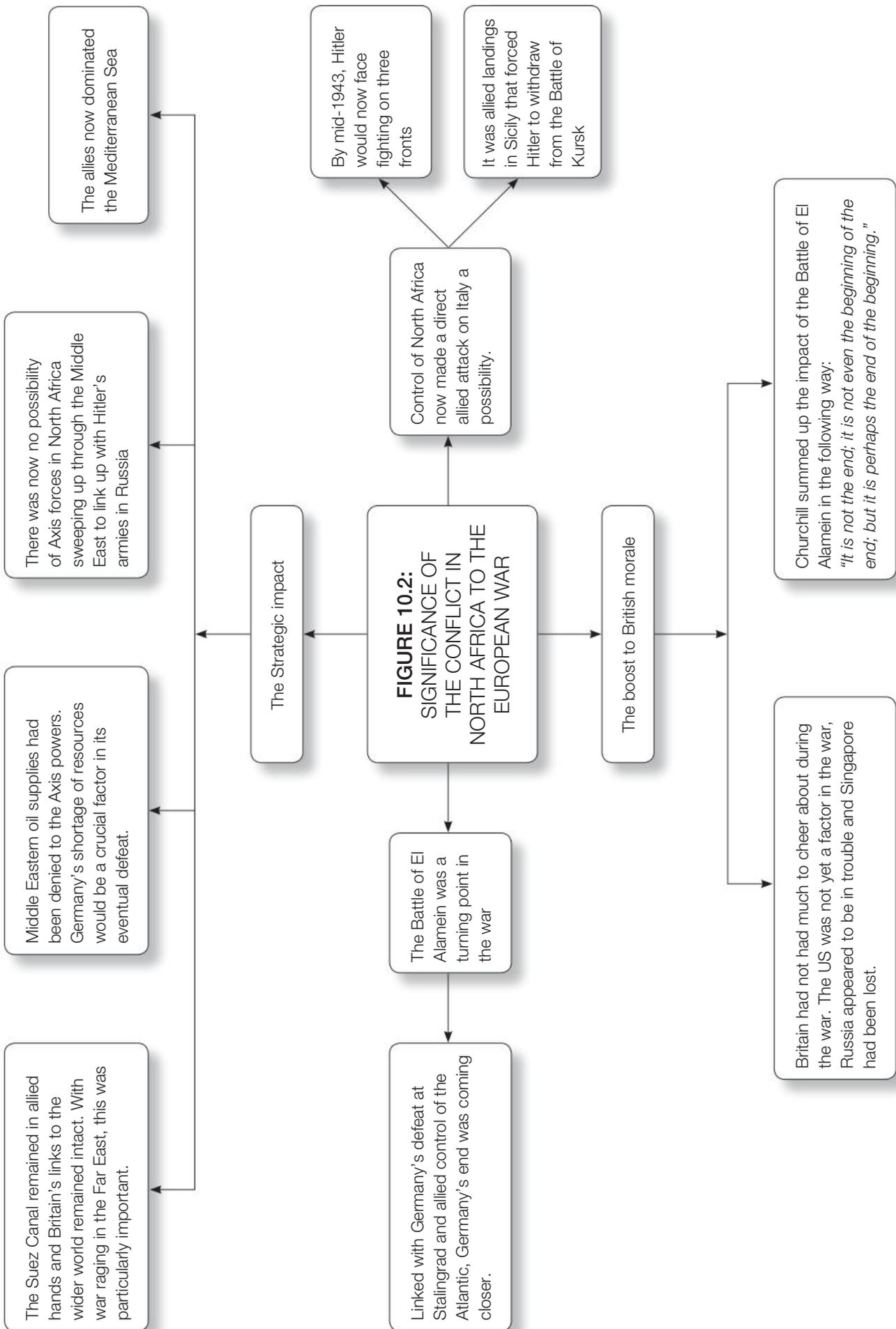
Thomson sees the whole North African campaign of great strategic importance. Though he concedes action in North Africa did little to ease pressure on the Eastern Front, and certainly did not satisfy Stalin's demand for a western front, allied success there had a great impact on the wider European war. In grand strategic terms, it was a gigantic flanking movement; Churchill liked to say that it exposed ‘the soft under-belly of the Axis powers.

*“...It made possible the next steps – an attack upon the Balkans and upon Italy, and immediately it exposed these areas to bombing attack. Above all, it was a complete testing and vindication in action of the Atlantic Alliance.”*¹

William S Shirer: *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*

Shirer's discussion of the Battle of Stalingrad and the Battle of El Alamein is brought together in a single chapter which he entitles ‘The Great Turning Point’. This is the thrust of his argument regarding the significance of El Alamein. The high tide of Nazi success was now beginning to ebb and would never flow again. The days of the great Nazi blitzkrieg offensives cutting enemies to pieces were

¹ Thomson, D, *Europe Since Napoleon*, Pelican, Harmondsworth, 1957, p782



a thing of the past. Shirer concedes that there would be temporary local thrusts – for example in the Ardennes in 1944 – but these were really just examples of tenacious defence.

“...The initiative had passed from Hitler’s hands, never to return. It was his enemies who seized it now, and held it...in the snows of Stalingrad and in the burning sands of the North African desert, a great and terrible Nazi dream was destroyed.” ²

3. David Knowles: How El Alamein changed the war

Knowles tackles the impact of the Battle of El Alamein in a personal way. He recollects on what victory in North Africa meant to the people of Britain and how it helped to boost national morale. He shows that El Alamein occurred at a time that Britain’s fortunes were at a low ebb – the Germans had conquered the Balkans, were making progress in Russia, while in the Far East HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Repulse had been sunk by the Japanese and Singapore had fallen in February. Closer to home hundreds of bombers had attacked British cities and thousands of Canadians had been killed in a raid on Dieppe. The British people needed a morale-boosting victory.

“...Churchill (wrote)... ‘Before Alamein we never had a victory. After Alamein, we never had a defeat.’ At that time, at home, everyone was of course delighted by the news. In the UK, many church bells rang for the first time since the beginning of the war..” ³

Exercise 10.1

Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

1. Why was Britain so keen not lose control of Egypt?	
2. How successful had Italian forces been in North Africa by early 1941?	
3. Why were the Axis powers and Britain so interested in Tobruk?	
4. What were the results of the First Battle of El Alamein?	
5. Why was Rommel keen to tackle the British forces at El Alamein sooner rather than later?	

² Shirer, WS, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, Pan Books, London, 1964, pp1114-15

³ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/2347801.stm

6. What advantages did Montgomery have at El Alamein?	
7. Of which type of battle was El Alamein reminiscent?	
8. What eventually happened to Rommel and his troops?	
9. What was Operation Torch?	
10. What was the final outcome of the conflict in North Africa?	

ESSAYS 2

Responding to HSC questions on the Course of the European War

The purpose of this section is to provide some ideas for the type of questions which might be asked on the second section of the syllabus: The Course of the European War. These outlines are not presented as the ‘be all and end all’ responses to these questions. To provide a sense of reality to this section, what follows is a ‘first draft response’ to each question, ie what were the first ideas that came into the author’s head as he thought about each question?

Essay No 1

“Assess the success of German strategies during the course of the European War in the period from September 1939 to June 1941.”

In a HSC Modern History question, the term “assess” is asking students to make a judgment. Thus, students must be very careful in this question not to simply narrate the events from September 1939 to June 1941. This descriptive or narrative style of response, with no attempt at making a judgment, would score a 15/25 at best.

As you look at this question, consider what judgments you might make:

- a) German strategies in this period were extremely successful because, by and large, Germany had achieved the aims it set out to achieve.
- b) German strategies were successful because by June 1941 Germany had gained control over the whole of Europe and faced only an isolated and weakened Britain.
- c) German strategies had failed by June 1941 because as Germany contemplated an attack on Russia, it knew it would be facing a two-front war.
- d) German strategies had mixed success, at best, in the period up to June 1941 and they had only gained a measure of success because of the weakness of their opponents.

NB: Be careful about hindsight here. Because you know how the war turned out, be careful you do not rely too much on this ‘future’ knowledge, eg it would be foolish to argue that German strategies were obviously not successful because, after all, Germany lost the war didn’t it?

For the purposes of this exercise, let us consider argument d) above.

A superficial look at the map of Europe in June 1941 might lead one to conclude that German military strategy was one long success story. Axis control of Europe stretched from the Arctic to the Sahara, from the Atlantic to the Russian frontier. Apart from Britain, it faced no opposition in Europe. However, on closer examination there had been setbacks, the future was from far from certain and Germany had yet to be tested in battle by a hardened enemy.

- Hitler's strategy against Poland in September/ October 1939 seems to have been extremely successful:
 - the Wehrmacht's use of blitzkrieg tactics (provide a brief explanation) worked very effectively;
 - Poland was defeated inside a month with light German casualties;
 - the pre-war agreement with the Soviet Union had been honoured;
 - Poland's quick defeat meant it would not face a two-front war (explain Britain's position).
- However, on closer examination success in this campaign should not be exaggerated:
 - Poland's defences were clearly no match for German offensive forces;
 - Polish strategy of fighting in the open west played into Germany's hands (explain the needs of blitzkrieg);
 - Poland's quick demise was helped by the Soviet invasion from the east;
 - invading Poland now left Hitler with the west to deal with, while the Soviet Union resided on Germany's new frontier.
 - Germany could not fight on as it needed to replenish its war supplies.
- Victory in the west was spectacular as Germany overran Denmark, Norway, the Low Countries and France (give a little narrative detail):
 - Swedish iron ore supplies were secured;
 - control of the Norwegian and Low Countries' coasts gave Germany a strategic advantage over Britain (explain)
 - the collapse of France gave Germany control of Western Europe;
 - Britain remained in the war but was greatly weakened and isolated.
- However, the results of the campaigns in the west revealed the limits of German strategy:
 - as each nation was conquered, large occupation forces were required to control these lands (eg 400 000 in Norway);
 - poor French leadership, low morale and a willingness to deal with Hitler greatly eased the German western campaigns;
 - the occupying Germans faced strong resistance movements (eg France);
 - failure to knock Britain out of the war revealed several problems with German strategy: eg weaknesses in the Luftwaffe, errors of judgment on Hitler's part;
 - Britain's continued presence in the war ensured that Hitler would always have a two-front war if he decided on attacking Russia (which he always intended to do).
- Events closer to June 1941 revealed similar flaws. Axis success in the Balkans and North Africa suggested a continuation of successful German strategy:
 - allies had been gained in Eastern Europe (egs);
 - Yugoslavia and Greece had been easily defeated and allied troops forced out of Greece and Crete;

- Rommel's presence in North Africa had re-established the Axis advantage in North Africa (details).
- However, on closer examination the situation was not as good as it seemed:
 - the Balkans campaign meant that Hitler's planned attack on Russia was delayed (explain the significance of this – time, the winter etc);
 - German presence in Greece and North Africa was the result of Italian failures (give examples of this); Italy was not a useful ally;
 - commitment in North Africa meant Germany having to fight on another front.

Essay No 2

“To what extent was the Russian campaign a turning point in the European War?”

Be careful with “to what extent” questions. Whatever line of argument you choose to follow, it is crucial that you ensure that you address the issue presented in the question.

- For example, let us assume you do not believe that the Russian campaign was a turning point in the war, but rather it was the Britain's survival in 1940 and the impact of the bombing of Germany that provided the turning point in the war.
 - You cannot enter the question by dismissing the Russian campaign in a paragraph or two and then explaining your argument about the air war.
 - This sort of pre-prepared response could score quite a low mark, no matter how good your information was.

Equally, avoid the narrative response which simply tells the story of events on the eastern front from Operation Barbarossa to the Battle of Kursk and its aftermath. This can only lead to a maximum 15/25.

The following offer themselves as possible responses.

- a) The Russian campaign was clearly the turning point of the war as up until this point Germany had had virtual non-stop military success. Failure to gain quick success in Russia revealed the flaws in blitzkrieg and a long-drawn out war would always benefit the Russia due to its vast resources and huge population compared to Germany's limited strength.
- b) The Russian campaign was clearly very important but to argue it was a turning point is unhistorical as it should not be considered in isolation from other events in the war.

It is probably very difficult to argue much else. It would take a brave student to try and prove that the Russian campaign was not a turning point and of little importance in changing the course of the European War.

For the purposes of this section, let us play safe and follow option a).

- Prior to the Russian campaign, Germany had experienced almost non-stop military success using its blitzkrieg tactics:
 - be careful not to rely on too much straight narrative to illustrate this point.

- Germany was in an almost invincible position in June 1941:
 - explain this by referring to its allies, weakness of potential opponents, control of resources, strength of its navy etc.
- The early part of the Russian campaign further proved the point:
 - provide some factual detail to illustrate this but be careful not to fall into a narrative trap.
- However, Barbarossa failed to achieve its goals in 1941:
 - explain these goals, show what went wrong, suggest why;
 - what was the implication of this failure?
- Germany took up the offensive again in 1942 with some success (egs) but then experienced the horrors of Stalingrad:
 - some narrative detail concerning Stalingrad;
 - explain the importance of the consequences of Germany's failure at Stalingrad.
- Germany's failure at Kursk sealed its fate:
 - give some narrative detail about Kursk and its fallout;
 - explain the significance of Kursk, Russia's growing strength and tactical skills, and what it meant for the wider war
 - Germany had lost the initiative on the Eastern Front
- You might suggest that Germany had lost its opportunity for victory in the war with its defeat in Russia:
 - show how failure in Russia coincided with defeat in North Africa, the growing presence of America and growing Anglo-American control of the Atlantic.

Failure in the Russian campaign meant the question was now not will Germany lose, but when will it lose. In this sense, the Russian campaign was clearly a turning point in the war.

Essay No 3:

“Assess the significance of the conflict in North Africa to the course of the European War.”

The previous two questions presented questions coming out of the ‘key features and issues’ part of the syllabus; this question comes out of the ‘Students learn about’ section. Be prepared to be able to answer both.

Read the comments regarding “assess” questions that accompanied Essay No 1.

The allied success in the conflict in North Africa was of major if not decisive importance for the course of the European War. It provided the allies with major strategic and economic advantages, boosted British morale and augured well for future Anglo-American cooperation. It severely weakened the Axis position. However, as a turning point in the war, it did not have the decisive impact that Germany's failure in the Russian campaign was to have.

- Provide some narrative background of the events in the conflict in North Africa:
 - refer to early allied success against Italy, the arrival of Rommel, success of the Afrika Korps, the Battle of El Alamein and the eventual removal of Axis troops from North Africa;
 - be careful not to get into a total narrative response.
- Allied success in North Africa had enormous strategic implications:
 - allied control of the Mediterranean and the opportunities this gave for future campaigns (examples);
 - it maintained British control of the Suez Canal (importance);
 - prevented the possible linking of Rommel's forces with those inside Russia (explain the context of this point);
- It secured allied control of Middle East oil supplies:
 - explain why this was so, refer to the Axis difficulties in gaining oil supplies.
- It gave a great boost to British morale when times had been hard:
 - explain Britain's long series of setbacks;
 - introduce some Churchill quotes to illustrate this point.
- After some early difficulties in Operation Torch, the later stages of the conflict in North Africa showed that Anglo-American forces could work well together.
 - give examples of actions in Sicily, Italy and later France.
- However, though the conflict in North Africa was important, and certainly weakened the Axis cause, it was on the Eastern Front in the Russian campaign where the war turned decisively in the allies' favour due to the scale of German losses and the magnitude of the Russian war effort.

Chapter Eleven:

Social and economic effects of the war on civilians in Britain

World War II transformed the social and economic life of Britain and it had a far greater effect on the lives of ordinary people than the Great War. Air warfare had placed British civilians in the front line, all aspects of national life were more quickly and more extensively mobilised, and far greater attention was given to the needs of ordinary people. The Great War had ended with the call for Britain to create “homes fit for heroes”; this was a call that was not heeded. Politicians did not take seriously calls for long-term improvements in the lives of ordinary people; after 1945 these calls ‘were’ taken seriously and the face of Britain changed.

The reaction to the outbreak of war

When war broke out in 1914, there was dancing in the streets and young men could not get into uniform quickly enough. Ignorant of the realities of war and brought up on a diet of daring-do in ‘Boy’s Own Annuals’, hundreds of thousands of young men rushed to join up. Eager to serve king and country, join their mates or simply impress the girls, there was a sense of excitement in 1914. This was not the case in 1939.

- Britons went to war in 1939 with a sense of weary resignation. Since the failure of Munich, war had been expected and when it came there was no cheering in the streets just a desire to get the job done.
 - There were no lengthy recruitment campaigns this time round; conscription had been introduced in April 1939.
- In fact, there was a sense of relief when war came and the illusions of appeasement were at last over. However, this relief was tempered strongly by a sense of fear.
 - Stanley Baldwin had stated earlier that “the bomber will always get through”; there was a deep sense of foreboding about the nature of the coming war.
 - Everyone believed, quite rightly, that Nazi Germany was going to be a formidable enemy.

Preparations for war

The country had been gearing up for war ever since the Munich crisis of September 1938. Air raid shelters had been built across the country. In November 1938, Sir John Anderson was put in charge of an Air Raid Precautions Bureau.

- Anderson gave his name to ‘the Anderson shelter’, a small backyard shelter topped with metal sheets which families would crawl into during an air raid to avoid falling debris.
- In 1941, Home Secretary Herbert Morrison, gave his name to the ‘Morrison shelter’, a kind of strong metal cage which was for use indoors.
- In London, the city tube stations were eventually used as public air raid shelters with almost 200 000 people sleeping in them each night.

One of the horrors of the Great War had been the use of gas. It was widely believed that gas would be widely used in the coming war.

- Since 1938, civilians had been issued with gas masks and during the war nobody was allowed to leave home without one.
- Gas was never used as a weapon against civilian populations.

Within days of the start of war, over 1.5 million children were evacuated from Britain's cities to spare them the horror of the expected bombing onslaught. Once the 'phoney war' set in, many of these children returned home.

- Some child evacuees were sent to Canada and South Africa but this practice was stopped when an evacuee ship was sunk.

Many precautions were put in place to deal with the expected air attacks. In order to make it difficult for German bombers, a 'blackout' was enforced across the country.

- As soon as the air raid siren sounded, street lights were turned off, car headlights dimmed to almost nothing and windows were covered with thick curtains to conceal internal lighting.
- There were heavy fines for disobeying blackout regulations which were rigorously enforced by ARP (air raid precautions) wardens.

Barrage balloons became a common sight over major cities. The barrage balloon made German dive-bombing more difficult, made bombers fly higher and thus reduce the accuracy of enemy bombing. Buildings were sandbagged. Fearing invasion, beaches were covered in barbed wire, pillboxes set up in southern England and even signposts were removed to 'confuse' the enemy.

The Blitz

British cities never experienced the level of mass bombing which German cities such as Hamburg, Cologne and Dresden went through. However, German bombing still had a major effect on industrial and civilian areas. From early September 1940 to May 1941, London experienced the Blitz. German bombing was carried out at first during the day but from early October switched to nights. Chapter 8 deals with the Blitz in more detail. Later in the war, British cities had to endure smaller scale attacks and from 1944 the V1 and V2. Germany 'V' rockets were not very effective but they caused enormous fear amongst the civilian population.

It was not only London that was bombed during the war. On 14 November 1940, a massive raid was launched against Coventry. Cities and towns considered of economic value were attacked across the country from Belfast to Swindon to Birmingham to Sheffield. In 1941, ports were the main targets as bombing tried to assist the German U-boat campaign in the Battle of the Atlantic. Merseyside suffered 4000 casualties in one week.

German air attacks had several aims:

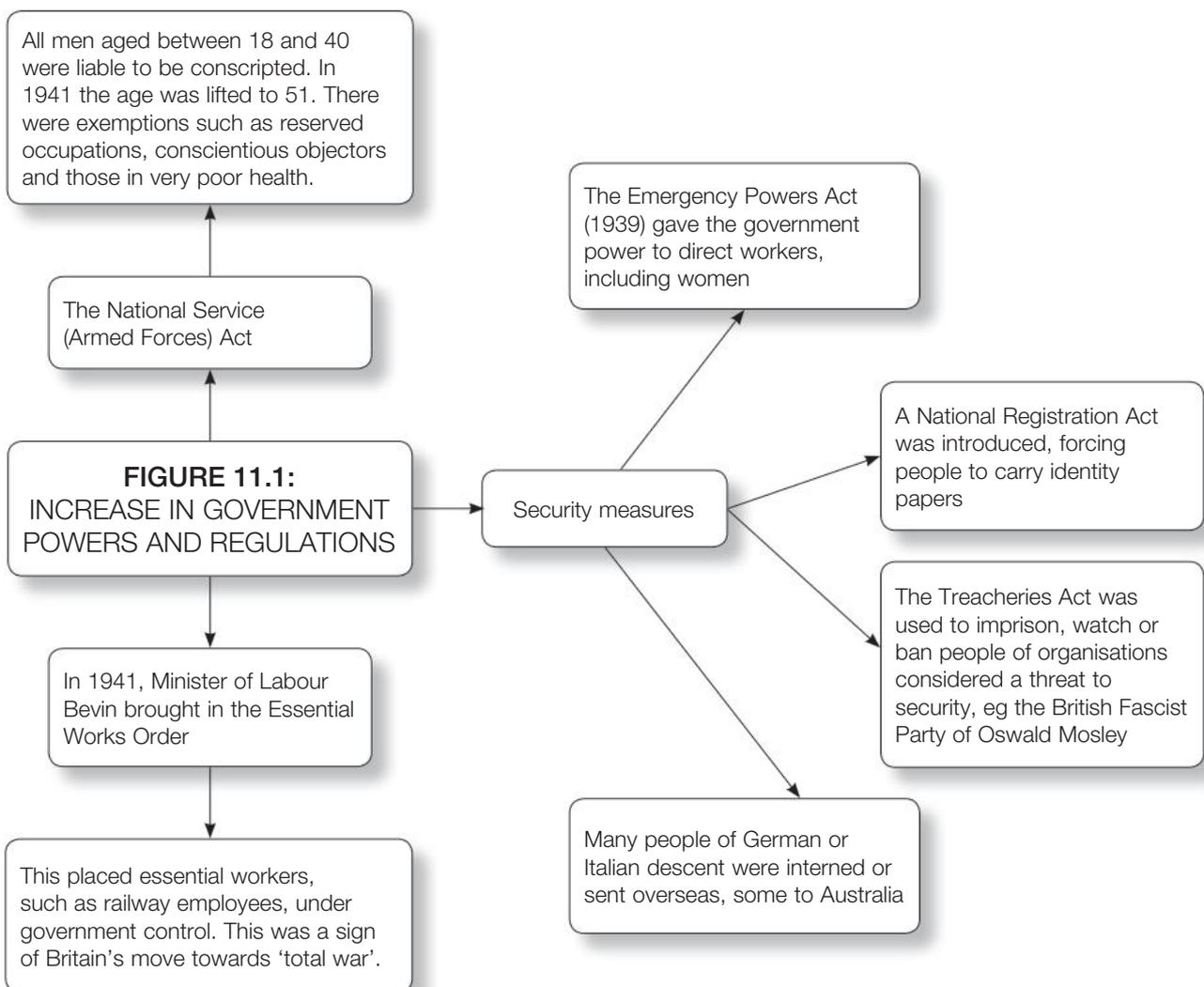
1. At first it was to 'soften up' the country for a possible German invasion.
2. It was also aimed at destroying Britain's ability to produce the needs of war.
3. However, a key aim was to break the morale of the British civilian population.

On all counts German bombing failed.

- The Luftwaffe’s failure in the Battle of Britain ended any real prospect of a German invasion.
- Though bombing did do great damage, particularly to working class housing, often located near to their places of work, British economic production was never seriously threatened.
- Rather than lower morale, it probably increased it. It has become fashionable in ‘revisionist’ circles to mock the Londoners’ ‘we can take it’ attitude, but there is no denying that the British people faced the enemy with great resilience and determination. The ‘Dunkirk spirit’ continued throughout the Blitz.
 - London did not witness the panic-stricken crowds seen in France in 1940.
 - King George VI and Churchill were well received in the ruins of the East End, especially after Buckingham Palace had been hit.
- However, it is true that not all people shared the “Dunkirk spirit”. During the Blitz, crime rates increased, there were cases of panic and a thriving ‘black market’ developed as unscrupulous people tried to take advantage of the inevitable shortages that occurred.

Government controls

The government intervened in the life of the nation enormously, taking on many extra powers. Figure 11.1 below summarises some of these measures.



Propaganda, censorship and the media

A Ministry of Information was established under John Reith. It was Reith's job to control the amount and nature of information the British people were allowed to have. Reith's ministry was involved in activities ranging from censoring soldiers' letters home to pushing the anti-German message in billboard posters and encouraging people to be careful what they said in case 'spies' might be listening. Censorship never developed to the extent that it did in Germany; Churchill believed it was better to tell the people the truth and his speeches are peppered with exhortations to face war's grim realities of 'blood, toil, tears and sweat'.

The BBC's fledgling television service was closed down on 1 September 1939. It was radio which was to be the key disseminator of government information and propaganda. The wireless became the focus of the nation, used in an inspiring manner by Churchill. At first radio broadcasts comprised sombre music and dour news bulletins. However, it became clear the people needed entertainment. Much of early 1940s humour, music and shows might seem quite corny by today's standards but they did much to maintain morale, a fact of which the government was well aware.¹

- Tommy Hanley's show "It's that man again" was a national favourite. The catchphrases from that show became part of the English language:
 - "Can I do you now sir?" – the refrain of Mrs Mopp
 - "Ta, Ta for now"
 - "I don't mind if I do" – Colonel Chinstrap's response to the offer of alcohol
- The BBC produced shows for workers such as "Workers' Playtime" and "Music while you work". These shows lasted long after the war.
- An Armed Forces Radio Network was established. This proved very popular, especially when major artists performed on it such as Gracie Fields and George Formby. Vera Lynn became known as 'the forces' sweetheart'. Her songs often contained a strong element of affection for England and were well received by soldiers fighting overseas. They included:
 - 'There'll be blue birds over the white cliffs of Dover'
 - 'We'll meet again'
 - 'There'll always be an England'.

As in the depression, cinema was a popular escape from the tribulations of daily life. 'Gone with the Wind' ran in cinemas for years, as did many other American films such as Walt Disney classics and Humphrey Bogart films. American music performers such as Bing Crosby and the Glen Miller Band were also very popular.

Exercise 11.1

Complete the following passage using the answers provided in the box below.

In 1939 war was greeted with _____ rather than the _____ of 1914. The government expected the country to be bombed immediately so child _____ were removed from the cities, everyone had to carry a _____ and _____ balloons floated over

¹ In Germany, Goebbels realised the same thing and ensured German radio had its share of music and comedy (see Chapter 12).

cities. The _____ was rigidly enforced to make the Luftwaffe’s job more difficult. _____ shelters were built to provide protection during bombing raids. The _____ expected during the Blitz never eventuated, in fact the British people showed enormous _____ and a strange sense of _____ in being able to stand the bombing. The government took on many extra powers. Men could be _____, Germans in England could be _____ and _____’s Ministry of Information had the power to _____ news. The main form of communication was _____ which did much to maintain British _____ thanks to _____’s humour and _____’s singing.

interned	editor	morale	barrage	Vera Lynn
resignation	conscripted	Reith	radio	Anderson
Tommy Hanley	enthusiasm	blackout	evacuees	pride
panic	gas mask	resilience		

Rationing

The Blitz was feared but it was the Battle of the Atlantic which posed the greatest threat to Britain’s survival during the war. Churchill had written to Roosevelt:

“It is in shipping and in the power to transport across the oceans...that the crunch of the whole war will be found.” ²

Richard Overy puts it this way:

“The Axis knew how much the oceans mattered, which is why they made such strenuous efforts to sever the arteries one way or another. By 1942, German submarines were sinking British ships faster than they could be replaced...” ³

Britain imported much of its food and so from the start of the war, the government paid great attention to food rationing. Petrol rationing started in 1939.

- Food rationing began in January 1940 for butter, bacon and sugar.
 - Over the coming months other foods were added to the ration list including meat (March 1940), tea (July 1940) and margarine, fats, jam (March 1941).
 - In December 1941 a points system was introduced which gave each person 16 points to ‘spend’ at any shop on the items they wanted.
- The Ministry of Food exhorted people to try substitute foods such as carrot tart, American Spam and whale meat.
- Eggs were rare as many chickens had been killed; the average egg ration was one egg a fortnight. From July 1942 dried eggs appeared.
- Full cream ‘National Dried Milk’ became available for small children. People were treated far better during the war years than during the depression and one of the ironies of the war was that health standards actually rose.
- The Minister of Food, Lord Woolton, initiated several schemes to deal with the food crisis:

² Overy, R, Why the Allies Won, Jonathan Cape, London, 1995, pp18

³ ibid, pp18-19

- people were exhorted to grow vegetables in 'victory gardens';
- his BBC program 'The Kitchen Front' promoted ideas for producing nutritious food with limited resources;
- propaganda was used to encourage economy and rely on home grown vegetables which were not rationed.
- Exotic products like chocolate became highly valued. Tobacco and alcohol were not rationed but trading hours were limited.

It was not only food that was rationed but also clothes. Clothes sold in shops lacked the pre-war frills and extravagances. People were encouraged to make their own clothes, recycle old garments, make clothes from blankets and used curtains. Nylon stockings were almost impossible to get (until the arrival of Americans GIs) and so women resorted to drawing a line up the back of their legs to give the impression of a stocking seam.

Life during the war had its privations. Not surprisingly there was a thriving black market for goods in short supply and many people survived by bartering goods. However, for all the hardships, most British people faced life stoically. The government had been largely successful in ensuring a degree of equality during the war years and so there was a feeling that everybody was 'mucking in'. A popular song of the war years was 'We must all stick together'.

The health of the nation

Over 4.6 million children were born during the war years. Despite wartime privations and the threat of German bombing, this proved to be the most healthy generation of Britons yet born. Between 1939 and 1945, infant mortality fell by 10%; maternal mortality fell by 40%. The government introduced a series of measures to improve the health of the nation:

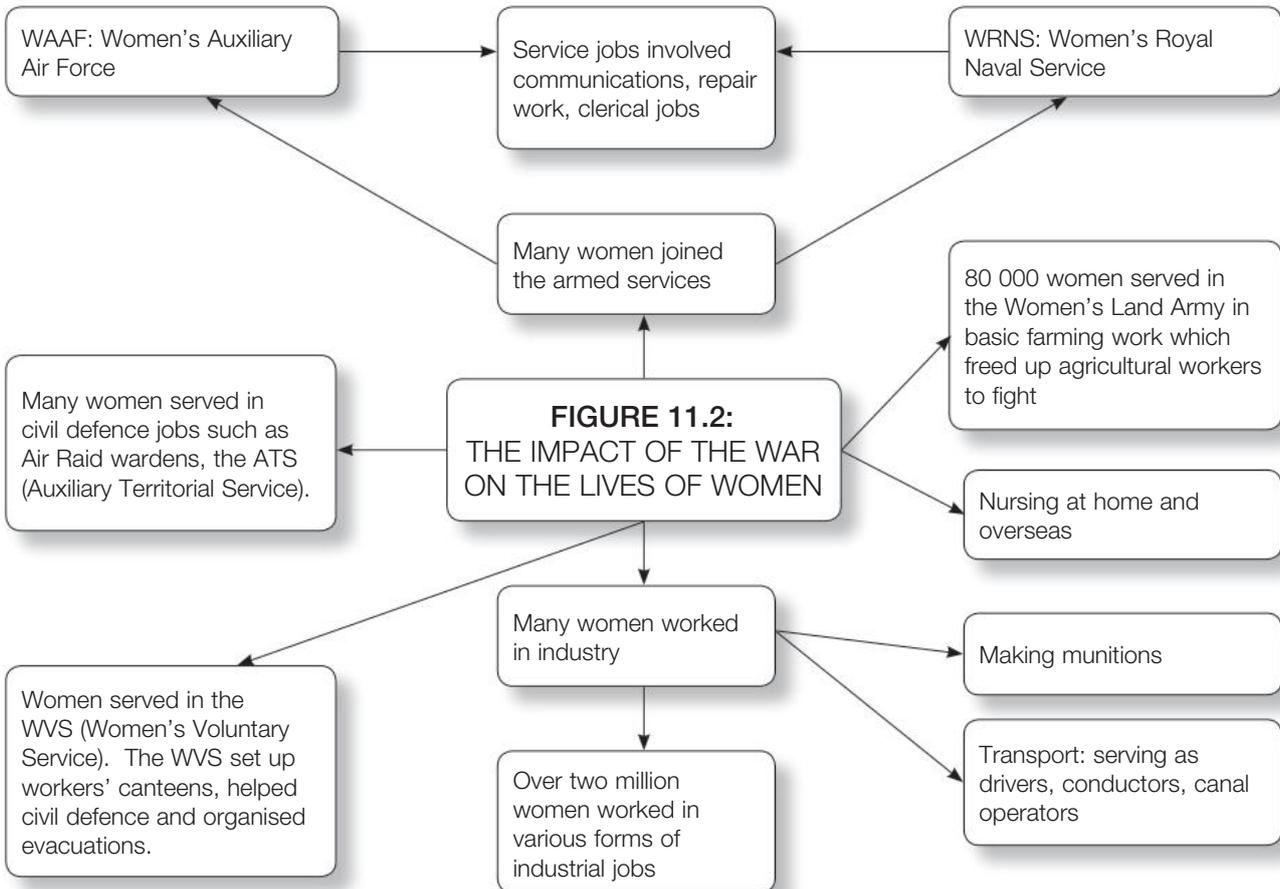
- Diphtheria immunisation was introduced. Deaths from this disease fell by 75% between 1938 and 1945.
- By September 1941, all school children received free milk, a scheme that lasted until the early 1970s;
- by 1945 half of all school children were receiving school meals.
- The Emergency Hospital Service widened the availability of medical services.

The Home Guard

During the 1960s, one of England's most popular television shows was 'Dad's Army'. This program took a light-hearted, yet affectionate look at Britain's wartime Home Guard. When the Home Guard was created in May 1940, then known as Local Defence Volunteers, it comprised a motley collection of boys and old men, often armed only with sticks and pikes. The name change came in July 1940. Under the command of General Ironside, the Home Guard had over 1.5 million members by 1942. By the end of the war, it had evolved into a decently trained and armed organisation. Its members were certainly prepared and willing to take on any German parachute landing even if a generation later their experiences were to become the topic of a television sit-com.

Women during the war

The war had a major impact on the lives of women. With millions of men in the armed services, women were needed to fill the gaps left by men. As well as jobs in industry, women were also recruited into the armed services. Figure 11.2 below summarises the effect the war had on female employment.



Social trends

Statistics can be misleading but Home Office figures from the time reveal some interesting trends during the war years.

- There was a dramatic fall in crime:
 - In 1939 there were 787 000 offences; in 1945 there were 467 000 offences. This was possibly due to increased surveillance of the population and the fact millions were absent in the armed forces.
 - Drunkenness in 1945 was 40% of the 1939 level. This might be caused by the government's restrictions on pub opening hours.
- The war years led to concern about moral standards:
 - there was an increase in promiscuity and premarital sex, not surprising considering many people could never be sure if they would be alive the next morning;
 - in 1939 there were 9970 divorce petitions filed; in 1945 there were 24 857;
 - in 1939 4989 divorce petitions were on the grounds of adultery; in 1945 the figure was 17 091;

- in the last year of war, over 70 000 illegitimate⁴ children were born.
- There were millions of American troops based in Britain during the war. The attitude of the British towards the Americans was similar to that of Australians at the time:
 - gratitude was felt as the presence of America in the war, it was believed, spelt the inevitable defeat of Nazi Germany (and Japan);
 - but there was also deep resentment as the Americans had more money, a smarter uniform and were “taking our women”;
 - violence between British and American soldiers was not uncommon;
 - a phrase of the time described the Americans as being “overpaid, oversexed and over here”;
 - by the end of the war 15 000 British women had married American servicemen.

The long-term social and economic effects

Churchill took over from Neville Chamberlain as Prime Minister on 10 May 1940 as it had become clear that Chamberlain had lost the confidence of parliament and the country. Churchill's cabinet and ministry contained Labour as well as Conservative ministers. During the war, Churchill often received more support from Labour members of parliament than he did from his own Conservative Party.

Churchill was Minister of Defence as well as Prime Minister. He wanted to keep control of military policy and believed that as a ‘former military man’, he could deal with the service leaders better than anyone else. Halifax remained as Foreign Minister until November 1940 when he was succeeded by Antony Eden. Eden's poor health and fervent admiration of Churchill, allowed Churchill to dominate foreign policy in the same way he dominated defence policy. This had two main results:

1. During the war, Churchill remained almost totally preoccupied with the military and diplomatic aspects of the war. This is hardly surprising and certainly not a criticism.
2. However, it meant that domestic affairs – social and economic policy, industrial relations and post-war planning - became the domain of the Labour ministers.

The main Labour members of Churchill's ministry were: Attlee (Labour leader and Deputy Prime Minister from February 1942), Greenwood (Minister without Portfolio), Dalton (Economic welfare), Morrison (Supply) and Bevin (Labour and National Security). It was Attlee, Morrison and Bevin who came to dominate domestic affairs. This had two main results:

1. The Labour Party was seen as the party for post-war reconstruction and reform. It was Labour Party championed policies for planning for the future.
2. In the General Election of 1945, Churchill was thrown out despite the gratitude the nation felt for him. His party was the party of the depression and the party of the appeasers.

Britain's wartime government put in place a series of ‘blue-prints’ for the future direction of Britain's society and economy.

⁴ The term ‘illegitimate’ is used deliberately. It reflects the feelings of the era.

- 1) The Beveridge Report was published in 1942 and proposed sweeping measures to improve the wellbeing of the British people and to ensure there would be no repetition of the suffering of the 1930s. The Beveridge Report offered a blueprint for Britain's future Welfare State. William Beveridge followed up his first report with 'Full Employment in a Free Society' in 1944. This report sought to ensure the mass unemployment of the 1930s would not be repeated in the post-war era.
- 2) In 1936, John Maynard Keynes published his 'General Theory of Employment, Money and Interest'. Keynes' thesis was that governments could manipulate the national economy and thus avoid a repeat of the depression. Keynesian economics would dominate the thinking of western governments for the next thirty years.
- 3 In 1944 came Richard Butler's 'Education Act'. The school leaving age was raised to 15, free milk, school meals and medical services became part of the work of Local Education Authorities. An '11 plus' examination would offer the chance for working class children to enter grammar schools.

Exercise 11.2

Read each of the following statements. Circle either the words THIS IS TRUE or THIS IS FALSE as it applies to the statement.

1. The development of the rationing system was a direct result of the fears caused by the Battle of the Atlantic.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
2. British people were generally panic-stricken and dissatisfied during the war years.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
3. Health standards, not surprisingly, dropped during the war years.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
4. The Home Guard developed into an effective civilian militia force.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
5. Women became a crucial element in the functioning of the British Home Front.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
6. Moral laxity became an issue of some concern to many in wartime Britain.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
7. Anglo-American relations remained good on the Home Front throughout the duration of the war.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
8. The Labour Party became a key element in Churchill's wartime government.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
9. Churchill lost the 1945 election because the British people were dissatisfied with his wartime leadership.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
10. It was clear that the suffering of the depression had been forgotten in Britain's plans for the post-war era.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE

What do the historians have to say about “The social and economic effects of the war on civilians in Britain”?

1. GDH Cole and Raymond Postgate: *The Common People*

Cole and Postgate examine the war years from a working-class perspective. Their assessment of the impact of the war is a positive one. Though human nature can never be ignored, Cole and Postgate argue that Britain really did approach the tasks of war in a united manner. Public interest tended to override private interest. Government legislation placed the burden of financing the war on those who could best afford it and the effort put into such things as the Home Guard and Air Raid Precaution Work tended to transcend social class.

*“...In the period that began with May 10, the history of the British common people cannot be separated from that of all the nation. The unity so frequently promised or appealed to in politicians’ speeches was for some time a reality...”*⁵

2. Arthur Marwick: *Great Britain – Society in Flux*

Marwick argues that the war brought about a social and economic revolution. He says that existing institutions were challenged by the needs of war and that when they were shown to be inadequate, they were changed; the hospital system was one example of this. The war needed the participation of the ‘lower classes’ and they benefited from this need by having services improved; an example of this would be the steady betterment of factory conditions. He further argues that the war produced a demand that post-war Britain had to be better than the Britain of mass unemployment and the means test of the 1930s; the work of Keynes and Beveridge is evidence of this.

*“...The struggle for civilian survival at home initiated lasting social changes. Experience of the Blitz, food shortages, and lack of clothing ensured that Great Britain emerged from this war a very different type of society, with a new emphasis on social equality.”*⁶

3. Alan Jenkins: *The Forties*

Jenkins provides detailed descriptions of ordinary people’s experiences in Britain during the war. In his chapter ‘Home Fires Burning’, he explains how ordinary people coped with the early demands placed on them from having to carry a gas mask to seeing one’s children evacuated to the country. The overriding experience of that time seemed to be of people willing to put up with the tribulations of war in that ‘typically, uncomplaining British manner’. When describing life during air raids he says:

*“...The shelter life now was normal for thousands of people...The word ‘togetherness’ had not yet been invented, but this was it...By Christmas 1941, thousands of Londoners were leading an astonishingly cheerful troglodyte existence underground...”*⁷

5 Cole, GDH and Postgate, R, *The Common People*, Methuen, London, 1961, p661

6 Marwick, A, *Great Britain: Society in Flux*, in Purnell’s *History of the 20th Century*, London, 1969, Volume 5, p1907

7 Jenkins, A, *The Forties*, Book Club Associates, London, 1977, p23

Chapter Twelve:

Social and economic effects of the war on civilians in Germany

The impact of World War II on civilians in Germany was catastrophic. The regime that had been in power since 1933 was utterly destroyed; in 1945 its leadership was either dead, imprisoned or in hiding. German cities lay in absolute ruins as Anglo-American bombs rained down on them and as Soviet artillery pounded them without respite. A discussion of the British home front considers genteel politics, post-war reform plans and gradual social change. A discussion of the German home front has to confront the death of tens of thousands in a single night, the complete absence of judicial procedure, concentration camps and marauding hordes of Soviet soldiers eager to rape any woman they find in the ruins of 1945 Berlin.

The early years of the war

The reaction of the German people to the outbreak of war in 1939 was quite different to that of 1914. As in most countries, Germans in 1914 were eager to fight, filled with romantic ideas of adventure, romance and patriotism.

- In 1939, the feeling was more one of foreboding.
- After so much foreign policy success in the 1930s and after the triumph of the Munich Conference, Germans did not expect to have to fight. Surely, there would be another Munich over Poland.

Early Blitzkrieg successes were indeed warmly welcomed in Germany, and Hitler's popularity was probably at its zenith in July 1940. However, the outpouring of emotion for Hitler seen in mass demonstrations in Berlin at that time represented relief on the part of the people, not a desire for further conquest.

Right-wing propaganda in Germany immediately after World War I tried to argue that Germany had lost the Great War because the German army had been 'stabbed in the back' at home. Hitler took this notion to heart and he believed that German failure in the First World War came because of the collapse on the Home Front. With this in mind, he paid very close attention to the Home Front.

- He was determined to maintain Home Front morale and it was his intention to maintain the normality of German life. Apart from a few basic rationing measures, it was very much 'business as usual' inside Germany:
 - there was no switch to total war production as occurred in the Soviet Union and Britain;
 - women were not rushed into the factories as Nazi ideology believed in separate spheres for men and women; women belonged in the home;
 - Goring said in June 1940 that he would not authorise the use of female labour because it would cause too much unrest.
- In September 1939 decrees were introduced removing paid holidays and time and a quarter pay for overtime and Sundays. In October a wage freeze was imposed.

- These measures received so much opposition that they were removed by December, so eager were the Nazis to keep the Home Front happy.
- The Euthanasia Policy was quickly dropped following strong opposition from the Catholic Church led by the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Munster, Cardinal von Galen.¹

In fact, for a variety of reasons, it was not until late in the war that the German people began to suffer on the Home Front. About 35% of Germany's food needs came from occupied areas and domestic agriculture was able to benefit from good weather and the use of foreign labourers. Families of men serving in the armed forces were looked after. The squeeze that had destroyed the German Home Front during the Great War did not occur in World War II. It was not until the very end that living conditions collapsed, and by then the war had been long lost.

Despite Hitler's concerns, morale was not a concern for the Nazis during the early part of the war. The swift defeat of Poland with relatively light casualties convinced most people of Hitler's continuing genius and the strength of the armed forces. During the phoney war, life was unaffected by the war. The rapid successes in the west from April to June 1940 further allayed any concerns people might have had. Goebbels had an easy time developing German wartime propaganda:

- all he had to do was to run the newsreel films that showed the Wehrmacht marching through Warsaw or Paris;
- war heroes were paraded through the streets.
- as in Britain, Goebbels realised the value of providing comedy and light entertainment on the radio and at the cinema.

However, Germany's early easy Blitzkrieg successes were not good for the Home Front or the longer-term war effort. It convinced the Nazis that there was no need for stringency at home. Germany could survive off the resources of the nations that it had conquered. As a result, laxity on the Home Front continued when common sense would have dictated that total war should have been introduced immediately.

Total War

However, by the end of 1942 the war was clearly not going in Germany's favour. Britain still resisted, the Afrika Korps had been defeated at El Alamein, the United States was now in the war and, worst of all, defeat was looming at Stalingrad. Against this background of military setbacks, Germany belatedly reverted to 'total war'.

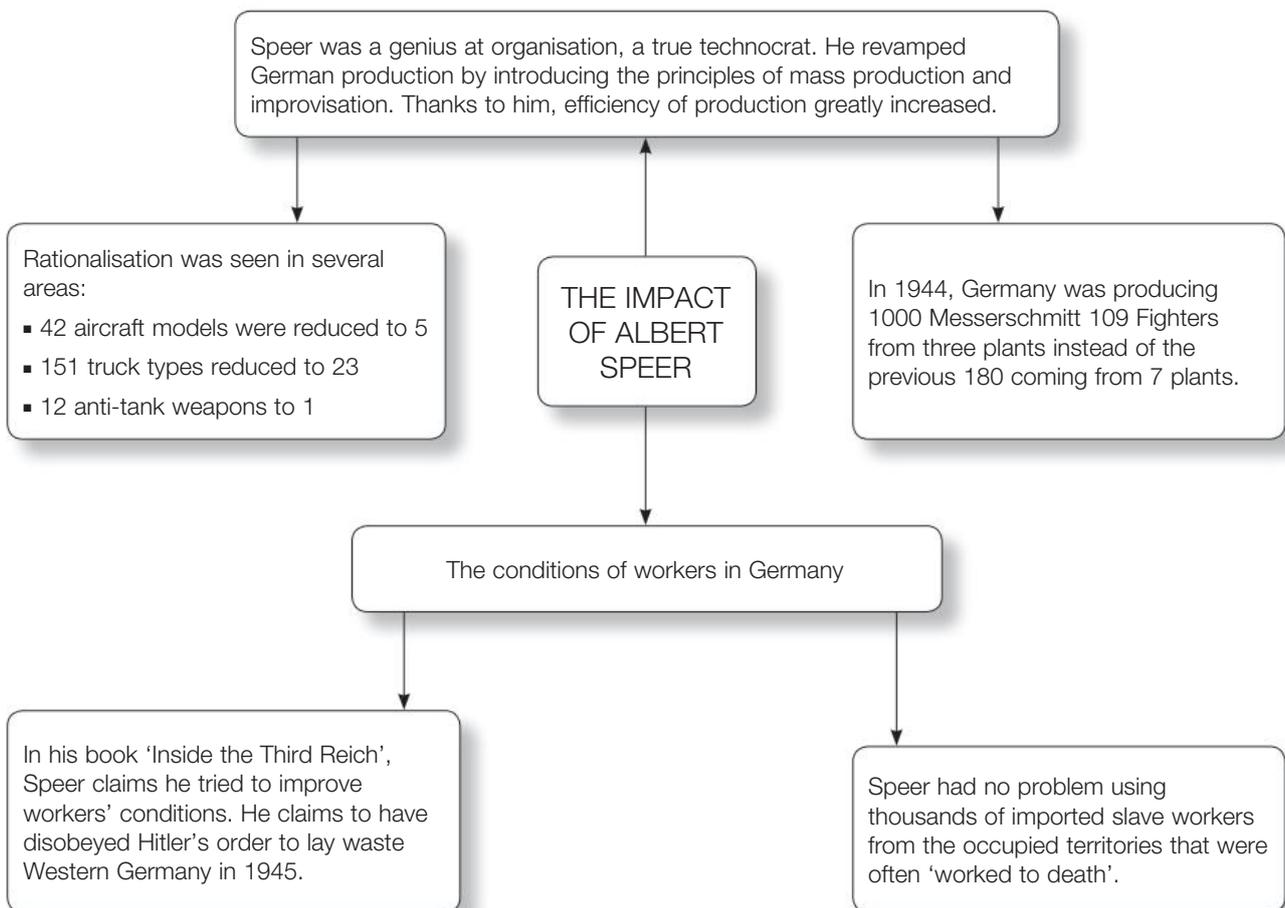
- On 18 February 1943, Goebbels announced this switch in a famous speech at the Berlin Sportpalast. "Total war means a shorter war" he said. From now on policy in all areas - economic, levels of repression, propaganda - became more extreme.
- During this period propaganda became far more strident.
 - The imagery used was more extreme and contained crude Jewish/ Slav/ Bolshevik caricatures.
 - The link with between the Jews and the Communists was emphasised.

¹ The Euthanasia policy was the practice of killing the handicapped and mentally ill. The policy resumed in 1942 (see Chapter 14 for more details).

- Atrocity stories were spread through the German media about Russian actions in the east and what was in store for the German people.
- In April 1943, Goebbels made much of the news that Soviet forces had massacred thousands of Polish officers at Katyn Wood in 1940.
- The January 1943 Casablanca Conference between Churchill and US President Roosevelt called for the ‘unconditional surrender’ of Germany before any peace talks could occur. Goebbels argued that this showed the allies intended treating Germany far worse than in 1919 and so German had no choice but to fight on to the bitter end.

The death of Fritz Todt, in February led to appointment of Albert Speer as the new Armaments Minister. Speer’s influence on the German war effort was to be enormous. Some historians have suggested his efforts added two years to the length of the war. Speer attempted to drag Germany into total war. He was not completely successful, but as Figure 12.1 below illustrates, the impact he made was significant.

Figure 12.1 Impact of Albert Speer on the German economy



Richard Overy comments on the impact Speer had on the German economy:

“...A remarkable amount was achieved in three years...The shift to mass production, though far from universal, brought an instant increase in efficiency...Industrialists now revelled in the freedom to work without the constant fear of military interference.”²

2 Overy, R, Why the Allies Won, Jonathan Cape, London, 1995, p204

Despite Albert Speer's efforts, wartime Nazi Germany was to be plagued with what he called 'an arthritic organisational' system. Red-tape and layers of bureaucracy still hindered production. On top of this was the incredibly decentralised nature of the regime. Contrary to popular belief, Nazi Germany was not a highly centralised system in which nothing happened without Hitler's word from the top. There were many centres of power in the regime, each trying to maximise their own power and build up their own 'empire'. These 'centres of power' included:

- The SS empire which was being developed by Heinrich Himmler and his deputy Heydrich. The SS ran the concentration camps, had their own schools, their own factories, own legal and judicial system. It even had its own army (the Waffen SS).
- There were 32 Gauleiters in Germany. A Gauleiter was a regional Nazi governor. These men were powerful, had access to Hitler and endeavoured to build up their own power, even to the point of hoarding badly needed supplies that the army needed.
- Goering tried to hang on to aircraft production long after his limitations had been clearly revealed.
- Adolf Eichmann had the job of organising the 'Final Solution',³ for this he commandeered railway stock even when it was needed by the army.
- Martin Bormann, who headed the Nazi Party Chancellery from May 1941 sought to develop his own power base. As the war continued, Bormann became Hitler's confidant and no access could be gained to the Fuhrer without going through Bormann. Bormann particularly disliked Speer.

Against all this rivalry and power play, Speer tried to direct the economy while the Wehrmacht tried to fight a war.

Exercise 12.1

Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

1. How did the German people respond to the outbreak of war in 1939?	
2. Explain Hitler's attitude towards the Home Front during the war.	
3. How responsive was Hitler to popular feeling in the early years of the war?	
4. What was the nature of early Nazi wartime propaganda?	

³ See Chapter 14

5. Why did Germany find it necessary to revert to total war by 1943?	
6. How had Nazi propaganda changed by the later part of the war?	
7. Why was Albert Speer so important to the Nazi economy during the war?	
8. What obstacles did Speer continue to face despite his successes?	
9. How was the Nazi regime structured?	
10. How did the Gauleiters affect the wartime economy?	

The allied bombing of Germany ⁴

After the war, there was much wringing of hands about the morality of the allied bombing of Germany. Mass aircraft formations carpet bombed entire towns. These tactics inevitably ensured that civilian casualties would be high. Bomber Command Chief Harris always defended his tactics and pointed out the risks that air crews faced on such missions. Regardless of the morality of allied bombing, it proved enormously effective in weakening the German war effort.

The German people had to face bombing on a scale that totally dwarfed that of the Blitz. During the period of the Blitz from September 1940 to May 1941, British civilian casualties amounted to about 43 000 dead. In late July 1943, Bomber Command launched 'Operation Gomorrah' against the city of Hamburg. The use of incendiaries whipped up fire storms which burnt everything in its path. The effect of the attack on Hamburg was enormous:

- Between 30 000 and 40 000 people died;
- Over 500 000 people were left homeless;
- 24 hospitals, 58 churches, 277 schools lay in ruins and over 50% of the city had been gutted. ⁵

Similar actions were taken against other German cities including Dresden in February 1945 and the Soviet attacks on Berlin in April/ May 1945.

The impact of allied bombing on the German economy was enormous. Much economic activity

⁴ This is dealt with in more detail in Chapter 8.

⁵ Figures from Kershaw, I, Hitler: 1936-45 Nemesis, Penguin, London, 2000, pp597-8

had to be dispersed from the major cities or was forced underground. This had the effect of placing definite limits on potential German output. In addition, there were other more specific effects:

- oil supplies reached critically low levels;
- chemical production was drastically reduced;
- the railway system was greatly disrupted.

Amazingly, German morale seemed to survive in most places until the end. It is unlikely this was the result of any affection for the regime, or even a case of patriotic fervour. More likely the German people realised that they had no choice but to stick it out to the end. Michael Burleigh suggests that the distance between the leadership and the people had become so great that people simply tried to survive. He says that the story of life on the Home Front was a story:

*“...of the progressive isolation of a leadership determined to go down in flames from an increasingly atomised civilian and military mass increasingly bent on personal survival. The latter literally lost faith, and had to confront a terrible inner emptiness.”*⁶

Repression and opposition

The German Home Front during World War II did not suffer the opposition or industrial disruption that it had experienced during the Great War. The critical difference of course was that Nazi Germany was a police-terror state. During the 1930s, Himmler's SS-police system was able to reach into every corner of Germany. All Germans knew that the price of opposition or even a careless comment could mean an early hours visit from the Gestapo or a spell in a concentration camp or worse. The war served to strengthen the power of the security forces.

- In September 1939, the Reich Central Security Office was set up under Heydrich. His job was to coordinate all police forces in the Reich and increase their efficiency.
- In September 1941, the 'Night and Fog Decree' was introduced. This gave the regime the power to arrest anyone and detain them without trial and at the same time deny any knowledge of such action. People would just disappear.
- The Nazis never hid the reality of the concentration camps from the German people. The opening of a camp had always been a front-page story. Between 1933 and 1945, Nazi records showed that over three million Germans spent some time in a concentration camp.
 - By 1945, there were 714 000 Germans in concentration camps for political crimes.
- All pretence at judicial procedure disappeared. The Gestapo and the SS were free to act as they saw fit. In 1942, Georg Thierack became Minister of Justice; his 'People's Court' became known for dispensing swift and brutal party justice.⁷
- Reports of the SD⁸ revealed that from 1943, many Germans were unhappy with the regime:
 - many were disillusioned and saw the war as a disaster;
 - there was disquiet at anti-Semitic policies;
 - Goebbels was no longer trusted and people listened to foreign broadcasts.

⁶ Burleigh, M, *The Third Reich*, Pan, London, 2001, p759

⁷ The 2006 German film "Sophie Scholl: The Final Days" portrays with great accuracy how the Nazi court system operated during the war.

⁸ The SD was the Intelligence Branch of the SS and under the leadership of Heydrich.

- Open opposition to the Nazi regime was limited to a small number of brave individuals. These included people such as:
 - Hans and Sophie Scholl who organised the White Rose resistance movement in Munich;
 - the left-wing Red Chapel group;
 - a small number of churchmen such as Pastors Niemoller and Bonhoeffer.
- Army opposition to the regime was seen during the unsuccessful July 1944 bomb plot on Hitler’s life led by Colonel Stauffenberg. The failure of this plot soon saw the conspirators rounded up and shot. Even stiffer repression now followed.

Exercise 12.2

Match each term or personality on the left, with the matching phrases given in the box below.

1	Total war	
2	Euthanasia	
3	Albert Speer	
4	Gauleiters	
5	Heydrich	
6	Martin Bormann	
7	Operation Gomorrah	
8	Night and Fog Decree	
9	Georg Thierack	
10	The White Rose Movement	

Hitler’s right-hand man from May 1941	Munich-based opposition movement
Head of the SD	Armaments Minister
Nazi regional governors	Minister of Justice
Nazi law to arrest and detain people	dedicating all resources to the war effort
The allied bombing of Hamburg	policy of killing handicapped people

What do the historians think about “the social and economic effects of the war on civilians in Germany”?

1. Richard Overy: *The Dictators – Hitler’s Germany Stalin’s Russia*

Overy challenges the point that is often made about women on the German Home Front. He argues that women had always made up a key part of the German labour force; in 1939 women comprised 37% of the workforce or 14 million workers. By the end of the war this figure was 51% and in agriculture reached 65%. There were many foreign female labourers working in Germany which helped to swell this figure. He further states that the number of women working in heavy industry doubled between 1939 and 1943. Overy says that there still exists:

*“...a popular myth that German women were not recruited to war work as they were in other warring powers, an assertion that rests largely on a statistical illusion. Women in Germany played a major part in keeping the war effort going...”*⁹

2. Martin Broszat: *The Nazis at War*

Broszat explains how due legal process totally disappeared inside Germany during the war. Up until 1942, the Justice Department had been run by Franz Gurtner of the DNVP¹⁰ until his death in January 1941 and then by his state secretary, Schlegelberger. Both had tried to maintain at least a semblance of justice. Any hope of this continuing ended with the appointment of Georg Thierack in August 1942.

*“...Thierack sought from the first a close understanding with Himmler and undertook on his behalf the sell-out of the legal system, for instance by his readiness to transfer some 10 000 state prisoners into SS concentration camps...”*¹¹

3. Michael Burleigh: *The Third Reich*

Burleigh comments on the impact of the war on German family structures. He argues that it led to an almost complete breakdown of the family system, at least in the short term. He comments that with fathers away at the war many wives looked elsewhere for sexual satisfaction while a generation of German fatherless children ran wild. Families which had earlier been spared conscription were increasingly being separated. The men would be sent to one district to work, children sent to another rural district while the women might be relocated somewhere else.

*“...This atomisation of the population into ever smaller ‘communities of fate’ continued beyond the end of the war, as did the progressive redefinition of the family, with neither wives nor adolescent children prepared to subordinate themselves to the returning father.”*¹²

⁹ Overy, R, *The Dictators: Hitler’s Germany Stalin’s Russia*, Penguin, London, 2004, p508

¹⁰ The DNVP was the German National People’s Party

¹¹ Broszat, M, *The Nazis at War*, in Purnell’s *History of the 20th Century*, London, 1969, Vol 5, p1885

¹² Burleigh, M, *The Third Reich*, Pan, London, 2001, p765

The current classic work on the German Home Front is Richard Evans' book: *The Third Reich At War*, (Penguin, London 2008). It is a lengthy and very highly detailed work, and most students would not read it in its entirety. However, it is certainly worth "dipping into". The section that follows uses some of Evans' ideas to explain what had happened to the nature of power in The Third Reich during the war.

At home, The Third Reich was becoming increasingly leaderless. The traditional bureaucracy did what it could in its usual dedicated manner but it dare not risk suggesting any policies on its own initiative. Nazi leaders were unable to see Hitler. Goebbels was reduced to sending Hitler briefing papers which of course were nearly always unread.

As the war continued, Hitler was failing to offer any leadership or direction in domestic affairs, and so government departments were being forced to issue decrees and directives. These were issued in their hundreds and done so without consultation between the various organs of government.



With no formal cabinet government, and with Hitler failing to offer direction, the government of the Third Reich had become more and more fragmented. Evans quotes Goebbels from his diary to illustrate this: "Everybody does and leaves undone what he pleases because there's no strong authority anywhere". (Evans, p 511)

The growing power of the party over the state was seen in Goebbels' growing power, especially in the economic area, Himmler's role as Interior Minister and the decision to increase the number Reich Defence Commissioners from 13 to 42 so their regions were identical to party regions. They used their power to bypass state civil organs and used their party staff and continued to strengthen their own local power bases.

The figure of Martin Bormann made things worse. Bormann was the Head of the Party Chancellery. He controlled access to Hitler, denying entry to civil servants and even to ministers. The head of the Civil Service, Lammers, complained in early 1945 that he had not spoken to Hitler for months.

Chapter Thirteen:

Social and economic effects of the war on civilians in the Soviet Union

Of all the nations that fought in World War II, arguably none suffered as much as the Soviet Union. In Nazi eyes the people of the Soviet Union were “*untermenschen*”, sub-human. Racial inferiors such as the Slavs of the Soviet Union did not merit treatment as human beings. Any actions were justifiable as far as the Nazis were concerned if it brought about the achievement of *lebensraum*. For the Soviet Union a Nazi victory in the war offered at best a future of slavery; for Russia’s Jewish population it offered no future at all. It is not surprising, therefore, that the war on the Eastern Front was so savage. For the Soviet people, the war really was a life and death struggle. Twenty million Russians would die during the war and the destruction heaped upon western Russia beggars belief.

Operation Barbarossa and its aftermath ¹

The Nazi onslaught against the Soviet Union in 1941 constituted the greatest invasion in history. Hitler threw over three million men into the fight across a 3200 km front. The Germans scored victory after victory until they were halted outside Moscow due to a combination of poor German planning, Soviet General Zhukov’s tactics and the freezing Russian winter. The Germans took up the offensive again in 1942 but were this time stopped at Stalingrad. After the Battle of Kursk in 1943, the German army lost the initiative on the Eastern Front and were gradually pushed westwards back into Germany. Wherever the German army went, the SS followed to inflict terror upon the Russian people.

Russia scored a tumultuous victory in what Soviet writers called “The Great Patriotic War” but this victory came at an enormous price. Stalin realised that the only two things the Soviet Union had going for it in 1941 were time and space – drag things out until the terrible Russian winter arrived.

- The German advance had to be delayed as long as possible.
 - Every action, no matter how small, if it slowed down the German army by only a few hours, was of value.
 - This meant that the Soviet Red Army continued actions at great human cost when a tactical retreat would have saved lives.
- When withdrawal did take place, the Red Army pursued a ‘scorched earth policy’.
 - Everything they left behind them had to be destroyed – homes, farms, livestock, cornfields, even the Dnieper Dam.
 - Nothing must be left which the Germans might be able to use.

The combination of German barbarity and the Soviet scorched earth policy was devastating. Human losses amounted to about 20 million. Various historians have endeavoured to calculate the extent of the death and destruction suffered by the Soviet Union. What follows are examples of a few of these efforts.

¹ The details of the Russian campaign can be found in Chapter 8

- Lionel Kochan² says that the war destroyed 17 000 towns, 70 000 villages, 31 000 factories, 84 000 schools, 64 000 kms of railway track and 45 million head of livestock. By 1945, 25 million people in western Russia had nothing to live in but wooden huts.
- David Christian³ estimates that during the first six months of the war alone, the Red Army lost over five million men. The territory which had been lost produced 60% of Soviet coal, iron and steel, and aluminium, and contained 40% of the country's railways. He suggests that the Soviet Union's industrial production had dropped to 50% of the level achieved in 1940.
- Helene Carrere D'Encausse⁴ adds that by late 1941, the Germans occupied territory which produced 84% of the nation's sugar supplies and 40% of its cereal production.

As **Moscow** came under direct attack, Muscovites prepared to defend their city. Thousands of civilians dug tank traps around the outskirts of the city. Buildings were sandbagged, a blackout imposed, barrage balloons appeared over the city and people slept in the Moscow underground to escape the bombing.

However, nowhere was the suffering of the Soviet people greater than during the "**Siege of Leningrad**". The German army laid siege to the city of Leningrad for almost 900 days from 8 September 1941 to 27 January 1944. Cut off from the rest of the country, apart from a winter lifeline across frozen Lake Ladoga, supplies of everything were always desperately short. Eventually bread was being baked that contained sawdust and there were stories of workers eating grease from factory bearings. Workers toiled in roofless factories as winter temperatures plummeted. It is estimated that up to 900 000 Leningraders died during the siege.

The economic impact of the war

Soviet industry was in a critical state following the German invasion. Apart from the losses listed above, other industrial areas were within range of German bombers. Stalin's solution to this problem was a mass migration eastward of factories, plant, machines and workers.

- The government moved over 1500 industrial enterprises eastwards beyond the Ural Mountains out of range of German bombers. Over ten million workers accompanied this move. Complete factories were stripped down, taken east and rebuilt.
- Conditions in the east were exceptionally tough. Soviet workers had to cope with a lack of food, freezing temperatures and 16-18 hour working days. Discipline was strict and workers were as much under orders as were soldiers at the front.

Yet despite the difficulties and the human suffering, the Soviet Union produced what can only be described as an economic miracle. Output from Soviet factories during the war included:

- over 135 000 aircraft
- almost 500 000 guns and 100 000 tanks.
- 3500 new industrial enterprises were built.

Soviet industry worked on the principles of simplicity and tight rationalisation, a total contrast to German industry before Speer took over. Avoidance of duplication and unnecessary variety were key elements in industrial planning.

2 Kochan, L, *The Making of Modern Russia*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1962, pp312-3

3 Christian, D, *Power and Privilege*, Pitman, Melbourne, 1986, p254

4 Carrere D'Encausse, H, *Stalin: Order Through Terror*, Longman, Harlow, 1981, p81

- Soviet industry produced only two types of tanks – the T34 and KV.
- Only five types of aircraft were produced: three fighters, one bomber and one fighter-bomber.
- Tank factories used giant presses rather than casts which speeded up production.

From the middle of 1942, Soviet industry was also helped with the inflow of aid from the United States under the Lend Lease Scheme. The Americans would lend the Soviet Union what it needed during the war; payment would come once the war was over.

Total War

The Soviet Union had a highly centralised, disciplined political system. During the 1930s, Stalin had removed any potential opposition to his rule during the purges. The secret police – the NKVD – kept tight control of the people and the Soviet Union had its own system of labour camps known as the Gulags. Such a system was ideal for dealing with the pressures the country was under during the war and for enforcing the superhuman exertions of the Soviet people. Total war meant more than just directing the nation’s economic resources and loyalties towards the war effort. People had to be convinced of the need to serve the nation.

However, what is clear is that the Soviet people did not need to be coerced into working for the war effort. There was a genuine outpouring of nationalism during the war. Stalin, reviled though he was in many parts of the country, was now being viewed as symbol of Russian resistance to a foreign invader.

- Stalin realised that in order to motivate the people to make great sacrifices, it would not be enough to call for the defence of socialism; instead, the people were defending ‘mother Russia’.
 - The whole tenor of Soviet propaganda changed during the war.
- Stalin had promoted atheism and churches were closed down and put to ‘more productive use’. However, during the war Stalin realised that it would not be a bad idea to have god on one’s side.
 - Consequently, state religious policy was turned on its head. If praying will get the Soviet Union’s people to work harder, then let them pray thought Stalin.

Soviet policies towards propaganda and religion are summarised in Figure 13.1 below.

Exercise 13.1

Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

1. What was the Nazi view of the Russian people?	
2. Why did Stalin pursue a ‘scorched earth policy’ during the German invasion?	

3. How badly damaged was Russia's economy by late 1941?	
4. What was the fate of Leningrad?	
5. How did the Soviet Union deal with its economic losses?	
6. What advantages did the Soviet system possess for wartime conditions?	
7. How did Soviet propaganda change during the war?	
8. What was the attitude of the Soviet regime towards religion during the war?	
9. What were the two main themes of Soviet propaganda during the war?	
10. How did Stalin figure in Soviet wartime propaganda?	

The Nationalities

The Soviet Union was a multi-national nation with the predominant national group being the Russians.⁵ However, the country also contained many non-Russian groups. These included: Georgians, Ukrainians, Kazakhs, Estonians and a host of others. Soviet policy towards the nationalities had been harsh as Stalin had pursued a policy of Russification during the 1930s. The Ukraine in particular had suffered enormously under Stalin during the collectivisation of agriculture. He attempted to have all signs of national Ukrainian identity eliminated.⁶

Not surprisingly Stalin was concerned about these groups' loyalties towards the Soviet Union when the Germans invaded. Indeed, in some areas the Germans were welcomed. German treatment of these groups quickly proved to be as savage as it was towards ordinary Russians and the nationalities soon saw Stalin as the lesser evil to Hitler.

Nevertheless, Soviet policy towards the nationalities remained harsh.

- Germans living in Leningrad and other cities were quickly deported to the east.
- When the Red Army liberated areas that had been taken by the Germans, Stalin ordered the deportation east of entire national groups, not just those who might have collaborated with the Germans.

⁵ This is why historians often use the terms Soviet Union and Russia interchangeably, even though this is not strictly accurate.

⁶ Ukrainians use the term "Holodomor" – extermination by hunger – to describe the Soviet man-made famine in the Ukraine in 1932-33 which killed millions.

- Deported groups included: the Kalmyks in December 1943, the Chechens and Ingushis in February 1944, Crimean Tatars in June 1944.
- The Crimean Tatars were rehabilitated in 1967 but were not allowed to return to their homeland until 1988.
- They were sent to places in the east such as Kazakhstan Uzbekistan, Kirgizia and Siberia.

The effect of the war on the Communist Party

The Communist Party changed during the Great Patriotic War. Between 1941 and 1945, there was a great increase in party membership: five million new candidate members and three and half million new full members; the vast majority of these served in the army or navy.

- By the end of the war, half of the Communist Party membership was in the armed forces.
- The military element within the party had been modest before 1941.

During the war the party took on many additional crucial tasks in the civil, economic and military areas. However, there was a key change.

- Before the war, one's background was of importance and one's 'proletarian consciousness' mattered when it came to party membership.
- However, what mattered now were talent and an ability to get the job done. Social background was irrelevant.
 - During the war over 40% of new members came from the intelligentsia.
- Party members with technical skills were held back from the army; many were sent east of the Urals to organise the new factories.

The extremities of the wartime experience established a close bond between the newer members and the party, much stronger than that felt by members who had joined before the war.

Partisan groups, bands of irregular guerrilla fighters, fought the Germans, often behind enemy lines. Only about 7-8% of these were party members. At one stage partisan groups occupied up to the 10% of German forces. Some of the partisan groups remained beyond state control for years after the war.

What do the historians have to say about “the social and economic effects of the war on civilians in the Soviet Union”?

1. Isaac Deutscher: *Stalin*

Deutscher suggests that one of the most significant developments inside the Soviet Union during the war was the upsurge of nationalism. He argues that this was largely spontaneous as the Soviet people reacted with both anger and pride as news filtered back about the treatment of their countrymen by the Germans. Nazi racist propaganda which depicted the Russian people as racial inferiors intensified these feelings. There was also a sense of pride, says Deutscher, felt by the people because of their sense of isolation, as they seemed to be fighting Hitler alone as the west continually delayed a second front. However, Deutscher also points out that Stalin also manipulated the situation.

*“...Stalin artificially boosted the nationalist emotion as a matter of policy..Hosts of propagandists followed him with a grotesquely immoderate glorification of Russia’s imperial past...”*⁷

2. Helene Carrere D’ Encausse: *Stalin – Order Through Terror*

Carrere D’ Encausse describes the incredible hardships which were faced by the workers who were forced to move east. Apart from the obvious difficulties of the operation, there was also the problem of frequent German bombing raids and the terrible climate. Once they had arrived in the east, life was dire and everybody had to cope with the most primitive conditions. Yet, despite all this Soviet industrial production was able to take off again in 1942.

*“...The recovery of production was largely due to the almost superhuman effort of the civilians, especially of the women who almost everywhere took the place of the men who were called up.”*⁸

3. Richard Overy: *Why the Allies Won*

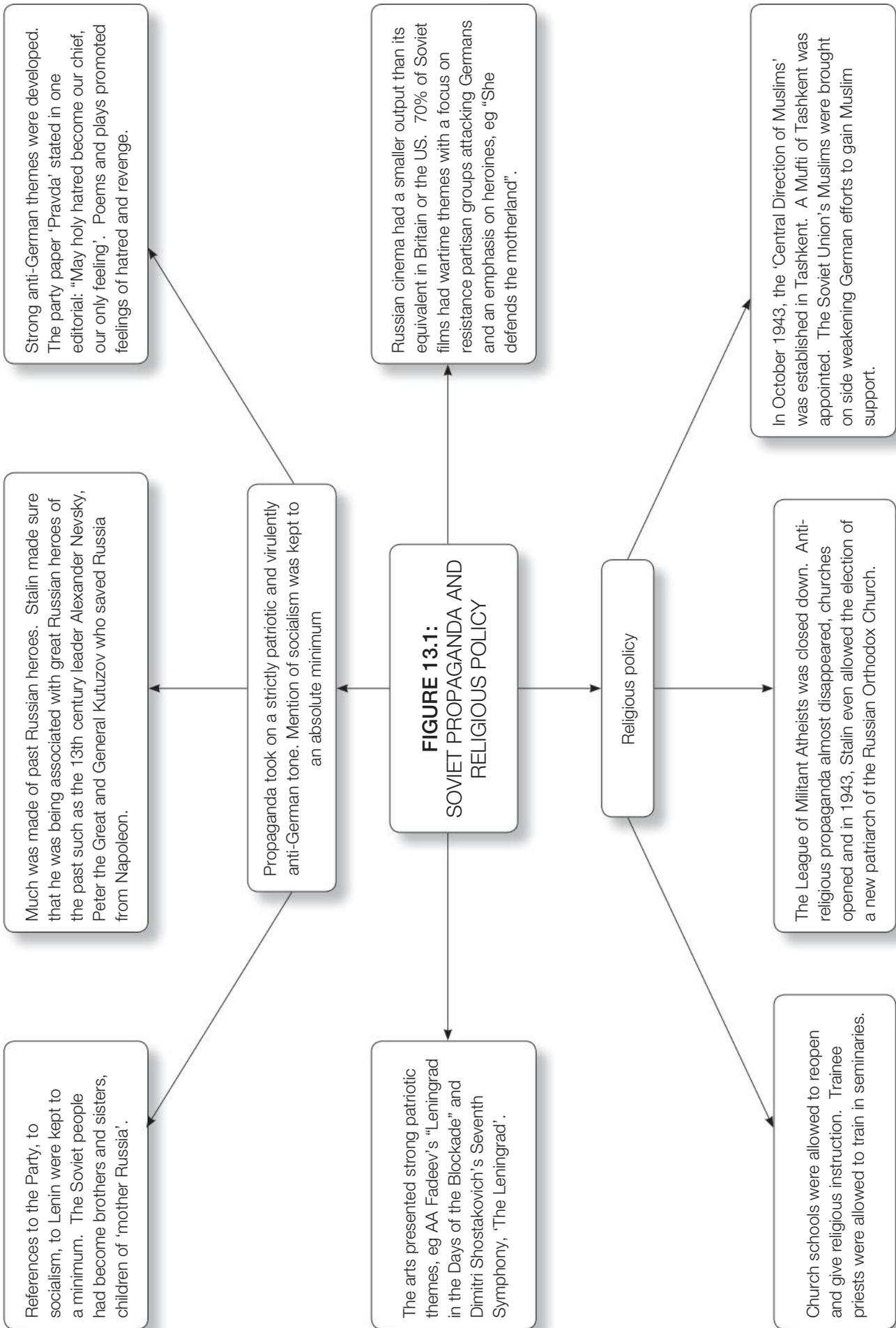
Overy paints a grim picture of civilian life during the Great Patriotic War. The Soviet Union experienced what he calls ‘deep war’ as Stalin endeavoured to turn the country into a single war camp. Working conditions were tough and discipline was strict. There were punishments for lateness and absenteeism which could even mean a spell in a labour camp, though Overy wryly suggests that for most workers conditions inside and outside of the camps were increasingly difficult to distinguish. Food in particular was a major problem. Rations for Soviet workers were about a quarter those of a German worker, a fifth that of a British worker yet the Soviet work day was far longer and harder to endure. The costs were high:

*“...for the Soviet people as they struggled to come to terms with life in an economy where there was little left over for civilians once the forces were equipped and fed. Theirs was an exceptional, brutal form of total war.”*⁹

⁷ Deutscher, I, *Stalin*, Pelican, Harmondsworth, 1966, p475

⁸ Carrere D’ Encausse, H, *Stalin: Order Through Terror*, Longman, Harlow, 1981, p88

⁹ Overy, R, *Why the Allies Won*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1995, p190



Chapter Fourteen:

The nature and effect of the Holocaust in the Nazi-occupied territories

The term 'the Holocaust' is used to denote the systematic attempt by the Nazis to exterminate the Jewish race in Europe.

Hitler's war was like no other that had ever occurred in Europe. It is not just the scale of the conflict or the massive loss of life or the advanced technology that made the conflict in Europe so different. Hitler's war was a racial war. It had deep ideological aims. Past conflicts had been fought to gain control of land and economic resources, to unite national groups or to seek revenge. All these elements were present in World War II. However, for the Nazis they were always only a means to an end. From the start, Hitler's goal had been the achievement of 'lebensraum' in the east and the creation of a German empire peopled by racially pure Aryans who would be served by a slave force of Slavic 'untermenschen'. There was to be no room for the Jews or other undesirable groups in this new world.

Nazi thinking

Nazi ideology ¹ was based on a Darwinist approach to race. Darwin believed that the development of life on earth was a process of evolution in which species survived that were able to adapt to their environment, ie the fittest survived. In the late nineteenth century, this idea was applied to 'the rise and fall of nations' and became known as Social Darwinism.

- Nations succeeded in history because they contained superior human beings who had produced a superior culture to lesser nations.
- Thus, race became the key to understanding history.
 - Just as species were involved in a struggle for the survival of the fittest, so too were nations.
- This thinking meant that there had to be a superior race of people and equally it implied the existence of inferior races.
 - For Hitler and his followers, the Aryan race was the supreme race.
- The combining of Aryan racial stock and Germanic culture convinced Hitler that Germany was destined to lead the world.
 - With Hitler leading the nation, a Germanic empire in the east would be created for a German population that would reach 250 million by the end of the century. Here is the origin of the idea of lebensraum.

However, in order for the Aryan race to succeed in its historical mission, it was essential that the Aryan blood stock be kept pure.

- The reason previous nations had fallen was because of the pollution of the racial stock.
- It was the duty of all Germans to maintain the purity of the Aryan race. Nothing must be allowed to soil the blood and potential impurities had to be squeezed out and ultimately destroyed.

¹ See Chapter 5

What might constitute such impurities? Gradually, Nazi policies developed to identify several. They included:

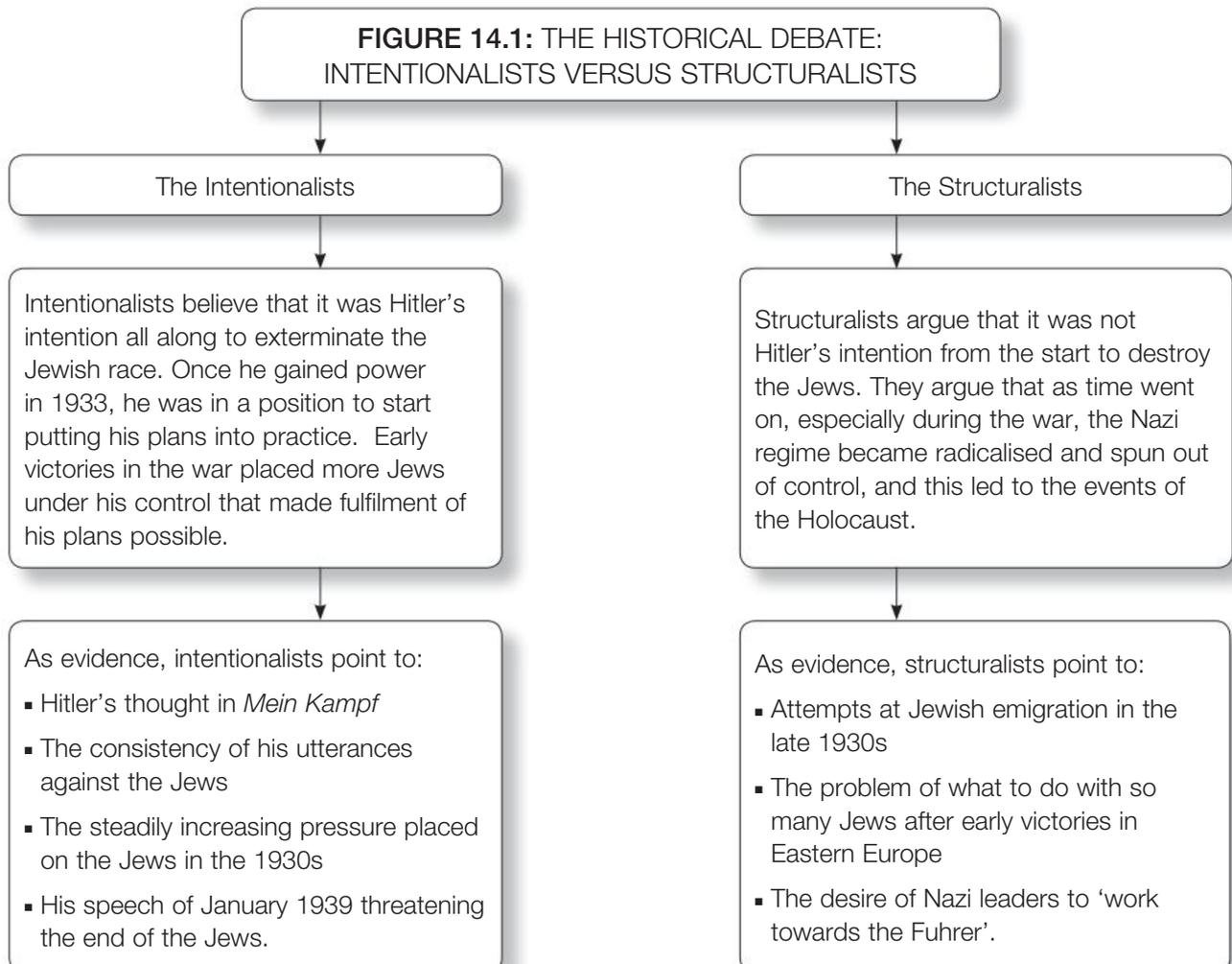
- non-Aryan racial types such as Slavic people and Gypsies;
- handicapped people and the mentally ill;
- homosexuals and other social “deviants”.
- Above all, the greatest threat to the purity of the Aryan blood stock was the Jew!

How was the purity of the race to be achieved so that the Aryan race could seize the destiny that history had laid out for it?

The historical debate

Hindsight would suggest that the solution to the problem facing the Nazis of maintaining racial purity was to destroy the impurities. Root them out, separate them from the master race and then destroy them forever. This, it would seem, is the essence of the Holocaust: perverted science and inherent racist thinking combining in Nazi ideology to bring about the systematic destruction of the Jews in Europe, along with other threatening minorities.

However, historians are not agreed on this. Figure 14.1 below summarises part of the historical debate concerning the origin of the Holocaust.



The development of anti-Semitic policies in pre-war Germany ²

Anti-Semitism is an irrational and often violent hatred of Jews and all things Jewish. It was not a new phenomenon; anti-Semitism had been a feature of European history for two thousand years. Many reasons have been suggested for the development of anti-Semitism:

- The Jews were 'Christ-killers' and so any persecution of them was justified in Christian eyes because they were responsible for crucifying Christ.
- Following the Roman expulsion of the Jews from Palestine in AD 70, Jews eventually sought refuge in a range of lands across Europe, the Middle East and North Africa;
 - in some countries Jews gradually assimilated;
 - in others they retained a geographical, religious and cultural separateness.
- In some countries Jews were excluded from certain activities.
 - These included the church (obviously), the army and politics.
 - For centuries the only area of life in which Jews could participate was commerce. This partly explains the stereotype that evolved of the scheming, miserly Jewish money lender.
 - Shakespeare's 'The Merchant of Venice' constitutes a classic piece of anti-Semitic literature.
- Jewish separateness made them easy scapegoats. Over the centuries Jews would be blamed for everything from the disappearance of a small child, to the Black Death, to Germany's defeat in WWI.

Thus, Hitler and the Nazis did not invent anti-Semitism. It existed all across Europe and was being strongly promoted in the late 19th and early 20th century. In 1905 a pamphlet was produced (still dragged up today) called "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" which purported to show that there existed a Jewish conspiracy to take over the world.

It was a tragic irony that it was in Germany at the start of the 20th century where Jewish people had the best chance to live lives free of persecution.

Hitler's electoral support rose steadily during the early 1930s, reaching 37% by July 1932. However, there is little indication that his anti-Semitism was the reason so many Germans voted Nazi. More likely it was a feeling of desperation caused by the depression and a belief that the Nazis offered some hope for the future. However, once in power, the Nazis began to introduce a series of anti-Semitic measures.

- At first anti-Jewish measures caused inconvenience and were humiliating rather than life-threatening, eg Jews might be excluded from parks and buses.
- Gradually Jews were excluded from the professions, eg medicine, education.
- The 1935 Nuremberg Laws denied Jews German citizenship and forbade marital or sexual relations between Aryans and Jews.
- In November 1938 Jews all across Germany were attacked in a government organised pogrom that became known as Kristallnacht (The Night of Broken Glass). Thousands were rounded up and sent to concentration camps. Many Jews tried to flee Germany at this time – if they could.

² For more detail on Nazi Racial policy in the 1930s, see: Webb, K, Power and Authority in the Modern World 1919-1946, Get Smart Education, Mona Vale, 2018, Chapter 15

In January 1939, Hitler openly threatened the Jews when he said: *“If the international Jewish financiers...succeed in plunging the nations into a world war...then the result will (be)..the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.”*

Moving towards the Holocaust

Actions targeting Jews were implemented within weeks of the beginning of the war. The conquest of **Poland** presented the Nazis with the issue of what to do with Poland’s estimated three million Jews.

- In November 1939 it was made compulsory for Polish Jews to wear the yellow Star of David. Failure to do so brought harsh punishments.
- A month earlier Jews from Austria and Moravia were being sent to Poland.
- The ‘General Government’ area of Poland (see Chapter 7) was run by Hans Frank. Here, SS killing groups, known as Einsatzgruppen, and some army units had murdered about 15 000 Polish Jews by December 1939.

In 1940, medieval-style **ghettos** were set up in Polish cities such as Lodz and Warsaw. The purpose of these ghettos was to separate the Jewish from the non-Jewish population.

- Conditions in the ghettos were atrocious. Thousands of people were crammed into very small areas; the Warsaw Ghetto contained 450 000 people. The Warsaw ghetto was split by a road so a bridge was built to link the two halves.
 - In 1943 a Jewish protest rising in the Warsaw Ghetto was brutally suppressed. Survivors were marched off to concentration camps.
- Living conditions were horrific, food supplies were poor, medical facilities non-existent and thousands died from starvation and disease.

German successes in western Europe brought Jews there under Nazi control though numbers were smaller than in eastern Europe. Many would be sent to the death camps in the east. The Vichy regime in **France**, passed its own anti-Semitic laws and set up a Ministry of Jewish Affairs in March 1941. In July 1942, 13 000 Parisian Jews, including 4000 children, were rounded up by French police and herded into a cycling stadium, the Vélodrome d’ Hiver. They nearly all died in Nazi death or concentration camps.

In June 1941 Germany invaded Russia in **Operation Barbarossa**. Early German victories were spectacular and a vast area of Russian territory soon came under German control. These western regions of Russia were inhabited by millions of Jewish people. The German army was followed by SS units called ‘Einsatzgruppen’. The Einsatzgruppen were killing squads; their purpose was to seek out Jews and kill them. Throughout the second half of 1941, tens of thousands of Jewish people were systematically murdered by SS Einsatzgruppen. On one occasion in September, 33 000 people were killed in one ‘action’ at Babi Yar near Kiev. The Nazis were often assisted by some of the local non-Jewish population.

However, the shooting activities of the Einsatzgruppen were inefficient, time-consuming and ‘distressing’ for those taking part. Another method had to be found to deal with the enormous ‘Jewish problem’ facing the Nazis.

- On 31 July 1941 Goering requested that Heydrich present a plan which would 'bring about a complete solution of the Jewish question within the German sphere of influence in Europe'. When under interrogation at Nuremberg after the war, Goering claimed he was acting under Hitler's orders.
- Before the end of 1941, the Nazis had begun experimenting with various gassing techniques.
 - Sealed trucks crammed with prisoners were filled with carbon monoxide.
 - At Chelmno and Belzec concentration camps, a series of poisonous gasses were being tested.
- In January 1942, a group of top party and civil officials met Heydrich in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee. Here it was decided to 'seek a final solution' to the Jewish problem: gas all the Jews in Europe.
 - Blueprints were made for the design of gas chambers and crematoria, lists drawn up of how many Jews were to be exterminated in each country.
 - Some of Germany's top industrial firms were involved in this.
- In 1942, extermination camps were built in Poland at Sobibor, Belzec and Treblinka. Jews were later deported to new and larger camps such as Auschwitz-Birkenau and Majdanek. This deportation was euphemistically referred to as 'resettlement'.
- By the middle of 1943, the death camps were in full swing.

The Final Solution

Jews from all over Europe were being shipped to the death camps throughout 1943 and 1944. Often it was done at the point of a gun as happened to the Jews who were cleared out of the eastern ghettos. Jews from occupied western Europe sometimes actually paid for their fares to the east believing that they were being 'resettled'. The order of who should go first was often decided by the Jews' own leaders.

However, the normal manner was for the Jews to be herded onto cattle trucks. These trucks would be sealed, crowded, stifling in summer and freezing in winter. Trainloads of these cattle trucks might take days to reach a place like Auschwitz.

- On arrival they would be met by screaming SS guards ordering them out of the trucks; the bodies of those already dead would have to be removed first.
- Lined up, they would receive a cursory examination from an SS doctor.
 - If the 'doctor' believed they could work – the young, the strong, the healthy - he would gesture them to one side; they had been selected to work. They would be worked to death.
 - If the doctor deemed them unable to work – the old, the sick, the lame, pregnant mothers – they would be sent a different way. These people would be gassed immediately.

Forced to undress, they would be ordered to line up and take their turn in the delousing shower. When it was their turn they would be herded into a 'shower', sometimes hundreds at a time and the door would be sealed. Small children were sometimes tossed in over people's

heads. In the roof of each gas chamber was a small metal grill. Through this opening would be dropped pellets of Zyklon B gas (prussic acid). The grill was closed and the gas was left to do its work. After about fifteen minutes, when the screaming had ended, the door would be opened and Jewish 'volunteer prisoners' would have the job of extracting the bodies from the chamber. Often, they would be a tangled mass of bodies as each had tried to escape the rising deadly gas. The bodies were then taken to crematoria where they would be incinerated.

Once it became apparent that the war was lost, the SS stepped up the process of killing. Adolf Eichmann ensured that valuable resources were made available for shipping Jews to the death camps instead of being used for the army. In May and June 1944 alone, half a million Hungarian Jews were deported. By the end of the war, the Nazis had murdered over six million Jews.

The camps were run in a very efficient, businesslike manner. Nothing was allowed to go to waste; recycling became an end in itself.

- The gold fillings and any remaining jewellery were extracted from the bodies.
- Human hair was shaved off and kept. In Auschwitz today, it is possible to see a large room crammed with the remains of the hair of camp victims.
- Similarly, all possessions were kept for reuse. Again, in Auschwitz, it is possible to view thousands of old suitcases, spectacles and even prosthetic limbs. The Nazis did not want anything to go to waste.

As well as being centres of death and slavery, the camps in the east had another function. Perverted medical science was given free rein as 'doctors' such as Josef Mengele, known as the 'angel of death', performed medical experiments on prisoners. They might be injected with diseases in order to trace the progress of infection, be subjected to intense cold or intense air pressure. Mengele also selected twins and would experiment on one while leaving the other alone.³

Exercise 14.1

Examine the following statements carefully.

Rewrite them in the space provided in a logical order that gives a clear understanding of the events surrounding the Holocaust.

When the Russian campaign began, Einsatzgruppen death squads hunted down Jews and killed them. These Darwinist ideas were applied to nations and races and led to Hitler's ideas on Aryan racial superiority. Over six million Jews were killed during the war. Hitler's ideas combined with a centuries' long tradition of anti-Semitism to cause the growing persecution of the Jews of Germany in the 1930s. Eventually, the Nazi leadership decided to gas the Jews of Europe in death camps built for the purpose. Nazi ideology was firmly rooted in Darwinist notions of selection and the survival of the fittest. The outbreak of war led to many more Jews coming under Nazi control. In Poland they were rounded up into ghettos.

³ The Japanese carried out similar experiments on Chinese and Korean prisoners in their Unit 731 based in Manchuria.

The persecution of minorities

Though the Jews were the principal victims of the Nazis' barbarism, they were not the only victims. There were many minorities that did not fit in with the Nazi vision of a racially pure and perfect future. People who had no place in a Nazi future included gypsies, homosexuals, the mentally ill, the handicapped, people who suffered forms of social deviancy like alcoholics or vagrants.

- Gypsies were viewed very poorly by the Nazis.
 - For a start they were not racially German and so there was always a danger of racial pollution. Their itinerant lifestyle was unproductive and anti-social.
 - Gypsies did not fit into the Nazi ideal of Volksgemeinschaft.⁴
 - Once Poland had been conquered, most of Germany's 30 000 Gypsies were sent to the newly established camps there. Later on, Gypsies from other conquered territories were rounded up.
 - By 1945 the Nazis had murdered over 200 000 Gypsies.
- The Nazis put much effort into identifying homosexuals and the criminal code contained severe penalties for being a homosexual.
 - Over 15 000 German homosexuals were sent to the camps.
 - Once there they became easy targets as they were forced to wear a pink triangle. Both guards and inmates targeted them, such was the prejudice of the time against them.
 - Ironically many Nazis were themselves homosexual, including the former SA leader Ernst Rohm and many of the SA leadership.
 - Homosexuality allegations were often used as means of discrediting opponents, eg Rohm in 1934 and General Fritsch in 1938.
 - Michael Burleigh suggests that one of the reasons for the antagonistic attitude towards homosexuality was simply biology – homosexuals do not breed.

*"...This explains why the Gestapo agency responsible for their repression coupled homosexuality and abortion, since both had deleterious effects on the birth rate."*⁵

⁴ Volksgemeinschaft roughly means 'People's Community', the Nazi ideal of all Germans living in a racially pure, classless society.

⁵ Burleigh, M, *The Third Reich*, Pan, London, 2001, p233

- Estimates of how many homosexuals were murdered vary from 10 000 to 600 000. Calculation is difficult as homosexuals might be Jewish or Communist, and so be classified by the Nazis that way.
- The mentally ill and the handicapped were also targeted from 1939 in what became known as the euthanasia program. Such people clearly did not fit the image of the future pure and perfect Nazi empire.
 - The extermination program for these people was referred to as Operation T4.
 - They would be rounded up and taken to one of six special facilities throughout Germany and gassed using pure carbon monoxide gas.
 - The procedure was stopped temporarily after objection from the Catholic Church but was recommenced in 1942.
 - By the end of the war, up to 275 000 handicapped and mentally ill people had been killed.

Exercise 14.2

Using the terms in the box below, complete the passage below.

There were other groups beside the _____ who were subjected to Nazi _____. One group was the Gypsies who were despised by the Nazis for their anti-social _____ and the fact that they clearly did not fit into the _____. Up to _____ Gypsies were killed. In order to keep the race fit and healthy the _____ ill and the handicapped were also removed in what was known as _____. By 1945, up to _____ of these people had been killed. Homosexuals were also targeted which was _____ as so many Nazi figures were homosexual. Anti-social elements such as alcoholics and _____ were also targeted by the Nazis.

275 000	Jews	vagrants	Volksgemeinschaft
persecution	200 000	Operation T4	lifestyle
mentally	ironic		

What do the historians have to say about “Nazi racial policies: The Holocaust and the persecution of minorities”?

1. William S Shirer: The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich

Shirer explains the nature of the Nazi ‘new order’ in Europe. The resources of Nazi-ruled Europe would be exploited for the benefit of Germany and the industries of the east would be dismantled and taken back to Germany. Slavs would provide a slave force for the master race. Slavic culture would be gradually eliminated and Slav slave workers would of course not be given an education. Himmler stated that what happened to a

Russian or a Czech was a matter of complete indifference to him. Undesirable elements would be exterminated.

*“...The Jews and the Slavic peoples were the Untermenschen – subhumans. To Hitler they had no right to live, except as some of them, among the Slavs, might be needed to toil in the fields and the mines as slaves of their German masters.”*⁶

2. Israel Gutman: *The Darkest Hour*

Israel Gutman endeavours to provide some idea of what daily life was like for the inmates of Auschwitz concentration camp. He makes the point that on arrival a prisoner was completely stripped – not just of clothes and possessions but also of identity. All body hair was removed and a number tattooed onto the left arm. Home became a block, and one's bed comprised a three-tier bunk with some straw as a mattress. Prisoners wore striped camp fatigues and each wore an identifying tag which categorised them – yellow star of David for Jews, black triangles for asocials. He says it is almost impossible to describe what it must have been like in the camps.

*“...Everyday was filled with unbearable tension...emotional turmoil and terror...All energy went into (avoiding) ...beatings... and the constant threat of being sent to the gas chambers, either for some ‘misdemeanour’ or because of illness or weakness...”*⁷

3. Ian Kershaw: *Hitler – 1936-45: Nemesis*

Kershaw shows that an environment was created in Nazi circles which clearly showed what fate was in store for the Jews. Hitler had given general views about the fate of the Jews in his speech of January 1939. Goebbels had written an article for the quality newspaper *Das Reich* in which he explained the country was experiencing the fulfilment of Hitler's prophecy about the annihilations of the Jews. This article was widely circulated amongst troops on the eastern front. No specific order was given to exterminate the Jews, but Kershaw suggests the lower levels of the Nazi organisation were eager to bring about what they believed was the Fuhrer's wish.

*“...Hitler had raised hopes which encouraged pressure for radical action from his subordinates. That the hope could be fulfilled less easily than anticipated then simply fanned the flames, encouraging the frantic quest for an ultimate solution...”*⁸

4. Kazimierz Smolen: *Auschwitz 1940-45 – Guide book through the museum*

Smolen's work was written to assist visitors as they wandered around the surviving complex at Auschwitz. In one section he describes what it was like for women and children, commenting on the almost impossible chance of healthy birth within the camp. Infants would be allowed to live at SS discretion and would have their numbers tattooed on their buttocks because their wrists were too small. Few infants survived for more than

⁶ Shirer, W, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, Pan, London, 1964, p116

⁷ Gutman, I, *The Darkest Hour*, *The Australian*, 24 January, 1995, p9

⁸ Kershaw, I, *Hitler: 1936-45 – Nemesis*, Penguin, London, 2000, pp482-3

a couple of weeks. He comments that in the early period of the camp, pregnant women and children were sent to the gas chambers immediately. He later quotes a camp survivor who witnessed a selection process:

*"...During the selection of children, the SS men had placed a rod at the height of 1.20 metre. Children who had passed under the rod would be gassed. Small children, knowing only too well what was awaiting them, tried hard to push out their necks when passing under the rod, in the hope to escape gassing..."*⁹

5. Daniel Goldhagen: Ordinary Executioners

Goldhagen tries to explain how the Holocaust could happen. He says that four things were needed: Hitler's decision, German control over the Jews, organisation and resources had to be allocated to the operation, and a large number of people to actually do it. Goldhagen caused some controversy when he published his book, 'Hitler's Willing Executioners'. He argues 'no Germans, no Holocaust'. His point is that German political culture had developed to the point where masses of ordinary Germans were happy to go along with the Holocaust. Beliefs were prevalent inside Germany which

*"...prepared...the vast majority of the German people to understand, assent to and, when possible, do their part to further the extermination of the Jews..the inescapable truth is that...an enormous number of ordinary, representative Germans became... Hitler's willing executioners."*¹⁰

6. Dr Frank: Sites of the Nazi Dictatorship

Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp was constructed near Oranienburg to the north of Berlin while the Olympic Games were in progress. 200 000 people were detained here between 1936 and 1945; tens of thousands never survived...

Sachsenhausen served as a 'preventative detention camp', to which the Gestapo sent political opponents of the Nazi regime along with others persecuted for social, biological or racial reasons. 'Preventative detention' was an arbitrary instrument enabling 'habitual criminals' and people described as 'social misfits' or 'idle and disorderly persons' to be interned in the concentration camp. The inmates also included Jewish citizens, homosexuals, Sinti and Roma, and Jehovah's Witnesses as well as members of the resistance movement who planned to assassinate Hitler on 20 July 1944, among them Hans von Dohnanyi. After the start of the Second World War tens of thousands of people from countries occupied by the Wehrmacht were brought to Sachsenhausen. In the space of just a few weeks in late summer 1941 the SS murdered over 10 000 Soviet prisoners-of-war here.¹¹

⁹ Smolen, K, Auschwitz 1940-45: Guide book through the museum, Panstwowe, Oswiecimiu, 1976, p64

¹⁰ Goldhagen, D, Ordinary Executioners, in The Good Weekend, Sydney Morning Herald, 27 April, 1996, p19

¹¹ Schmitz, Dr F, Sites of the Nazi Dictatorship, Stadtwandel Verlag, Berlin, 2010, pp 51, 52

SACHSENHAUSEN CONCENTRATION CAMP



Entrance to the former Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp



Memorial to victims of the Death March from Sachsenhausen, April 1945

Remains of crematoria which the Nazis tried to destroy before Sachsenhausen's liberation.



The Sachsenhausen Camp



Notes

ESSAYS 3

Responding to HSC questions on Civilians at war

The purpose of this section is to provide some ideas for the type of questions which might be asked on the third section of the syllabus: Civilians at war. These outlines are not presented as the 'be all and end all' responses to these questions. To provide a sense of reality to this section, what follows is a 'first draft response' to each question, ie what were the first ideas that came into the author's head as he thought about each question?

Essay No 1

"Assess the social and economic impact of World War II on civilians in Britain AND Germany."

In an HSC Modern History question, the term "assess" is asking students to make a judgment. Thus, students must be very careful in this question not to simply describe what life was like for civilian on the British and German Home Fronts. This descriptive style of response, with no attempt at making a judgment, would score a 15/25 at best.

Think about the following as you approach this question:

- The 'AND' is capitalised for a reason. Therefore, do not get carried away doing only Britain and then forget to bring in Germany. You are sure to lose half your marks.
- However, you do not have to write exactly 50% on each country. Use your common sense here; provide a balanced response where you attempt a roughly equal treatment of each country.
- The issue of structure needs to be considered.
 - Do you write about Britain first, and then deal with Germany?
 - Or do you try to cover themes and deal with each country concurrently?
- Normally the latter is a more sophisticated technique. However, as the experience of the two countries is so diverse, the common theme angle would be difficult to sustain, so separate treatment is probably better.
- However, be sure you have addressed both nations in your introduction and acknowledge both in your conclusion.

In the short term the war had a minor effect on the civilians of Germany as the Nazis tried to mitigate the impact of the conflict and took advantage of their control of conquered nations. However, by early 1943 it was forced into total war and had to face the full fury of the allied war effort. This would have a devastating impact on social and economic life. Britain did not suffer as much as Germany though civilians were affected by the Blitz, shortages and a fear of invasion early on. The main long-term effect of the war on British civilians was the consensus that grew within the country that life after the war had to be different to life before the war.

- Early on, the social and economic effects of the war on **German** civilians were minor.
 - Explain why: Hitler's concerns about Home Front morale
 - The business as usual approach
 - Germany's ability to use the resources of conquered nations which lessened the need to tighten up at home – explain the danger in this.
- By early 1943 the situation was quite different – explain why
 - Refer to military issues such as El Alamein, Stalingrad, allied bombing
 - Thus, the need to change domestic policy
- Social and economic life for German civilians now became a much more extreme:
 - Refer to some of the Nazi policies that caused this:
 - Changes in propaganda: examples/ reasons for the change
 - The increases in SS-police repression – examples
 - Refer to the allied actions that caused this:
 - The bombing of Germany – refer to the devastation, intensity and how ordinary Germans were affected by this
- Discuss the impact of total war on Germany:
 - Introduce Speer and his impact on the economy
 - Consider how women were affected by the war
 - By 1945 old men and boys are being conscripted in the Volkssturm to defend the country as the Russians closed in

By 1945 the regime had been destroyed, the country was occupied and much of it had been destroyed. Civilian loss of life was enormous.

- **Britain** did not suffer as much as Germany, particularly in terms of air warfare
 - Discuss the Blitz – its range, impact
 - Consider how British morale was affected by German bombing – bring in the impact of Churchill's oratory
- Examine the social effects of the war - you might include:
 - ARP measures, evacuees, domestic security measures
 - The Home Guard
 - Propaganda
 - Popular entertainment – give examples
 - Britain's ambiguous relationship with the Americans
- Food shortages were always a major concern for Britain:
 - Mention the Battle for the Atlantic
 - Rationing – paradoxical impact on health
 - Measures encouraged by the government to deal with food shortages

- Introduce the presence of Labour ministers in Churchill's government and their influence on domestic policy:
 - Hopes for the future and the expectation of improvement for ordinary people
 - The Beveridge Report
 - Keynesian idea
 - The Butler Education

Despite short-term suffering, for Britain the long-term effects of the war were to lead to significant social and economic improvement.

Essay No 2:

"Explain the origin and impact of the Holocaust."

This seemingly straight forward question is full of pitfalls of which students need to be aware.

- In the HSC, the term 'Explain' expects students to discuss 'cause and effect'. In this question that is pretty obvious but it is worth remembering this if you face it in a different context. ¹
- The Holocaust is an immensely emotional topic; even experienced teachers who have taught the subject many, many times never fail to be touched.
 - However, it is crucial you keep emotion out of your response. Your answer needs to be logically argued and factually supported.
- It is easy to get carried away with the awful detail. Avoid this. Remember, a descriptive/narrative response which fails to 'explain' can only expect a maximum of 15/25.
- Does the Holocaust refer only to the Jews or does it also include other minorities who suffered? Some Jewish historians would argue that the term should refer only to the Jews.
 - Avoid this debate. For the purposes of an HSC examination question, refer to the minorities as well (unless the question specifically stipulates it requires only a discussion of the Jews).
- It would be expected that students should be able to pay at least lip service to the intentionalist – structuralist debate.
 - However, do not let this become your entire response.
 - This question does need some consideration of ideology and the details of what happened.

Nazi ideology was deeply rooted in 19th century Social Darwinist ideas and a strong belief in the superiority of Aryan culture. These notions fed the belief in anti-Semitism, prevalent in Europe for centuries and widespread in the early 20th century. Hitler had promoted such ideas long before he gained office. Once in power he was in a position to promote his racial beliefs, gradually throughout the 1930s, and then with horrific efficiency during the war leading to the Holocaust. However, some historians suggest the Holocaust came not specifically from Nazi ideology but from the nature of Nazi regime and the extreme conditions it faced during the war.

¹ Consider this "Power and Authority" question: "Explain the Nazi Party's policies towards women and youth between 1933 and 1939" (15 marks). This question would expect students not only to discuss what happened to women and youth in this period, but also to explain why the Nazis were pursuing these policies.

- The Holocaust was a direct result of Nazi ideology being put into practice.
 - This requires you to provide a clear explanation of the nature of Nazi ideology.
 - Discuss Social Darwinism, Aryan culture, Volksgemeinschaft.
 - Make a link to anti-Semitism.
 - Conclude with the obsession the Nazis had about racial purity and the perfect race, and what this implied for Jews and minority groups.
- Hitler's obsession with racism and anti-Semitism predates his coming to power
 - Make a reference to Mein Kampf
- Once in power he was able to pursue these policies in the 1930s
 - Make reference to Nazi anti-Jewish legislation and Kristallnacht
 - His January 1939 speech is worth mentioning
- The onset of war put in sharper contrast what to do about the Jews and other minority groups
 - Once in control of Eastern Europe and much of the Soviet Union, the Nazis were now able to put their ideological beliefs into widespread practice
- Explain the impact of Nazi beliefs on Jews and other minority groups now that the Nazis were in control.
 - The creations of ghettos
 - The construction of the camps
 - Resettlement
 - The implementation of the Final Solution – provide some facts but do get carried away with a lot of grim detail.
- Historians are divided on the simple link between ideology and the Holocaust.
 - Explain the Intentionalist line of argument
 - Explain the Structuralist line of argument

Chapter Fifteen:

‘D’ Day and the liberation of France

The 1998 movie “Saving Private Ryan” features Tom Hanks playing the role of a Captain John Miller. The opening 25 minutes of the film feature Miller’s men and thousands of other Americans trying to get a foothold on Omaha Beach during the D-Day landings of 6 June 1944. The opening of “Saving Private Ryan” is as close a depiction of the reality of war as a movie can be. It highlights the enormous difficulties that the allied troops faced against the German defences. For students who are studying the D-Day landings, it is definitely worth seeing this opening scene.

The background to D-Day

By mid-1943 the tide in the war had clearly turned against the Axis powers.

- Rommel had been driven out of North Africa following defeat at El Alamein and in Tunisia.
- The allies had taken Sicily and were beginning their slow march through Italy.
- The Germans had lost the initiative on the Eastern Front following the Soviet success in the Battle of Kursk.
- The allies had gained the upper hand in the Battle of the Atlantic.
- Allied bombing would soon have a devastating effect on German industry. ¹

However, despite all this, the allies knew that victory against Germany would require an attack on German-occupied France which would eventually be followed by driving the Wehrmacht back into Germany.

The decision to invade France was agreed at the Washington Conference of May 1943 and plans were accepted at the Quebec Conference in August. By the end of the year, US General Dwight D Eisenhower had been appointed Supreme Allied Commander of what was to be called ‘Operation Overlord’. Not that this satisfied the Russians who had been bleeding for well over two years.

- Soviet losses ran into the millions; their land had been destroyed.
- Stalin suspected that the western powers were happy to see the Nazis and the Communists destroy each other in a bloody war of attrition.
- Stalin questioned western courage on several occasions.
- When Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill met at the Tehran Conference in November 1943, the western leaders promised Stalin that they would open another front in France by May 1944.

Though Stalin had a point, any decision to invade France was a matter that could not be made lightly. German defences were strong and if an allied amphibious landing failed, it might take months or years to try again. The attack on the French port of Dieppe in 1942 had shown the dangers involved with a cross-Channel attack. ²

¹ However, it should be noted that German war production reached its peak in mid-1944.

² In August 1942, an allied force of 5000 Canadians, 1000 British and 50 US troops attacked Dieppe in what was referred to as a ‘reconnaissance in force’. The purpose of the attack was to gain intelligence and experience for a later major landing. Allied losses amounted to 4000 killed or captured.

Roosevelt wanted to work with Stalin and was keen for Soviet intervention against Japan in the Pacific War. However, Churchill was deeply suspicious of Stalin and sought an allied front in the Balkans to prevent a total Soviet post-war takeover of Eastern Europe; the battle lines of the Cold War were already being drawn. However, there was also the danger that the Soviet Red Army might be able to march into Germany alone. Thus, though the decision to invade France in 1944 was taken because of the military position of Germany, it also had an eye on the post-war situation in Europe.

Preparations for D-Day

The German position in the west was protected by what became known as the Atlantic Wall. Stretching 2700 kms from Norway to Spain, it comprised a series of concrete bunkers, tank traps and artillery. The bocage vegetation in France also assisted the German defences. These deep hedges rooted in the sand dunes provided a strong additional wall of defence which would be difficult to break through. The German defence line varied in depth from just a few hundred metres to many kilometres in some places. By late 1943, the Germans were expecting an allied attack in France though they did not know where. Hitler ordered more troops into France and sent General Rommel to be General von Rundstedt's deputy. One of Rommel's first actions was to lay millions of mines.

An allied attack was clearly coming, but German intelligence did not know where.

- An attack on Norway was considered a possibility. Allied bogus intelligence certainly tried to fool the Germans into thinking this might happen in Operation Bodyguard. False information was leaked which the allies knew the Germans would be able to pick up.
- The most likely location for an allied attack was near the port of Calais. Calais was only 35 kms from the British coast.
- The third possibility, and of course the true allied choice, was Normandy.

The allies needed to keep the location secret. If the Germans knew where the attack was coming, their defences would be strengthened and allied casualties would be horrific. Keeping the location secret meant the Germans would spread their defensive forces. This is exactly what happened. Hitler's 'hunch', backed by Rommel, was that the allies would attack in Normandy. However, Hitler's hesitancy and caution stopped him fortifying Normandy at the expense of Calais. Secrecy was maintained in a variety of ways:

- The allies leaked a stream of false intelligence which they knew the Germans would be able to decipher.
- Allied commanders like General Montgomery, were given 'look-alikes' who would pointedly make appearances far from where the real person was. It was hoped that German spies inside England would relay this information.
- Phoney armies and phoney air squadrons were gathered in locations well away from the real embarkation points.

Keeping things secret was one thing, but real preparations took months. This is not the place to list the hundreds of technical and scientific innovations which were brought into play for the D-Day landings; a few will suffice.

- The allies constructed giant floating harbours called 'mulberries' which were towed across the Channel to be used to disembark troops, tanks and supplies.
- Flexible pipelines were laid beneath the Channel which would eventually give allied forces 1.5m litres of oil a day.
- German radar stations had been tracked for years. In March 1944, an attack was launched on a German radar station in Ostend, Belgium to assess the capability of allied air forces to take out German radar. Its success gave the allies hope that they would be able to take German radar in France.

By the middle of 1944, Britain had become a giant aircraft carrier. There were over 1.5 million US and Canadian troops in the country, tens of thousands of trucks and tanks. Amphibious landing craft were being prepared while the allied air forces had 12 000 aircraft at their disposal. Throughout May there were exercises taking place all over the country. The date set for the invasion was 5 June. However, on 3 June the chief allied meteorologist, Group Captain Stagg warned Eisenhower of bad weather. Eisenhower postponed the invasion. The next day Stagg told Eisenhower the worst of the storm was over. Eisenhower knew that if he did not go immediately, it would be another month before the tides were right. He gave the word for the attack to go on 6 June.

*"...In Paris Stagg's German counterpart failed to notice the approaching improvement in the weather. On such small chances hang the fate of nations."*³

D-Day: 6 June 1944

The scale of the attack on Normandy was staggering. The initial assault onto the beaches of Normandy involved 50 000 men. Over two million men would be shipped to France during the entire operation. The allies used 12 000 aircraft comprising fighters, bombers, transports and gliders, 139 warships, 221 smaller combat vessels, 4000 landing craft, 805 merchant ships and dozens of other smaller naval craft. Inside France, up to 100 000 members of the French Resistance assisted with guerrilla attacks on German positions.

The target area extended approximately 110 kms along the beaches of Normandy. Allied troops were allocated specific landing areas which were divided into five sections from east to west: Sword (British), Juno (Canadian and British), Gold (British), Omaha (US) and Utah (US).

The order of attack was as follows:

- The British 6th airborne division arrived by glider, to seize bridges on the River Orne and take a German artillery battery at Merville.
- The US 82nd and 101st airborne divisions landed in the south east corner of Cotentin Peninsula.
- Following a ferocious aerial bombardment, allied warships then launched a massive barrage against German defences.
- The landings at Sword, Juno, Gold and Utah were achieved efficiently and with relatively light casualties. A German counter-attack between Juno and Sword was defeated. British troops began moving inland towards Bayeux and Caen.

³ Taylor, AJP, *The Second World War: An Illustrated History*, Penguin, London, 1975, p195

- However, things were not as straightforward at Omaha and the Americans became pinned down on the foreshore. They suffered 3000 casualties on that first day.

By nightfall 156 000 allied troops had landed in Normandy. By 12 June there were 326 000 troops ashore and a bridgehead fifty miles wide had been gained. By 2 July a million men had landed in France. By this point the allies had lost 9000 men; 61 000 had been wounded.

- By 18 June the US forces had reached the west coast of the Cotentin Peninsula and trapped the German garrison in Cherbourg.
- A raging storm between 19-22 June destroyed one of the floating harbours, brought a temporary halt to air strikes and nearly cut off supplies.
- On 26 June British forces attacked west of Caen in Operation Epsom; heavy losses forced them to halt. General Montgomery was severely criticised for this action and some US generals sought his dismissal.
- By the end of June, the Americans had captured the port of Cherbourg and over 30 000 German prisoners.
- British forces captured Caen on 9 July.
- In mid-July US forces took St Lo after solid German resistance and British forces managed to clear the area around Caen despite losing over 100 tanks.

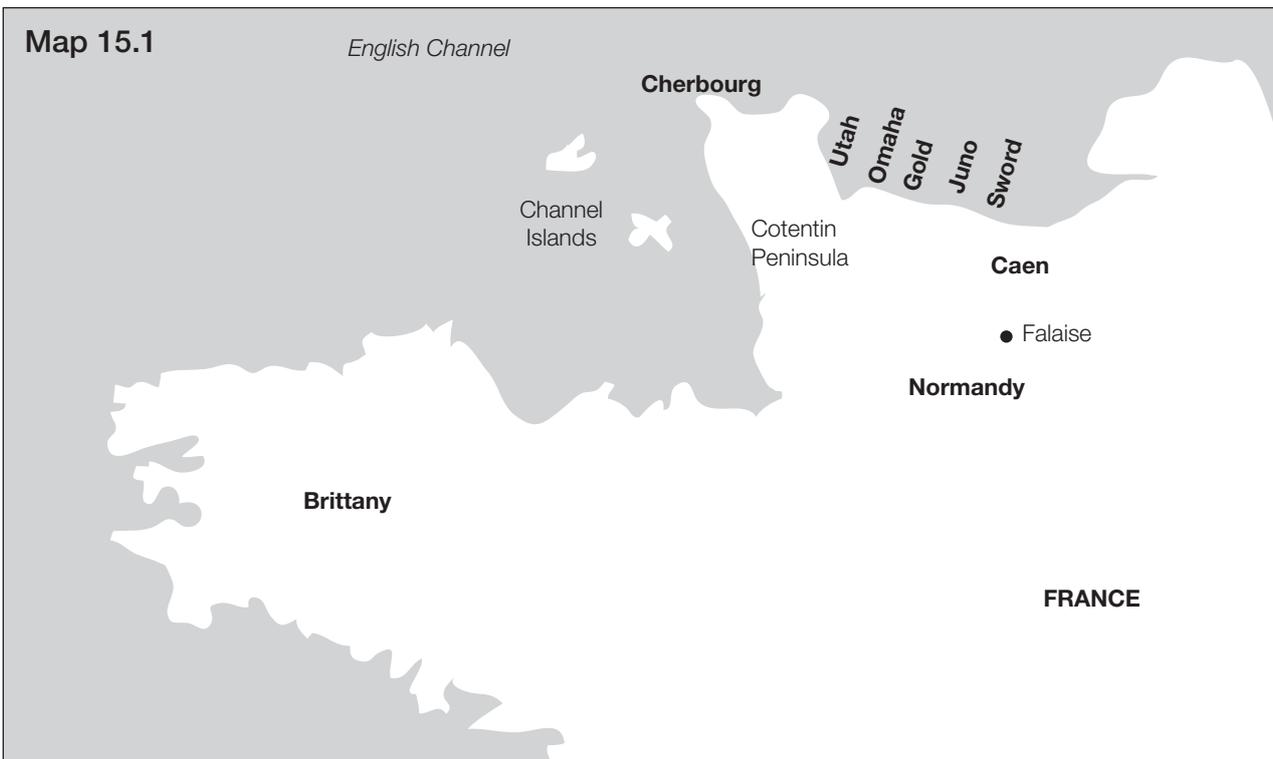
The allies were now ready for the breakout from Normandy.

Exercise 15.1

Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

1. Why was Stalin angry with the western allies?	
2. Why was Churchill suspicious of Stalin?	
3. Why was an allied invasion of France always going to be very difficult?	
4. Why was secrecy of such paramount importance for the allies?	
5. How did the allies try to mislead the Germans in the months before D-Day?	
6. How extensive were the allied preparations for D-Day?	

7. Name the five landings areas of the D-Day invasion.	
8. How successful were the initial landings in Normandy?	
9. What success had US forces achieved by early July?	
10. What success had British forces achieved by early July?	



The Liberation of France

The allies commenced their breakout from Normandy in late July. Within six weeks Paris had been liberated, the Germans driven out of France and the allies had reached Belgium.

- On 25 July Operation Cobra – the move out of Normandy – began. American troops moved south from St Lo and captured Avranches by 1 August.
- French resistance forces gained control of Brittany, almost making US General Patton’s entry there unnecessary. ⁴
- Canadian troops launched Operation Totalise which aimed to trap German troops near Falaise. It was called off on 11 August. American forces then moved eastwards and cornered German troops in what became known as the Falaise pocket. 50 000 were captured and 10 000 were killed but about 30 000 escaped with their armour. They fled eastwards across the River Seine.

⁴ The ports of Lorient and St Nazaire remained in German hands until the end of the war.

- Such was the slaughter at the Battle of Falaise, Eisenhower later described walking through the area afterwards as being in a scene from Dante's Inferno where it was almost impossible to make one's way without 'stepping on dead bodies and piles of human flesh'.
- In mid-August US and French troops invaded southern France in Operation Anvil and advanced north through the Rhone Valley.
- On 15 August workers in Paris went on strike and were joined by the police. Hitler ordered that Paris be levelled but the German governor, von Choltitz refused.
 - Von Choltitz surrendered the city to the French 2nd Armoured Division on 25 August; the Free French leader, de Gaulle arrived on 26th.
 - Paris was liberated.
 - In the days following the liberation of Paris, retribution was carried out against those French who had collaborated with the Germans. Some 10 000 were executed.
 - By October de Gaulle had restored order. He replaced Vichy appointees with Resistance leaders and Resistance forces were disarmed or merged into the French army.
- At the same time as Paris was being freed, British forces to the north had crossed the River Seine heading eastwards.
- By late August US forces were close to the River Meuse while British forces had gained control of all the bridges over the River Somme near Amiens.
- On 1 September Canadian forces liberated Dieppe. By 3 September allied forces had moved into Belgium and captured Brussels. Antwerp was liberated on 4 September.

The campaign to retake France had taken about seven weeks. The losses on both sides had been considerable: 400 000 Germans dead, 200 000 allied soldiers.

What do the historians have to say about “D-Day”?

1. Basil Liddell Hart: *History of the Second World War*

Liddell Hart makes the interesting point that Operation Overlord did not go according to timetable, but it did go according to plan. The objectives were achieved but it took longer than was expected. The breakout from the bridgehead that had been achieved by mid-June was slow in coming. However, this worked out to allies' advantage. The Germans were able to get their tank armour across to Normandy but not in mass numbers, partly because of allied air attacks and partly because of divisions in the German High Command. When they arrived, they provided stiff opposition to allied forces but they were ground down. This meant the Germans lacked tanks when battle was resumed in open country. Liddell Hart concludes:

*“...It was the proverbial ‘blessing in disguise’...The very toughness of the resistance that so much delayed the allies’ break-out ensured them a clear path through France once they broke out.”*⁵

2. R W Thompson: *D-Day The Great Gamble*

Thompson's detailed account of the events of D-Day concludes with comments about how light allied losses had been.⁶ However, he makes the point that it could so easily have gone the other way. Rommel had stated that the first 24 hours of the campaign would be decisive and he was right. Poor air reconnaissance, blocked radar and dislocated communications hindered the Germans. Even worse was Hitler's interference. Yet decisive action could have made a difference. The 1 Panzer Corps which was west of the River Seine did not move, awaiting Hitler's orders.

*“...Uncertainty inhibited the violent counterblows which alone could have driven the British and Americans back into the sea..(Rommel) made repeated efforts to move... Panzer Divisions...Had these divisions been there, the Omaha beach-head must have been smashed...It was too late when Hitler...released the XII SS Panzer Division...”*⁷

3. Andrew Roberts: *Hitler and Churchill – Secrets of Leadership*

Roberts presents an argument regarding the timing of D-Day. Stalin had been pushing for a second front in France since 1942; Roosevelt had been eager for action in 1943. Churchill urged caution, arguing that any premature attack would be disastrous. He managed to involve the Americans in actions in North Africa and Italy.

*“...It is more than doubtful that an invasion in 1943 could have succeeded, and the delay of ‘Overlord’ was arguably – after stiffening Britain’s resolve in 1940-41 – Churchill’s most important single contribution to the allied victory.”*⁸

5 Liddell Hart, B, *History of the Second World War*, Cassell, London, 1970, p547

6 2500 were lost on 6 June. 20 000 British soldiers died on the first day of the Somme.

7 Thompson, RW, *D-Day: The Great Gamble*, in Purnell's *History of the Second World War*, London, 1966, Vol 5, p1900

8 Roberts, A, *Hitler and Churchill: Secrets of Leadership*, Phoenix, London, 2003, p136

Notes

Chapter Sixteen:

Russian Counter offensives 1944

Following the Battle of Kursk, the initiative on the Eastern Front was now with the Red Army. From Kursk to the end of the war, the war in the east was the story of the Russian 'sledgehammer', as Zhukov referred to his forces, gradually pushing back Germany and its allies, while the Axis forces endeavoured to slow this inevitable advance. As the Red Army progressed, Soviet power and influence were being planted in liberated areas. Though Stalin knew the struggle with Germany was far from over, he was even now eyeing the post-war situation in Europe.

Soviet offensives: January-December 1944

- On 5 January 1944, Soviet forces under General Konev began an offensive to recapture the western Ukraine and the Crimea. The initial target was Kirovgrad which fell to the Russians on 8 January.
 - The retreating Germans put up consistently strong resistance to the advancing Red Army.
- The siege of Leningrad was finally broken on 27 January.
- By the end of February, Germany's Army Group North had been routed.
 - Three German divisions were wiped out with many others gravely weakened. Soviet forces captured almost 200 tanks and 1800 artillery guns in the fighting at the start of 1944.
- By mid-March, Soviet forces managed to split Germany's Army Group South and were poised to advance on Romania.
- Throughout April, the Red Army fought to free the Crimean Peninsula of Axis forces.
 - General Tolbukhin had almost half a million men, 6000 field guns, 600 tanks and 1250 aircraft.
 - The German and Romanian forces defending the region were down to 200 000 men, 200 tanks and 150 aircraft.
 - The Crimean port of Sebastopol was finally taken on 9 May. German losses exceeded 100 000.
- In early June Soviet forces attacked Finnish forces.
 - A massive Soviet artillery barrage forced the Finnish commander, Marshal von Mannerheim, to retreat to a stronger defence line.
 - On 15 July, Finnish forces managed to hold off Soviet forces in the Karelian Isthmus.
 - The Finns made peace on 2 September. (The peace agreement is extremely moderate and allows Finland to remain independent and capitalist throughout the entire Cold War.)
- On 22 June 1944, General Zhukov commenced Operation Bagration. ¹
 - The Soviet Union launched a massive all-out assault on the strongest of Hitler's eastern forces, Army Group Centre.
 - The attack was to move across Belorussia towards Poland. It comprised over one million men, 6000 tanks and 2000 aircraft.

¹ This Soviet operation was named after one of the Russian heroes of the Napoleonic War, Pyotr Bagration.

- The Soviet advance was rapid and strong, and captured German soldiers were shown no mercy by their Soviet captors; many thousands were executed in the field.
- For Germany, Operation Bagration resulted in the loss of 300 000 men dead, captured or wounded. This defeat equalled that of Stalingrad.
- In early July, Soviet forces began a campaign to drive the Germans out of the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Success here would threaten German food supplies and links to Sweden and Finland.
- On 11 July, Red Army forces captured Minsk.
 - German losses exceeded 100 000.
- On 17 July, Soviet forces entered Poland for the first time since 1941. Within a fortnight Lvov was liberated and Soviet forces reached the River Vistula.
- In August Polish resistance forces rose up against the Germans in Warsaw (see below).
- On 12 August there was a coup against the pro-German government of Romania.
 - On 12 September Romania surrendered to the Soviet Union.
 - Romania was 'rewarded' by receiving back the area of Transylvania it had lost to Hungary in 1940.
- In September, the Soviet Union declared war on Bulgaria, invaded and quickly took control.
 - On 8 September, a new Bulgarian regime declared war on Germany.
- In early September Soviet forces began an attack in the Carpathian Mountains on their way to Slovakia. They eventually broke through in November.
- British forces occupied Athens in October and German forces left the country on 19 October.
 - A brief civil war broke out in that country between communist and royalist forces which ended in December but Greece will not be a settled land for some years.
- The Yugoslav 1st Army began an advance on Belgrade.
 - Yugoslav Marshal Tito's Liberation Army captured Belgrade. ²
- The Baltic states fell under Soviet control and by early October the Russians were in East Prussia.

By the end of 1944, Hitler's empire in central and eastern Europe was greatly diminished. It consisted of western Poland, most of Czechoslovakia, western Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia and northern Italy.

The Warsaw Rising: August-October 1944

In early August, Polish resistance groups began an uprising against German forces in Warsaw. Polish forces numbered about 38 000, equal to the Germans, but the latter had a massive advantage in tanks and air support. The Polish resistance was supported by the Polish government-in-exile in London, and hoped to gain control of the city to be a stronger negotiating position with the advancing Red Army. ³

² Tito's success was to be significant. Unlike other east European countries, he managed to free his country of German control without the Red Army. Yugoslavia would continue to pursue a policy independent from Soviet control after 1945.

³ Signs of the future Cold War are apparent again in Poland. The western governments supported the London based government-in-exile while the Soviet Union supported the Lublin based government.

- By late August German superiority in air power and artillery was proving too much for the Polish resistance forces.
- Stalin ordered his forces to stop on the far side of the River Vistula and allow the battle to take its course.
- Stalin’s tactics were clear:
 - allow the Germans to destroy the Polish resistance
 - move in and destroy the German forces
 - Poland would then be under total Soviet domination.

AJP Taylor suggests that an alternative explanation is that the Red Army had so stretched its lines of communication that it was in no position to assist the Poles. This is not a view accepted by most historians.

- In mid-September Soviet Marshal Rokossovsky attacked the eastern quarter of Warsaw.
 - By 14 September, the Germans had been driven out of that area.
 - A Soviet-backed Polish army moved in to take control of bridgeheads in Warsaw.
- The Warsaw rising came to an end in early October as the last Polish fighters surrendered. The Germans evacuated the city, sending over 200 000 Poles into concentration camps and destroyed everything in their path. Polish fatalities numbered over 55 000.

Exercise 16.1

Study the list of events given below. Rewrite them in the correct chronological order.

Start of the Warsaw Rising	End of the siege of Leningrad
Start of Operation Bagration	Romania’s surrender to the Soviet Union
Red Army capture of Minsk	Soviet attack on Finland
Red Army move into East Prussia	Red Army captures Crimean port of Sebastopol

1st event	
2nd event	
3rd event	
4th event	
5th event	
6th event	
7th event	
8th event	

What do the historians have to say about “Russian counter offensives 1944”?

1. M L Altgovzen: *The Russians Reach Berlin*

Soviet writer Altgovzen, writing in the middle of the Cold War, places a rather different slant on the events of the Warsaw Rising from the usual western versions. He explains that as Soviet forces made their way through Belorussia and across the Polish border they were exhausted. They were in no position to assist any Polish action against the Germans. He fails to mention of course why Stalin refused to allow British planes to use Soviet airfields to help the Poles.

*“...Polish reactionary circles irresponsibly encouraged the inhabitants of (Warsaw) to launch an ill-prepared uprising without prior agreement with the Soviet military command. The result was the killing by the Germans of many thousands of people and the complete destruction of Warsaw.”*⁴

2. *Defense and Foreign Affairs Daily (US) on June 29, 2003*

Operation Bagration was one of the greatest battles of the Second World War. Launched against the Germans along a 700 km front, it effectively destroyed Army Group Centre; indeed, in German military history the battle is recorded at the ‘Defeat of Army Group Centre’.⁵ The operation was preceded by major partisan operations, involving the laying of mines and sabotage actions against German communications. A series of quick Soviet moves encircled large numbers of German forces. The result was that the Wehrmacht’s Army Group Centre now ceased to exist.

*“... The military-political and strategic importance of the Belarusian Operation cannot be possibly overstated. In fact, it became a decisive battle of World War II. Whatever hopes for survival which the Third Reich leaders harboured, evaporated.”*⁶

3. *Jonathan J Jordan: Operation Bagration - Soviet Offensive of 1944*

Jordan’s argument is that set against Operation Bagration, Operation Overlord pales by comparison. In geographical terms it was far greater than Overlord and was in fact the largest allied operation of World War II. Three German armies were demolished and the Wehrmacht’s position on the Eastern Front was totally opened up. Jordan makes the point that German reprisals against Soviet civilians in early 1944 were so severe that the ranks of the Partisans grew rapidly. Operation Bagration was given significant assistance from Partisan forces.

*“...Many German and Soviet accounts agree that Operation Bagration was Hitler’s worst military setback of the war. But the offensive lacked a single, dramatic focal point, such as at Stalingrad... Nevertheless, Bagration... dramatically turned the tide of war against the Third Reich.”*⁷

4 Altgovzen, ML, *The Russians Reach Berlin*, in Purnell’s *History of the 20th Century*, London, 1969, Vol 5, p1979

5 Belarus likes to call the battle the Belarusian Strategic Offensive Operation.

6 http://www.belarusembassy.org/belarus/worldwarII/operation_bagration.htm

7 http://www.historynet.com/wars_conflicts/world_war_2/3421346.html?page=5&c=y

Chapter Seventeen:

Final Defeat 1944-45

By the autumn of 1944, there was tremendous confidence amongst allied leaders that the war was very close to ending. D-Day had been a success and within three months the Germans had been almost totally driven out of France. Rome had been captured in June. The Red Army had thrown the Germans out of its territory and was poised to move on Germany itself. Allied bombing was continuing to have a devastating effect on the Germany economy. However, the war would drag on for another eight months. Anglo-American forces would experience major setbacks in the Low Countries, Axis forces in northern Italy stubbornly resisted while the Red Army would take time to capture Budapest and Berlin.

(1) The war in the west: September – December 1944

Operation Market Garden

By mid-September allied forces were taking control of Belgium and the Netherlands; Brussels and Antwerp had already fallen. On 17 September, General Montgomery launched Operation Market Garden. The aim of Market Garden was to outflank the German defences in the Netherlands by seizing the bridgeheads over the Rhine behind the old Siegfried Line.¹ This would be the prelude for an advance across the River Rhine into Germany.

Hopes for Market Garden were too optimistic from the start:

- Allied intelligence in the region was poor.
- The British were not able to use their Enigma machine to decipher German communications because in this region the German army was using different radio frequencies.
- Maps were outdated; there were no provisions for reinforcements or for proper evacuation if things went wrong. Montgomery was certain he would succeed.

At first the campaign went well.

- US paratroopers of the 101st and 82nd airborne divisions were dropped at Eindhoven and Nijmegen with the aim of capturing bridgeheads on the rivers Meuse, Rhine and the lower Rhine.
- The 1st British airborne division and a Polish brigade were dropped at Arnhem, but many units landed several kilometres from their target bridge.
- Ground forces had joined up with the 101st and 82nd by 19 September but they were unable to battle their way through to the British forces at Arnhem.
- The forces at Arnhem faced very strong German resistance and were gradually squeezed into a very narrow perimeter.
- The operation turned into a major disaster.
 - The force at Arnhem was supposed to hold out for two days; they were there for ten.

¹ The Siegfried Line was the allied term used to denote the West Wall, the pre-war German defensive fortified line in the west.

- Poor weather, German forces far stronger than expected, the inability of allied forces to get supplies and reinforcements to Arnhem either by air or by using Highway 69 and the lucky German discovery of allied battle plans in a downed plane all combined to turn Montgomery's operation into a fiasco.

2200 men were evacuated; almost 18 000 were killed, captured or wounded. German forces took revenge on hundreds of Dutch people for the operation believing that they had been behind the planning. When the Irish writer Cornelius Ryan interviewed Crown Prince Bernhard about Arnhem, the Prince commented: "My country can never again afford the luxury of another Montgomery success."²

German forces in the west were commanded by General Model, under the supreme command of Rundstedt. They managed to organise a strong defensive line along the West Wall. Allied progress in the region was now slow and costly.

- Patton's forces attacked Metz in early October.
- Hodge's 1st Army took Aachen in November. Bradley's forces tried to expand the success at Aachen at the Hurtgen Forest but with little success.

Elsewhere, the Canadians captured Boulogne on 22 September and Calais on 30th. French forces had captured Strasbourg by January 1945.

The Battle of the Bulge

By the end of 1944, the final defeat of Germany seemed just a matter of time. Pressed on all sides and running short of resources, the German position seemed hopeless. Hitler himself was in a very poor physical shape and was certainly not the inspiring figure he had been a decade earlier. However, the Germans had one hope. The allies were far from united in their aims.

- Stalin was deeply distrusted by the western allies, especially Churchill. Relations with the Soviet Union had always been poor before 1939 and many had never forgiven Stalin for signing the Nazi-Soviet Pact in 1939. Perhaps Hitler might be able to do a deal with the western powers.
- Relations between allied commanders in the west were strained. Patton and Bradley were in frequent disagreement with Montgomery.

It was against this background that in December Hitler took the offensive for one last time when he launched Operation 'Watch on the Rhine' (later renamed Autumn Mist), the Ardennes offensive. In the west this is usually referred to as The Battle of the Bulge. Hitler's aim was to split the allied forces in two, drive on to Antwerp whose capture would cripple the allied supply base. If he could trap allied forces on the coast, he might be able to force a negotiated peace.

The German offensive in the Ardennes began on 16 December. A German force of 24 divisions, of which ten were armed with the latest super-heavy Tiger II tanks, slammed into the allied forces.

- The British and Americans were taken completely by surprise.

² Cornelius Ryan's book 'A Bridge Too Far' and the Richard Attenborough film of the same name tell the story of the Arnhem campaign.

- General Manteuffel's V Panzer Army almost destroyed two American infantry divisions.
- In freezing conditions, German forces pushed through the lightly defended Ardennes region of Belgium and Luxembourg but failed to make it to the Meuse River. Instead all they had succeeded in doing was creating a 'bulge' in the American line.
- Allied reinforcements were quickly diverted to deal with the attack:
 - Two US airborne divisions were brought in by road.
 - Montgomery's forces moved to stop the enemy crossing the River Meuse.
 - Patton stopped his attack in the Saar and moved north to attack the German southern flank.
- The German attack began to fizzle by late December and as the weather improved, allied air power became decisive. It had been completely overcome by the middle of January.

The Ardennes offensive had been an extremely costly campaign for both sides:

- US casualties were 81 000 which included over 19 000 dead and 23 500 captured.
- British casualties were 1400, including 200 dead.
- German casualties exceeded 100 000 killed, wounded or captured.

The Ardennes Offensive certainly put back allied plans for moving into Germany, but it also gravely weakened Germany's fighting capacity. Apart from the manpower losses, the Germans had also lost over 600 tanks and assault guns, over 1000 aircraft and 6000 vehicles.³ US losses of equipment were also high, but they could replace theirs, Hitler could not.

AJP Taylor sums up the Ardennes Offensive thus:

*"...This was Hitler's last gamble – brilliant in conception, impossible to execute. The God of War does not love cleverness; he loves the Big Battalions."*⁴

(2) The war in the west: January-May 1945

There were no more allied disasters. The march into Germany through the early months of 1945 went fairly smoothly, though German forces resisted as best they could. By 5 March the US 9th Army had reached Cologne while further south the 1st and 3rd Armies took Bonn. On 7 March US forces captured an undamaged railway bridge at Remagen. By early March, allied forces were along the River Rhine from Holland to the Swiss border. Over 60 000 Germans had been killed fighting in the Rhineland and 250 000 had been taken prisoner. Allied losses were under 20 000. The allies now continued their push into Germany:

- On 22 March Patton's forces crossed the Rhine between Mainz and Worms and moved into northern Bavaria.
- Montgomery's forces crossed into Germany in the north and defeated a final German stand on 28 March.
- General Hodge's forces crossed the Remagen Bridge and reached Marburg to the east on 28 March.

³ The Americans suffered their worst atrocity in the European war at this time in The Malmedy Massacre where 86 American soldiers were murdered.

⁴ Taylor, AJP, *The Second World War: An Illustrated History*, Penguin, London, 1975, p215

- General Bradley's forces moved into central Germany and captured Leipzig.
- British forces moved across northern Germany:
 - they reached the River Elbe on 24 April
 - captured Bremen on 27 April and Lubeck on the Baltic Sea on 2 May
 - Hamburg fell on 3 May without a fight.
- The US 3rd Army took Linz in Austria on 5 May and Pilsen in Czechoslovakia on 6 May.
- The US 7th army was resisted strongly at Nuremburg. It then crossed the Danube, captured Berchtesgaden and met some of the US 5th Army which was moving north from Italy.

Over the next few days, various German units surrendered in Italy, Holland and France. The Germans agreed to an unconditional surrender on 7 May. By midnight on 8 May, the war in Europe was over.



(3) The war in the east: January-May 1945

The final Russian offensive in the east was due to begin on 20 January 1945 but was brought forward to 12 January, after a plea from Churchill, to relieve the pressure that German offensive action in the west was causing the western allies.

- Russian forces struck on several fronts across a distance of 1200 kms, from the Baltic in the north to the Carpathian Mountains in the south. The various attacking forces comprised the following:
 - General Konev's First Ukrainian Front
 - Zhukov's First Belorussian
 - Rokossovsky's Second Belorussian
 - Chernyakovski's Third Belorussian
 - Bagramyan's First Baltic
 - Yeremenkos' Second Baltic
- The Germans were totally overwhelmed and had no choice but to fall back apart from odd pockets of resistance which held out for as long as they could.
- The Soviet advance was irresistible:
 - Zhukov and Konev had both reached the Oder River by mid-February before turning north to pin down remaining German forces in tight corners of East Prussia and Latvia.
 - Some of Zhukov's forces were only 65 kms from Berlin but their lines of communication were stretched and the strength of German forces on either flank was unknown. Stalin ordered Zhukov to pause and regroup.
 - The advance on the southern front was slowed as the Red Army took a month to capture the Hungarian capital Budapest.
 - Soviet forces reached the Austrian frontier on 20 March and took Vienna on 14 April.
- The Soviet attack on Berlin reached a climax in April.
 - Soviet forces were led by Zhukov, Konev and Rokossovsky.
 - The scale of the attack was enormous: 2.5 million men, 6000 tanks, 7500 aircraft and 42 000 artillery guns.
 - The outskirts of Berlin were reached on 19 April; by 25 April the city was encircled.
 - Berlin was reduced to ruins as Soviet guns pounded the city.
 - The German defence was led by the old men and fourteen-year-old boys of the German style Home Guard called the Volkssturm.
- On 1 May the Red Flag was flying over the Reichstag building. The surrender came on 8 May.⁵

⁵ Hitler married his mistress Eva Braun on 30 April. Shortly afterwards they committed suicide. Hitler's body was incinerated. The 2004 movie "Downfall" presents a chilling look at events inside Hitler's bunker as the Third Reich came to an end.

Exercise 17.1

Read each of the following statements. Circle either the words THIS IS TRUE or THIS IS FALSE as it applies to the statement.

1. Allied leaders shared an expectation that the German armed forces were close to collapse towards the end of 1944.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
2. Operation Market Garden was successful in achieving most of its objectives.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
3. General Montgomery was universally praised for his Operation Market Garden.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
4. Hitler pinned his hopes on the disunity amongst allied military and political leaders.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
5. The allies were completely taken by surprise when Hitler launched the Ardennes offensive.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
6. The outcome of the Ardennes offensive put an end to any future German offensive actions.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
7. Anglo-American forces continued to meet extremely strong German resistance as they marched across Germany.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
8. Stalin ignored allied pleas to bring forward his final offensive in the east.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
9. Soviet forces had difficulty capturing the Hungarian capital Budapest.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
10. Anglo-American forces assisted the Red Army in its capture of Berlin.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE

What do the historians have to say about the “Final Defeat 1944-45”?

1. Hugh Cole: *The Ardennes – Battle of the Bulge*

Cole tries to assess the place of the Ardennes Offensive in the larger picture of the war as a whole. He is scathing of Hitler’s decision, suggesting that the purpose of the offensive was not so much to achieve a better bargaining position for Germany but rather it was a case of pursuing an offensive for its own sake. US losses were considerable but they were always going to be easy to make up. Detailed analyses of the battle show that the result of the battle was never in doubt. Eisenhower felt no need to issue a “backs to the wall” order similar to that issued by Haig in April 1918 when the German Spring Offensive of that year caused so much panic in allied circles.

*“...there is a strong possibility that Hitler... (was) motivated by the same impulse which triggered so many of the bloody and useless offensives of World War I – to seize the initiative for its own sake without a viable strategic objective in view.”*⁶

2. Tilman Remme: *The Battle for Berlin in World War II*

One of the worst crimes of the Second World War II occurred in Germany following the takeover of Berlin. Soviet soldiers allegedly raped up to two million German women, 100 000 in Berlin. Soviet authorities long denied these accusations. However, British historian Antony Beevor has had access to Soviet archives in recent times. His research has shown that the Soviet authorities of the time were well aware of what was going on and conceded that many of their troops were out of control. The first wave of troops into Berlin was quite disciplined but they were followed by a second wave who indulged in orgies of rape and violence.

*“...Even more shocking is Beevor’s discovery in the Red Army files that Red Army troops also raped Russian women after their release from Nazi slave labour camps in Germany.”*⁷

3. Dorothea von Schwanenfluegel

Dorothea von Schwanenfluegel was a twenty-year-old trying to survive in bombed out Berlin as the Red Army attempted to take the city in April/ May 1945. Her firsthand account relates stories of horror for the German civilians as the Russians moved in. She details accounts of looting, rape and random violence. When the German commander of troops in Berlin surrendered to the Russians, she says that an unreal silence seemed to descend on the city, even though communications in the city had almost totally broken down.

*“...Our nightmare had become a reality... The last days of savage house to house fighting and street battles had been a human slaughter, with no prisoners being taken on either side. These final days were hell... We were a city in ruins...”*⁸

⁶ Cole, H, *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge*, Department of the Army, Washington DC, 1965, p673

⁷ Remme, T, *The Battle for Berlin in World War II*, found at http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/berlin_05.shtml

⁸ *The Battle of Berlin, 1945*, “EyeWitness to History”, www.eyewitnesstohistory.com (2002).

Notes

Chapter Eighteen:

The Nuremburg War Crimes trials

Following the conclusion of World War II, many leading Nazis were placed on trial in front of the International Military Tribunal. The scale of the war and the extent of the inhuman atrocities that had been committed by the Nazi regime demanded that those responsible be called to account. The allied leaders had agreed on the idea of war crime trials at the Tehran Conference of November 1943. The terms under which the trials would operate were agreed to by the victorious allies in the London Charter of August 1945.

Trying individuals or nations for acts committed in the past is open to great debate. The 'defendants' questioned the whole notion of war guilt and war crimes. If the Nazi bombing of Warsaw was a war crime, what did that make the allied bombing of Dresden? If Nazi treatment of the Jews is a crime against humanity, what did that make the Soviet massacre at Katyn? ¹

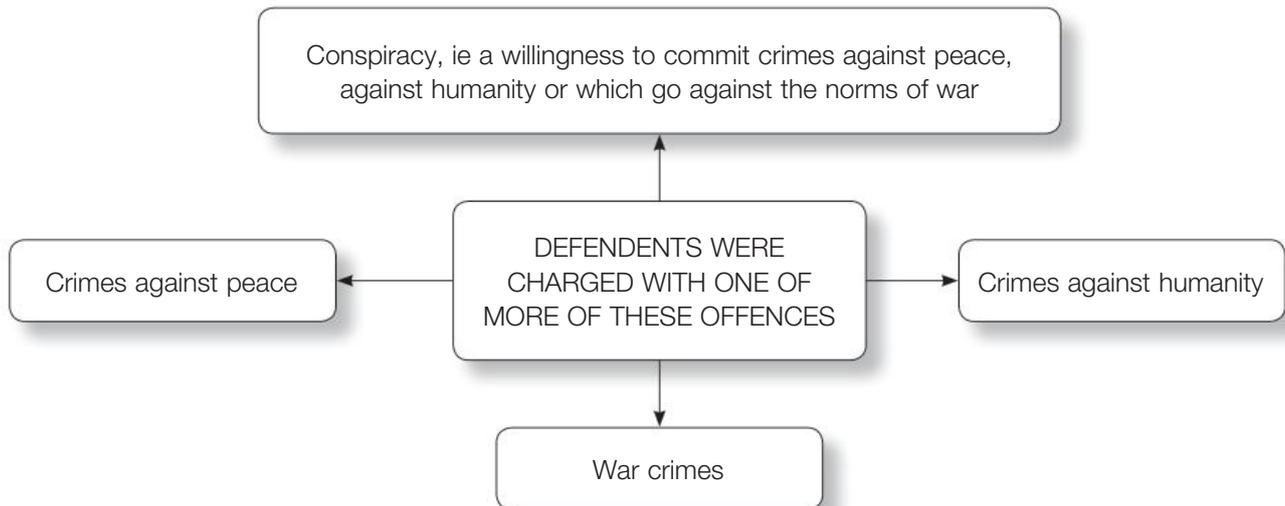
The concept of war crimes trials after the conclusion of a war was not new but in 1945 there was a need to make an example of the Nazi leaders for several reasons.

- Atrocities occur in all wars. No nation can claim that its soldiers, at some time or other, have not committed acts which would bring disgrace on to that nation. However, this is usually the actions of individuals or junior officers who have lost control or have acted as a direct result of the extreme stresses of wartime situations.
 - The actions of the Germans (and also the Japanese) were different. Atrocities were a part of official government policy.
- It was felt necessary at the time to ensure that the German people realised what had happened and that the culprits were people whom the German people had gladly supported in earlier years.
 - It also brought home to those Germans who claimed ignorance of the camps the enormity of the crimes that had been committed.
- There was also the idealistic hope that if an example was made of the Nazis after the war, similar acts of barbarism would not be repeated.
 - Alas, the experience of Cambodia (1970s), Rwanda (1990s) and Bosnia (1990s) have shown this to have been a forlorn hope.
- The United Nations Organisation was in its infancy and the trials hopefully would show it was a body willing to ensure international peace and morality.

Four sets of charges were to be laid against the accused. The diagram below summarises the issues and charges laid at the trials.

² Extension History students might pursue these points further. History, it is said, is always written by the victors. If the Axis powers had won the war, who would have been on trial for war crimes? Does this mean that all actions in history are relative? Or can it be argued that there are absolute moral values which transcend the events of the past and that it is an absolute truth that the Holocaust is an evil act?

Figure 17.1 The Nuremburg War Crimes Tribunal



In all, 24 leading Nazis were to be tried but only 21 would eventually stand trial.

- German Labour Front leader Robert Ley committed suicide.
- Gustav Krupp was too ill to stand trial.
- Martin Bormann was never captured and so was tried ‘in absentia’.
- Heinrich Himmler committed suicide while in British custody; Josef Goebbels committed suicide in Hitler’s bunker. ²

The following table lists the accused, their position in the Third Reich and their fates.

The person charged	Position in the Third Reich	Sentence and fate
Hans Frank	Governor of German occupied Poland	Death by hanging
Hermann Goering	Head of the Luftwaffe	Sentenced to death. Goering committed suicide two hours before his execution.
Alfred Jodl	Chief of Operations German High Command	Death by hanging
Ernst Kaltenbrunn	Security Police Chief	Death by hanging
Wilhelm Keitel	Chief of Staff of the German High Command	Death by hanging
Joachim von Ribbentrop	Foreign Minister	Death by hanging
Alfred Rosenberg	Minister for Occupied Eastern Europe	Death by hanging
Fritz Sauckel	In charge of slave labour	Death by hanging
Arthur Seyss-Inquart	Governor of Austria, and later Governor of the Netherlands	Death by hanging

² Goebbels and his wife both committed suicide after having murdered their six children first.

Julius Streicher	Editor of Der Sturmer, Governor of Germany	Death by hanging
Martin Bormann	Head of Reich Chancellery	Sentenced to death. Sentenced in absentia
Wilhelm Frick	Minister of the Interior	Death by hanging
Walter Funk	President of the Reichsbank	Life imprisonment Released 1957; died 1960
Rudolf Hess	Deputy Fuhrer	Life imprisonment Died 1987
Erich Raeder	Naval Supreme Commander	Life imprisonment Released 1955; died 1960
Karl Doenitz	Navy Commander	10 years imprisonment; Died 1980
Konstantin von Neurath	Governor of Bohemia/ Moravia	15 years imprisonment Released 1954; died 1956
Baldur von Schirach	Hitler Youth Leader	20 years imprisonment Died 1974
Hans Frizsche	Propaganda Ministry	Acquitted; died 1953
Franz von Papen	Vice-Chancellor under Hitler	Acquitted; died 1969
Hjalmar Schacht	Economic Minister to 1939	Acquitted; died 1970
Albert Speer	Armaments Minister 1942-45	20 years imprisonment; released 1966; died 1981

Frizsche, von Papen and Schacht were later sentenced by German courts but served only a brief time in prison.

The trial of Nazi war criminals did not end in 1946. For decades after the war, former Nazis, concentration camp guards and SS officers were tracked down and brought to justice. One of the most celebrated cases involved the trial of Adolf Eichmann. Eichmann had been tracked down to his refuge in Argentina by Mossad, the Israeli secret service. He was kidnapped, taken back to Israel, placed on trial, found guilty and executed in 1962.

In August 2018, a former SS Concentration Camp guard, Jakiw Palij, aged 95, was extradited from the United States to Germany to face war crimes charges. Palij had been a guard at Trawniki in Poland. At the time of writing, it is uncertain if he will formerly go on trial.



Goring and Hess listening to the verdicts being read out

What do historians think of the “Nuremberg War Crimes trials”?

1. John Toland: Adolf Hitler

Toland paints a picture of Goering at the Nuremberg Trials which seems to suggest that Goering lapped up his role at the trial and the attention he was getting. During his time in custody he broke his drug habit and lost 40% of his vast weight. He was defiant, defended his Fuhrer and attacked any co-defendant who tried to protest his innocence.

*“...he never put blame on others or hid behind the figure of Hitler. He took charge of the prisoners’ dock, aggressively dictating a concerted strategy of defence. Back in the cell block, he would...call himself the captain of the first-string team...”*³

2. John Man: Nuremberg – Nazism on Trial

Man attempts to deal with some of the doubts raised about the proceedings in the Nuremberg Trials. How could a nation be tried for aggression or for breaking a treaty as there was no legal framework for this? The charge of aggression was structured so as not to embarrass the Soviet Union over its attack on Finland in 1939. No Italians were placed on trial. This would have meant placing allies in the dock as Italy ended the war an ally; it would also have meant perhaps placing the Soviet Union in the position of an accused. The Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939 was a classic case of inconsistency in the trials. The Germans were accused of a conspiracy in their plans for the invasion of Poland. Part of that conspiracy was clearly the Nazi-Soviet Pact. The Pact was ignored. However, that same pact was deemed a treaty broken when Germany invaded Russia. Despite the problems and claims of a victors’ trial, Man concludes:

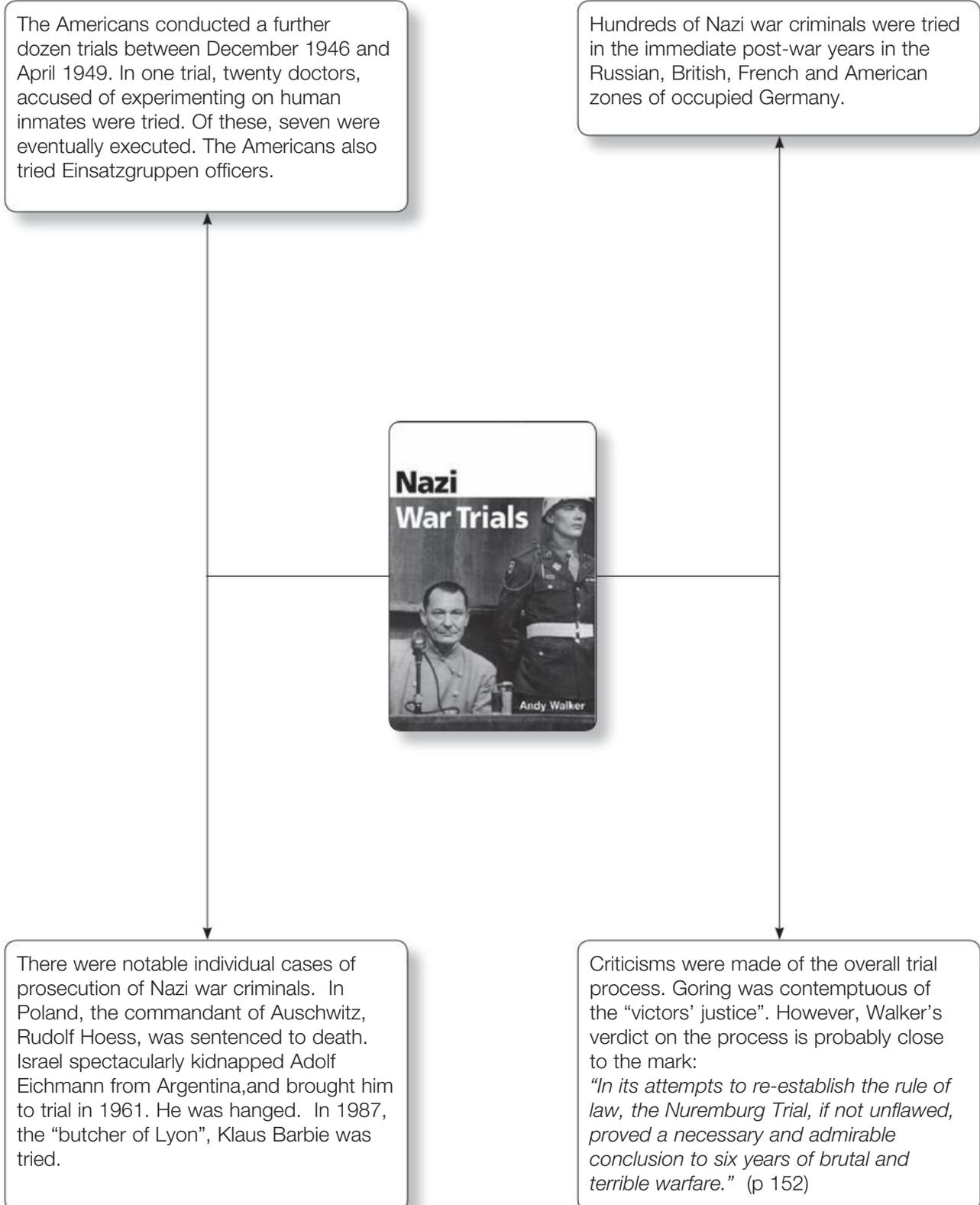
*“...only the victors possess the means of bringing criminals such as (Goering) to justice. But it does not in any way diminish the crimes of the vanquished, nor the need to punish them”*⁴

³ Toland, J, Adolf Hitler, Doubleday, New York, 1976, p895

⁴ Man, J, Nuremberg: Nazism on Trial, in Purnell’s History of the 20th Century, London, 1969, Vol 5, p2059

In his book **“Nazi War Trials”**, Andrew Walker provides a readable description of the background, proceedings and results of the Nuremburg Trials. The diagram below gives a summary of Nazi prosecutions that followed the international tribunal.

(Walker, A, Nazi War Trials, Pocket Essentials, Harpenden, 2006)



Notes

Chapter Nineteen: Analysis: Reasons for the Allied Victory

On the surface there seems to be very little to discuss concerning the issue: Why did the allies win World War II? Surely, the answer is obvious. Germany was simply overwhelmed by the vastly superior economic and military strength of the allies against whom it was fighting. Eventually, Germany found itself facing Britain and its empire, the Soviet Union (from 1941), the United States (from 1941), Italy (from 1943), France (once it was liberated), and a host of resistance and partisan movements. Defeat was therefore simply a matter of time.

Let us investigate this further.

1. The 'glad-bag' interpretation of the reasons for the Allied Victory.

The author has skimmed some old general textbooks and came up with these reasons.



The gist of this interpretation is that there is no one single key factor which accounts for the victory of the allied powers. The war was too vast, involved too many people and too many nations, had too many aspects to it for there to be one overriding explanation for the allied victory.

However, let us try and be a little more sophisticated. There are countless arguments that can be developed to explain the Allied Victory. What follows is just a few ideas that can be used to develop more detailed lines of argument.

2. The Allied Victory in World War II was due to the fact that the allies had gained control of the air.

Allied control of the air and the overwhelming superiority of allied air power made it impossible for Germany to achieve its long-term military objectives and did much to weaken the German economy.

- The Luftwaffe failed in the Battle of Britain and the Blitz:
 - This meant any possible German invasion of Britain had to be postponed indefinitely. This meant Hitler would always face a two-front war if he decided to move east.
 - German bombing did not manage to dent British morale; arguably it had the effect of increasing British determination.
 - It made possible the later intervention of the United States.
 - German bombing did not have a debilitating effect on the British economy.
- Allied bombing had a major impact on Germany's ability to sustain a war.
 - It became impossible for industry to be geographically concentrated and so it was impossible to maximise production.
 - Factories were dispersed across the country or forced underground.
 - Germany's railway network was greatly disrupted, chemical and oil production were badly affected which made munitions production much more problematical.
 - German cities were pulverised which created a host of humanitarian and social problems.
- The ability of the allies to escort long-range bombers with fighters later in the war was to have a major effect on the war.
 - Early bombing raids over Germany were dangerous because the long-distance planes lacked fighter protection. This meant that when they flew over Germany, they were vulnerable to attack. Bomber losses were very high early in the war.
 - By late 1943, a system had been perfected to enable fighters to fly distances as great as the bombers.
 - This forced the Germans to divert many of its fighters to the home front to deal with the allied bomber/ fighter threat.
 - This weakened German tactical aerial strength on the Eastern Front and in Normandy. As fighters had to be moved from the front, this gave a vast aerial superiority to the Soviet forces in the east and later allied forces in Normandy.

- Germany was forced to put much more effort into producing anti-aircraft guns. They took up 33% of artillery production by 1944. An army does not win great campaigns with anti-aircraft guns.
- In the later battles of the war the allies' superiority in the air was often a telling factor. At the time of D-Day, the allies had 12 000 aircraft to use; the Germans had less than 500.
- The eventual allied success in the Battle of the Bulge owed much to air power.

3. The Allied Victory in World War II was due to the fact that the allies had gained control of the sea.

Both Roosevelt and Churchill were extremely worried about the dominance of Axis forces in the Atlantic. Both had commented that the war would be won or lost at sea.

- Allied losses at sea reached catastrophic levels during the first three years of the war.
 - In 1940, 1000 allied ships were sunk by German submarines; that was a quarter of Britain's merchant marine.
 - Between January and April 1941, two million tons of shipping was sunk.
 - In 1942, 1662 allied ships were sunk (in both the European and Pacific theatres of war).
 - By early 1943, Britain had two months oil supplies left.
- Failure to gain control of the sea would be disastrous for the allied war effort.
 - Britain could be starved out as it relied on imported food.
 - Its links to the empire and Middle East oil would be cut.
 - It would be impossible to import badly needed munitions and war equipment from North America.
 - It would be impossible for the Americans to ship over the millions of men who would be needed to take on the Germans in Italy and France.
- Necessity had inspired allied technological innovation by the end of 1943 to wrest control of the Atlantic from German submarine packs.
- This is not the place for detailed scientific explanations.
 - However, the development of long-range aerial surveillance, improved convoy systems and the development of centimetric radar all helped to turn the tide.
 - It was allied control of the sea that made possible the massive American contribution to the defeat of Germany.

4. The war was lost on the Eastern Front.

Hitler's failure to defeat the Soviet Union dragged the German army into a long drawn-out war of attrition on the Eastern Front which it was destined to lose the longer the conflict went on.

- In 1941, the Germans were tantalisingly close to defeating the Soviet Union.
- Operation Barbarossa achieved enormous success at the beginning.
 - The Soviet Union lost hundreds of thousands of men killed or captured as the Wehrmacht took city after city.

- The Luftwaffe had decimated the Soviet air force during the first few days of the operation.
- By the autumn of 1941, western Russia was in German hands, Leningrad under siege, Kiev taken and Moscow about to be attacked.
- However, Moscow survived in December 1941 for a variety of factors.
 - General Zhukov military skills.
 - The transfer of 750 000 Siberian forces westwards.
 - Errors on the German side in timing and supplies, the Russian scorched earth policy, inadequate and inappropriate German equipment.
 - The winter.
- Russia's survival in 1941 meant it had a chance to mobilise its enormous economic and human resources.
 - Industries were moved east beyond the Urals to escape German bombing. They soon achieved unbelievable feats of production, eg 108 000 aircraft and 95 000 tanks were produced during the war.
 - Soviet wartime production was noted for its simplicity and rationalisation.
 - There was a surge of patriotic and religious fervour amongst the Russian people which spurred them on to superhuman efforts.
 - The Soviet Union was a centralised police state which made the rapid mobilisation of the nation easy to achieve.
- As a result of these factors, the Soviet Union was able to gradually grind down the German forces even though the human and economic costs were enormous.
 - Stalingrad marked a turning point on the Eastern Front.
 - Kursk saw the initiative slip away from the Wehrmacht.
 - From 1944 onwards, the giant Russian sledgehammer was able to push the Germans back towards their own land.

As Churchill said, it was the Russians who 'tore the guts out of the German army'.

5. Allied victory was the result of the intervention of the United States.

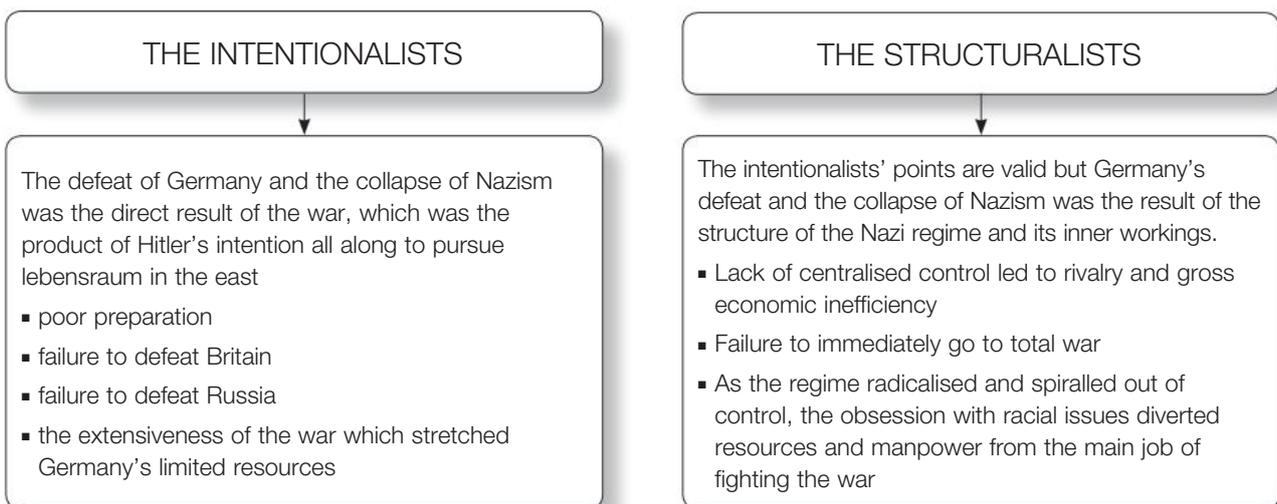
The United States was the deciding factor. Even before its entry, it had done much to sustain the British war effort. The sheer magnitude of US human, economic and military resources was too much for the Germans to counter. Their business acumen brought wartime production levels to a height the Germans could only dream of.

- Even before December 1941, the Americans were assisting Britain, even if they forced Britain to pay a high price.
 - Churchill had managed to do deals with Roosevelt on gaining extra destroyers.
 - The US and Britain established a moral high ground in the conflict with the signing of the Atlantic Charter.
 - The Lend-Lease system did much to assist Britain and the Soviet Union.

- US military power was a key factor in grinding Germany down.
 - Much of the bombing of Germany was carried out by the American air force.
 - The US navy was crucial in getting supplies across the Atlantic.
 - From 1944, the main military engagements in Western Europe were dominated by the American army led by American generals. The allied supreme commander, Eisenhower, was American.
- The American economy could not be matched in its efficiency and its ability to produce.
 - In four years, the Americans produced 8800 naval vessels and 87 000 landing craft.
 - In 1944, the Ford plant at Willow Bend south of Detroit was producing a bomber aircraft every 63 minutes.
 - Productivity in shipbuilding increased by 25% a year during the war.

In a long, drawn-out war, Germany could simply not survive against such economic and military power.

6. There is also the weakness of the German system to consider and here we return to the structuralist versus intentionalist debate.



What do the historians have to say about the “reasons for the Allied Victory”?

The classic work on the reasons for Allied Victory is Richard Overy’s 1995 work “Why the Allies Won”, a work which has been referred to several times in this book. Overy deals with the key issues relating to the allied victory in a masterful manner providing lucid arguments which are backed up by a wealth of factual detail. His book ranges over the failures of German organisation, the war in the air and the war at sea, the economic aspects of the war, specific campaigns and leadership. Few students (or teachers) will have the time to read Overy. What follows is a diagrammatic summary of his key argument. Of course, nothing is a substitute for being able to sit down and read his book for oneself. ¹

1 Overy, R, Why the Allies Won, Jonathan Cape, London, 1995

"There was nothing preordained about allied success"

Just because the allies won, does not mean that they were destined to win and that victory was inevitable. Indeed, in mid-1942, the allies did not see victory as certain. Germany occupied or had 'friends' across the entire European continent. Britain did not matter, the US were not really in and had Japan to contend with, and despite the failure to take Moscow, the Germans occupied all of western Russia. In a pre-El Alamein/ Stalingrad/ Battle of Midway world, there was nothing certain about an allied victory over Germany.

Overy's key argument is that the result of the war cannot be explained by simply saying that the allies far more resources than the Axis powers.

Overy raises the great paradox of World War II that western democracy was saved by the exertions of communism. He says that without the efforts of the Soviet Union, it is difficult to see how the western democracies could have defeated Germany.

There was a wide gap between the actual and potential output of both sides. This issue had two facets:

Why were the allies able to maximise their economic superiority?

Why was Germany not able to maximise its economic strengths?

To explain Germany's failure to maximise its economic output he points to factors such as internal political rivalries, military interference, lack of mass production

Connected to this is Germany's technological failures. In 1944 it could fire rockets into England yet it still needed 1.25 million horses to move its army.

Production and invention sealed the allied victory. The allies proved capable of maximising their production whether it was through US business can-do, heroic Russian sacrifice or British grit, whereas Germany did not. Invention and innovation won the battle in the air and at sea. Combine this to superior allied leadership and the moral high ground, and allied victory is explained.

"...Though from today's perspective Allied victory might seem somehow inevitable, the conflict was poised on a knife-edge in the middle years of the war. This period must surely rank as the most significant turning-point in the history of the modern age."
(Overy, p325)

ESSAYS 4

End of the conflict

The purpose of this section is to provide some ideas for the type of questions which might be asked on the fourth section of the syllabus: End of the conflict. These outlines are not presented as the ‘be all and end all’ responses to these questions. To provide a sense of reality to this section, what follows is a ‘first draft response’ to each question, ie what were the first ideas that came into the author’s head as he thought about each question?

Essay No 1

“Assess the importance of the air war in the eventual victory of the allied powers over the Axis.”

The usual rules apply regarding “assess” style questions – students are expected to make a judgment in this question. In your introduction you must present an argument regarding the importance of the air war and the allied victory. Several options present themselves:

- a) The air war by quite simply the key factor which explains the eventual allied victory over the Axis powers. If the allies had not gained and maintained their control of the air, the Axis powers would have survived and probably gone on to victory.
- b) The air war was simply one of a variety of factors which explain the eventual victory of the allied powers. Of equal importance was the outcome on the Russian front, victory in North Africa, allied supremacy in the Atlantic and the superior political and military leadership of the allies.
- c) The air war was eventually of little consequence in the final outcome of the war. Allied victory came from its overwhelming economic and military superiority against which the Axis powers had no answer. In this context, the air war was of minor significance.
- d) The air war was a factor of the first importance in the eventual allied victory over the Axis powers. However, alone it would not have led to the defeat of Germany. The crucial factor was the success of the Red Army on the Eastern Front.

Option a) is a valid approach, though to argue that allied victory was totally due to air war is pushing this line of argument rather too far and might be difficult to sustain. Option b) is a dangerous approach for two reasons: firstly, students might dismiss the air war quickly and answer their own question – this is inviting a very low mark; secondly, at best it will lead to an unsophisticated ‘glad-bag’ style –response. Option c) is quite valid, provided students argue for about 50% of their answer why the air war is not important before moving on to the economic/military superiority line of argument. Option d) requires the same structure as Option c), spend about 50% of the answer dealing with the importance of the air war, then move on to explain why the war on the Eastern Front was so important.

For the purpose of this section, let us consider Option d).

The air war was of major importance in explaining why the allied powers achieved victory over the Axis. It was air power which made possible the survival of Britain in 1940; if Britain had fallen in 1940, a German victory would have been highly likely. It had a catastrophic effect on

German war production which made it impossible for Germany to anywhere near match allied production. Indirectly, but crucially, air power weakened the German military position in the east and later Normandy. However, important though it was, the German war effort was most effectively destroyed due to the efforts of the Soviet Union in the east.

- The Luftwaffe failed to win the Battle of Britain and to cow the British people during the Blitz.
 - Thanks to the skill and courage on the part of the RAF, the use of radar and German errors, Britain survived the Battle of Britain.
 - Hitler's decision to bomb London and other cities gave Fighter Command a breathing space. It failed to break the will of the British people (give examples to support this).
- Failure to defeat Britain was of crucial long-term significance:
 - Hitler was destined to fight a two-front war (explain significance of this).
 - Britain's survival meant North Africa would not fall the Axis (explain why this was important).
 - Britain's survival made possible the later crucial involvement of the United States and an invasion of France (explain why).
 - It also made possible the bombing of Germany.
- The bombing of Germany was far worse than anything the British experienced (give a couple of examples). It had a major impact on weakening the German war effort.
 - A ceiling was put on production despite the efforts of Speer (explain why).
 - The railway network was disrupted.
 - Chemical and oil production suffered.
 - Major social disruption occurred.
- The allies' success in developing long-range fighter-escorts for its bomber force meant the Germans had to switch fighter aircraft to the home front and produce far more anti-aircraft guns.
 - This weakened the German military's tactical air strength on the Eastern Front and later in Normandy (provide evidence).
 - Instead of producing offensive weaponry, the Germans had to use scarce resources to defend its cities and economy.
- However, for all that, it was on the Eastern Front that the 'guts were torn out of the German army' (Churchill).
 - For a variety of reasons, the Wehrmacht became bogged down on the Eastern Front (give a few reasons).
 - Failure to defeat the Red Army in 1941, allowed Russia to take advantage of its enormous human and economic resources (give evidence).
 - This led to major defeats: Stalingrad, Kursk, Operation Bagration.
 - German losses on the eastern front were enormous (give examples) and the Germans simply could not replace them.
 - Part of the reason for this inability to replace the losses was of course the impact of the allied bombing campaign against the German home front.

Essay No 2

“To what extent were the events of the final twelve months of the war responsible for the allied victory in the European War?”

Again be aware of the usual pitfalls of a ‘to what extent question’. Students should ensure that they do not dismiss the issue of the question and then try to answer their own question. Equally, it would not be a good idea to write ‘only’ about the issue contained in the question. Also, this question contains a ‘narrative trap’; avoid simply telling the story of the final twelve months of the war.

Several approaches offer themselves.

- a) Take a positive line to the issue in the question. Yes, actions during the final twelve months were decisive in determining the outcome of the war. Up to that point, the war was on a knife edge (probably difficult to sustain).
- b) Argue a negative line to the issue in the question. Refer to the events of the final twelve months, but show that the outcome of these actions was the result of events earlier in the war.
- c) You might argue that the war was over long before the final twelve months and the events of this period were merely delaying the inevitable.

Option c) is to be avoided. This is an open invitation for students to answer their own question and the material relating to the last twelve months would probably only come in as narrative. Option a) is probably unsustainable unless one believes that Hitler’s secret weapons program had a chance.

For the purpose of this question, let us consider Option b).

During the final twelve months of the war, the Germans fought with great tenacity. The allies clearly did not have a clear run to Berlin. However, with only the occasional exception, it was a story of one defeat after another and this was due to events which had occurred earlier in the war. In this sense, the final twelve months of the war did not decide the outcome of the war. Rather events earlier in the war were responsible for deciding the outcome of the final twelve months.

- In mid-1944, the Axis powers were in an increasingly desperate position:
 - They were being steadily pushed back on the Eastern Front (mention briefly some pre-mid-1944 events).
 - North Africa had been long lost (brief mention).
 - Italy was facing an allied onslaught.
 - The bombing campaign was hurting Germany.
- It was in this context that the allies invaded Normandy.
 - Provide some brief details about D-Day (avoid the narrative trap).
 - Operation Overlord was only possible because of the survival of Britain in 1940 (brief explanation).

- The massive US presence in Overlord could not have happened without Anglo-American control of the seas (brief mention of the Battle of the Atlantic).
- Allied air superiority was only possible because of Germany's need to divert fighters to the Home Front (explain why).
- The massive Russian offensives of 1944 (give examples) steadily push the Germans back to their own land and defeat Axis allies one by one (details). The Germans simply cannot match the size and speed of the Russians.
 - Failure to innovate sees German forces still reliant on horsepower whereas the Red Army is totally mechanised. Lend-lease has helped the Red Army (explain).
 - Axis forces suffer air inferiority for the same reason as in Normandy.
 - Failures in the German economy have prevented a maximisation of output and so they cannot equal Russian power (explain).
 - Allied bombing has been a major problem in this (explain).
- German resistance to the allied move through France and into the Low Countries is strong but ineffective.
 - Use of heavy armour in the Falaise Gap holds up the allied advance but allied destruction of that armour is disastrous as the Germans cannot replace it.
 - Similarly, on the Eastern Front, actions against the Red Army (examples) lead to the destruction of tanks and aircraft which cannot be replaced.
 - Re-emphasise that the inability to replace armour and aircraft is the result of earlier actions in the war.
- There are moments of significant German resistance. Refer to Operation Market Garden and the Ardennes Offensive (some detail).
 - The allied disaster at Arnhem is a short-lived reprieve.
 - Allied air power finally destroys the German advance at the Ardennes which was petering out anyway.
 - Brave German resistance against the Russians as the Red Army descends on Berlin is led by Volkssturm troops. This indicates how desperate the Germans had become.

Germany is finally destroyed by allied advances from west, south and east. It is unable to resist these advances because of the impact of allied actions earlier in the war.

Glossary

abdicate	to give up a throne
annexation	the taking a piece of land by one country from another
anschluss	union of Austria and Germany
anti-Semitism	irrational, often violent hatred of Jews
appeasement	policy of compromising dictators to avoid conflict
Aryan	North European racial type
autarky	economic self-sufficiency
Axis	name of German-Italian-Japanese alliance
blitz	German bombing of British cities
blitzkrieg	lightning war, German military tactics
collaborator	a person who assists an enemy against his or her own country
collective security	the principle of nations collectively helping a victim against an aggressor
comintern	communist body encouraging revolution
conscription	forcible enlistment of people into the armed forces
demilitarisation	removal of any military presence
einsatzgruppen	SS murder squads
euthanasia	Nazi policy of killing mentally ill and handicapped people
fascist	extreme right-wing political group
ghetto	enclosed area into which Jews were squeezed
Holocaust	systematic murder of Europe's Jews by the Nazis
Hossbach Memorandum	1937 document purporting to show Hitler's plans for war
internationalism	principle of placing the common good above selfish national interest
League Covenant	rules by which the League of Nations operated
lebensraum	living space in the east
Maginot Line	French line of defensive fortifications along Franco-German frontier
Mein Kampf	Hitler's 1924 auto-biography
plebiscite	nationwide vote on an issue
pogrom	state-organised violence against Jews
propaganda	information designed to make people think a certain way
purges	forceful means of removing one's opponents
quasi-legal procedures	actions technically legal but against the spirit of the law
revisionism	policy of changing the Treaty of Versailles
sanctions	economic punishment enforced against an aggressor nation
scorched earth policy	practice of destroying resources during a retreat to deny an invader their use
total war	placing all a nation's resources into the war effort
Vichy regime	Nazi puppet regime that ruled non-occupied France
volksgemeinschaft	people's community
volkssturm	German home defence organisation
war of attrition	military conflict in which each side tries to exhaust the other
Wehrmacht	German army

Dramatis Personae

Anderson	Head of Air Raid Precautions Bureau
Attlee	Labour Party Leader, Deputy Prime Minister 1942-45
Baldwin	British Prime Minister 1935-37
Beaverbrook	Head of aircraft production
Bevin	British Minister of Labour
Bock, von	German general
Bormann	Head of Reich Chancellery
Bradley	US General
Chamberlain	British Prime Minister 1937-40
Churchill	British Prime Minister 1940-45
Ciano	Italian Foreign Minister
Daladier	French Prime Minister 1938
Darwin	Author of 'Origins of Species'
De Gaulle	Head of the Free French movement
Dolfuss	Chancellor of Austria, assassinated 1934
Dowding	Head of Fighter Command
Eden	British Foreign Minister 1940-45
Eichmann	Organiser of the Final Solution
Eisenhower	Allied Commander in Chief
Franco	Spanish Fascist leader
Goebbels	German Propaganda Minister
Goering	Head of the Luftwaffe
Guderian	German general
Halifax	British Foreign Minister 1938-40
Harris	Head of Bomber Command
Heydrich	Head of the SD
Himmler	Head of the SS
Hitler	Fuhrer of Germany
Hindenburg	President of Germany 1925-34
Hoare	British Foreign Minister 1935
Konev	Red Army general
Laval	French Prime Minister 1935
Leeb, von	German general
Litvinov	Soviet Foreign Minister 1930-39
Molotov	Soviet Foreign Minister 1939-49
Montgomery	British general
Morrison	British Home Secretary
Mussolini	Dictator of Italy
Papen, von	Vice-Chancellor of Germany
Patton	US General
Paulus	German general
Quisling	Nazi puppet leader of Norway
Reynaud	French Prime Minister 1940
Ribbentrop	German Foreign Minister 1938-45
Rokossovsky	Red Army general
Rommel	German general
Roosevelt	US President 1933-45
Runstedt, von	German general
Speer	German Armaments Minister
Stalin	Dictator of Soviet Union
Thierack	German Minister of Justice
Weygrand	French general
Wilson	US President 1913-21
Zhukov	Red Army general

Answers to Revision Exercise

Exercise 1.1

1 – US President Wilson; 2 – The Council; 3 – took care of day to day running of the League; 4 – nations sacrifice selfish national interests for the common good; 5 – it did not join; 6 – 1926-33=Germany, 1919-33=Japan; 1919-37=Italy, 1934-39=Soviet Union; 7 – Britain and France; 8 – health, refugees, communications; 9 – Italy; 10 – the League was shown as helpless, major powers could ignore the League with impunity.

Exercise 1.2

Italy had little to gain from its invasion of Abyssinia other than a misguided sense of military glory. Within a month of the invasion, the League had imposed half-hearted sanctions. This angered Italy but did nothing to help the Abyssinians. Diplomatically it destroyed the Stresa Front and pushed Italy into the arms of Germany. It also weakened Anglo-French relations. Finally, it showed clearly that any notions of collective security were now dead.

Exercise 1.3

1936/ Franco/ the Church/ Falange/ Republicans/ Germany/ Italy/ non-intervention/ Soviet Union/ Guernica/ 1939/ League/ rehearsal

Exercise 2.1

a) You've got to hand it to that chap Hitler. When he came to power, Germany was in a bally mess, stuck in the depression and all that street violence. I thought the commos would take over at one stage. Now look at the country, he's got the place ticking over, the German people are proud again and he's taken care of those damned communists and the unionists. Germany was treated badly after the war, can't blame the chap wanting to get back a few things that were taken from him.

b) What has an obscure region of some god-forsaken country in central Europe which we can't even spell got to do with us? If the Sudeten Germans want to be German, let them. Can you imagine what will happen once German bombers start flying over this country? Remember Guernica. We would be helpless. And what a waste of money it is spending so much on weapons. Like the Prime Minister says, we have a great opportunity to help our people with new housing, hospitals and schools. That won't happen if the warmongers get their way.

c) I spent almost three years in the trenches. Many of my mates were blown away on the Somme, we were all part of a pals' battalion. I cannot believe that anything is worth having a repeat of those awful times of the Great War. At the time, Belgium and that seemed so important. Today people are saying Czechoslovakia is important. Important to whom? I just know that I do not want my boys to get stuck in trenches like I was, knee deep in mud and coughing up their lungs. No issue is worth having another war for.

Exercise 2.2

1 – tolerance/ Germany deserved equality/ defence needed against communism;
2 – Hoare-Laval Plan; 3 – he was going into his backyard; 4 – fear of war/ Britain's weakness/

Sudetenland not a British matter; 5 – Berchtesgaden, Godesberg, Munich; 6 – Sudetenland given to Germany, Teschen to Poland, part of Ruthenia to Hungary; 7 – joy, gratitude, admiration for Chamberlain; 8 – Churchill's; 9 – Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia, March 1939; 10 – Poland, Romania, Greece, Turkey.

Exercise 3.1

Hitler made his hostility to the Soviet Union known as soon as he gained power. His long-term goal of achieving lebensraum would be at the Soviet Union's expense. As Nazi power grew, Stalin sought agreements with France and Czechoslovakia. Stalin was concerned at the west's willingness to give in to Hitler, especially after Munich. In March 1939, Britain offered a guarantee to Poland. Stalin now hoped an agreement could be reached with the western powers. Chamberlain was not keen on working with Stalin. As a result, Stalin became open to the idea of an agreement with Hitler. Germany and the Soviet Union eventually signed an agreement on 23 August 1939.

Exercise 4.1

1 – The Sept 1938 Czechoslovak crisis; 2 – Hitler's early foreign policy speeches; 3 – German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact; 4 – Behaviour after Dolfuss' assassination; 5 – Anschluss with Austria; 6 – Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact; 7 – Invasion of Poland; 8 – Anglo-German Naval Agreement; 9 – Remilitarisation of the Rhineland; 10 – Anti-Comintern Pact.

Exercise 7.1

1st – Start of Operation Weserübung; 2nd – Surrender of Denmark; 3rd – Invasion of the Low Countries; 4th – Rundstedt's advance through the Ardennes; 5th – The surrender of the Netherlands; 6th – British withdrawal from Norway; 7th – Fall of Paris; 8th – The surrender of France; 9th – Establishment of the Vichy regime; 10th – sinking of the French fleet at Oran.

Exercise 7.2

1 – Blitzkrieg; 2 – The Maginot Line; 3 – The Winter War; 4 – The Phoney War; 5 – Operation Dynamo; 6 – the sickle cut; 7 – The Vichy Regime; 8 – The Dunkirk Spirit; 9 – The Free French Movement

Exercise 8.1

1 – false; 2 – true; 3 – true; 4 – false; 5 – true; 6 – false; 7 – false; 8 – true; 9 – false; 10 – true.

Exercise 8.2

Ineffective – navigation – night – Harris – Lancaster – Flying Fortresses – Hamburg – 1943 – fighter escort – Dresden

Exercise 9.1

It had always been Hitler's intention to attack the Soviet Union. He had never meant to honour the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939. Preparations to attack Russia proceeded during 1941 but the invasion was delayed because of the decision to invade Yugoslavia and Greece. German

forces eventually attacked Russia on 22 June 1941. Early progress was swift and dramatic and Russian losses numbered in the millions. However, lack of supplies, distance and the Russian winter conspired to rob Hitler of his quick victory. Zhukov's leadership and the relocation of Soviet Siberian troops made possible a Soviet counter-attack in early December. The Germans were pushed back up to 300 kms in places.

Exercise 9.2

1 – Hitler's plan for the invasion of Russia; 2 – German plan to take Moscow; 3 – Hitler's plan for attacking southern Russia; 4 – German battle plan at Kursk; 5 – Russian battle plan at Stalingrad; 6 – Mannstein's attempt to relieve Stalingrad; 7 – German commander in the Caucasus; 8 – Soviet commander at Stalingrad; 9 – Stalin's number one commander; 10 – German commander at Stalingrad.

Exercise 10.1

1 – oil supplies, control of the Suez Canal; 2 – not very, 130 000 Italian prisoners taken, loss of many tanks and guns; 3 – only good port in that part of North Africa, strategic location; 4 – stalemate with both sides suffering heavy losses; 5 – British forces were getting stronger and he lacked fuel; 6 – more men, tanks, no fuel problems; 7 – a Great War frontal assault; 8 – fled to Tunisia, Rommel escaped, the troops surrendered; 9 – Anglo-American invasion of Morocco and Algeria; 10 – total allied control of North Africa, provided a springboard for an attack on Italy.

Exercise 11.1

Resignation – enthusiasm – evacuees – gas mask – barrage – blackout – Anderson – panic – resilience – pride – conscripted – interned – Reith – censor – radio – morale – Tommy Hanley – Vera Lynn

Exercise 11.2

1 – true; 2 – false; 3 – false; 4 – true; 5 – true; 6 – true; 7 – false; 8 – true; 9 – false; 10 – false

Exercise 12.1

1 – no enthusiasm, just foreboding; 2 – great concern, remembered WWI, wanted to maintain Home Front morale; 3 – very responsive, changed laws if they were opposed; 4 – easy, played up early Blitzkrieg successes; 5 – worsening military situation on various fronts; 6 – more strident, more racist, more use of fear; 7 – he rationalised production, increased war industry efficiency; 8 – layers of bureaucracy, red tape, Bormann's opposition; 9 – decentralised, several rival centres of power; 10 – tried to build up their personal empire, hoarded supplies.

Exercise 12.2

1 – dedicating all resources to the war effort; 2 – policy of killing handicapped people; 3 – Armaments Minister; 4 – Nazi regional governors; 5 – Head of the SD; 6 – Hitler's right hand man from May 1941; 7 – The allied bombing of Hamburg; 8 – Nazi law to arrest and detain people; 9 – Minister of Justice; 10 – Munich-based opposition movement

Exercise 13.1

1 – they were sub-human, only good for being slaves; 2 – stretch German lines of communication, limit supplies for the German army, wait for the winter; 3 – enormously, industrial production cut 50%, massive material losses; 4 – besieged by the Germans for 900 days, great suffering and loss of life, siege lifted January 1944; 5 – massive movement of people and industry to east of the Urals; 6 – centralised control, ruthless police-state controls; 7 – became more nationalistic; 8 – religion was now tolerated, indeed encouraged; 9 – nationalism and hatred of Germany; 10 – he was associated with past Russian heroes who had opposed foreign invasions.

Exercise 14.1

Nazi ideology was firmly rooted in Darwinist notions of selection and the survival of the fittest. These Darwinist ideas were applied to nations and races and led to Hitler's ideas on Aryan racial superiority. Hitler's ideas combined with a centuries' long tradition of anti-Semitism to cause the growing persecution of the Jews of Germany in the 1930s. The outbreak of war led to many more Jews coming under Nazi control. In Poland they were rounded up into ghettos. When the Russian campaign began, Einsatzgruppen death squads hunted down Jews and killed them. Eventually, the Nazi leadership decided to gas the Jews of Europe in death camps built for the purpose. Over six million Jews were killed during the war.

Exercise 14.2

Jews – persecution – lifestyle – Volksgemeinschaft – 200 000 – mentally – Operation T4 – 275 000 – ironic – vagrants

Exercise 15.1

1 – Russia was doing all the major fighting, he believed the west wanted the Nazi and Soviet armies to destroy each other; 2 – he believed Stalin sought a Soviet takeover of Eastern Europe; 3 – strength of German defences; 4 – it prevented the Germans concentrating their defensive forces; 5 – false intelligence, establishing dummy armies; 6 – enormous, masses of men, equipment, scientific innovations; 7 – Sword, Juno, Gold, Omaha, Utah; 8 – very successful apart from Omaha where losses were high; 9 – captured Cherbourg, control of Cotentin Peninsula; 10 – captured Caen and surrounding areas.

Exercise 16.1

1st – End of the siege of Leningrad; 2nd – Soviet attack on Finland; 3 – Red Army captures Crimean port of Sebastopol; 4 – Start of Operation Bagration; 5 – Red Army capture of Minsk; 6 – Start of the Warsaw Rising; 7 – Romania 's surrender to the Soviet Union; 8 – Red Army move into East Prussia.

Exercise 17.1

1 – true; 2 – false; 3 – false; 4 – true; 5 – true; 6 – true; 7 – false; 8 – false; 9 – true; 10 – false.

