# Conflict in Europe: 1935–1945

Robert Loeffel

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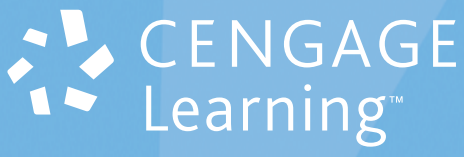

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**Conflict in Europe: 1935–1945**
**1st Edition**
**Robert Loeffel**

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# ABOUT THE BOOK

## Conflict in Europe: 1935–1945

*Conflict in Europe: 1935–1945* has been developed especially for senior secondary students of Modern History in New South Wales. The book is based on the understanding that History is an interpretative study of the past by which you also come to better appreciate the making of the modern world.

Developing understandings of the past and present in senior History extends on the skills you learnt in earlier years. As senior students you will use historical skills, including research, evaluation, synthesis, analysis and communication, and the historical concepts, such as evidence, continuity and change, cause and effect, significance, empathy, perspectives and contestability, to understand and interpret societies from the past.


**BOOK INTRODUCTION** provides a context to the issues that are addressed.




**KEY FIGURES AND GROUPS, KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS, AND KEY DOCUMENTS AND EVENTS** feature brief biographies, profiles, definitions and summaries of key documents as a ready reference for learning and revision.

**SYLLABUS OUTCOMES** are listed at the start of the chapter. These provide a focus for you as you read each chapter.




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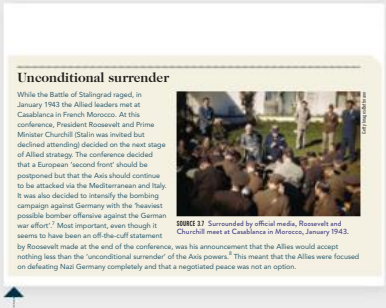
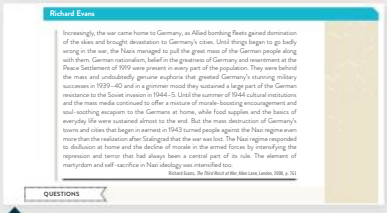
**SOURCE STUDIES** of visual and text primary sources and secondary literature appear frequently throughout the text and are combined with questions and activities to aid your evaluation and interpretation of evidence from the past.

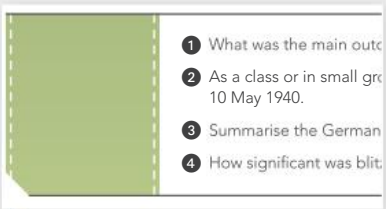

**SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUALS** are biographical profiles and assessments of key historical figures and frequently include questions and activities.




**INFORMATION BOXES** contain extended discussions of key events, concepts and historical developments. Many also include questions and activities.



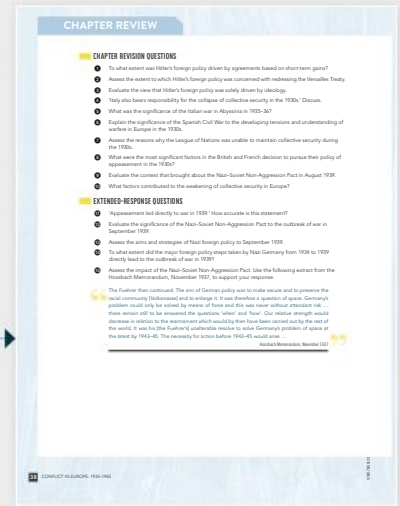

**HISTORIAN BOXES** introduce key historians and schools of interpretation as a way of making historiography clearer.




**QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES** are included throughout the text to consolidate content knowledge and hone examination skills.


**DIAGRAMS** are used to visually summarise complex ideas and events and each chapter includes **LOCATION MAPS**.


**CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CHAPTER REVIEW ACTIVITIES** conclude each chapter. They include a brief precis of the topic, suggestions for further reading, and a range of learning activities that consolidate knowledge and understanding of the chapter's content. These tasks incorporate a range of historical understandings and skills.

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French troops occupying the Ruhr in 1923. British and French attitudes towards enforcing the conditions of the Treaty of Versailles changed dramatically by the 1930s.

# CONFLICT IN EUROPE: 1935–1945

The period 1935 to 1945 was a time of terrible destruction that encompassed Western, Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Mediterranean and North Africa. In total there were over 45 million deaths across Europe. The 'total war' waged by the combatant countries killed millions of soldiers and millions more civilians, who were victims of aerial bombings, reprisals, genocide or died as slave labourers. The Soviet Union suffered the most with estimates of 25 million dead, including over 8.6 million soldiers.

The rise of fascism and the dictatorships of Hitler and Mussolini created belligerent and expansionist force in Europe. The cruelty of Italy's invasion of Abyssinia and acts of violence against civilians during the Spanish Civil War were in many ways precursors to World War II. German leader Adolf Hitler's aggressive foreign policy set out to crush the Treaty of Versailles, establish a 'Greater Germany', destroy communism and the Soviet Union and extend German influence deep into Russian territory. Hitler's invasion of Poland in September 1939 began six years of war, during which German fortunes fluctuated greatly. Initially, the Nazi forces seemed unstoppable as the stalemate style of warfare that was witnessed in World War I was forgotten amid the stunning German victories in Western Europe in 1940. However, after the German invasion of Russia began in 1941, the Allies grew in strength and the Axis began a long and painful retreat. The war was multidimensional, with massive offensives on land joined by sustained and costly strategic bombing campaigns that brought the war to the home fronts of both Britain and Germany. In addition to the technological advances of this war, it was also defined by its violent racism and politically motivated hatreds. This made World War II a 'war of annihilation' in which the complete destruction of one side or the other was the accepted objective.

World War II was the most comprehensive example of total war the world has yet seen, with the home fronts of Russia, Britain and Germany suffering both similar and different hardships and a total of over 20 million civilian casualties altogether. The role of the home fronts in sustaining the war effort cannot be underestimated and the ability of the civilians to endure hardship and maintain production helped to determine victory or defeat. World War II is also defined by the unique and terrifying human horror of the Holocaust and the 'race war' of the Eastern Front, which cost the lives of an estimated 11 million people altogether. The scale of the Nazi crimes informed the final phase of the war in 1944–45, which witnessed the liberation of Western Europe and the Red Army's triumphant capture of Berlin. In the aftermath, for the first time those deemed accountable for war crimes were tried before an international court.

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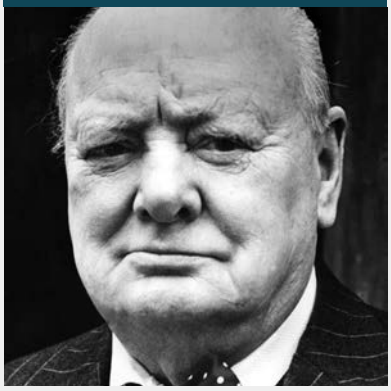
# KEY FIGURES AND GROUPS

## WINSTON CHURCHILL (1874–1965)



Winston Churchill was Britain's wartime Prime Minister (1940–45). Half American, Churchill had been on the edges of power in the 1930s as a vocal opponent of appeasement. In May 1940, he was made British Prime Minister. His rallying speeches and determined attitude guaranteed that the British would fight on rather than surrender to Nazi Germany. He developed a working relationship with US President Franklin Roosevelt and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin.

## ADOLF EICHMANN (1906–62)

Adolf Eichmann was one of the chief organisers of the Final Solution. He joined the SS in 1932. Up to 1939, he was in charge of Jewish migration from Germany. When the war began, he organised the deportation of Jews to the General Government area. He attended the Wannsee Conference in January 1942 and was an important planner of the Final Solution, in particular, organising the extermination of 400 000 Hungarian Jews at war's end. He escaped to Argentina at the end of the war but was recaptured, flown to Israel, tried and executed in 1962.

## JOSEPH GOEBBELS (1897–1945)

Dr Joseph Goebbels was crippled by polio at a young age. He was made Minister of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment in 1933. His ferocious anti-Semitism did much to whip up hatred for the Jews. In 1944, he was made Minister of Total War but could do little to stave off German defeat. In May 1945, he killed his children and committed suicide after the death of Hitler.

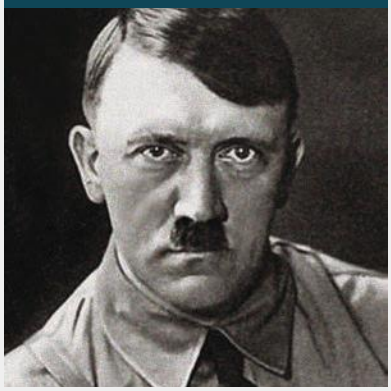
## REINHARD HEYDRICH (1904–42)

Reinhard Heydrich, a former naval officer, joined the SS in 1931 and was put in charge of its counterintelligence section (SD). He developed anti-Semitic legislation, including helping to organise the 'Night of Broken Glass' pogrom in November 1938. He was made Deputy Reich Protector of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (Czechoslovakia) in August 1941. In January 1942, he chaired the Wannsee Conference, which initiated the Holocaust. He was assassinated in March 1942 by Czech agents in Prague.

## HEINRICH HIMMLER (1900–45)

Heinrich Himmler was an agricultural student who became the chief of the SS. Himmler was in charge of the SS empire, which included the concentration camp system, the German police, the killing squads and the extermination camps. Considered by Hitler to be the 'truest of the true', Himmler tried to negotiate with the Western Allies at the end of the war. Captured by the British, he killed himself with poison in May 1945.

## ADOLF HITLER (1889–1945)



Adolf Hitler, born in Austria, fought in the German Army in World War I. He joined the fledgling National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) in 1919. His mixture of nationalism and anti-Semitism appealed to a section of German society. Appointed Chancellor in January 1933, he accelerated and made public Germany's rearmament and enacted anti-Semitic policies. He appointed himself Commander-in-Chief of the Wehrmacht in 1938 and Commander-in-Chief of the Army in 1941. He increasingly interfered with the leadership of the Wehrmacht during the war. He killed himself in his Berlin bunker as he faced defeat in April 1945.

## RUDOLF HÖSS (1900–47)

Rudolf Höss was the first and last commandant of the extermination camp at Auschwitz. He was given responsibility for creating the extermination side of the camp and developed the use of Zylon B gas





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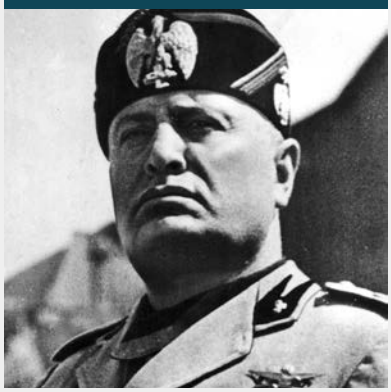
for the killing of prisoners. He gave evidence at the Nuremberg War Crimes Trial but was himself taken to Poland and tried, where he was sentenced to death and hanged at the Auschwitz camp site on 16 April 1947.

### VYACHESLAV MOLOTOV (1890–1986)

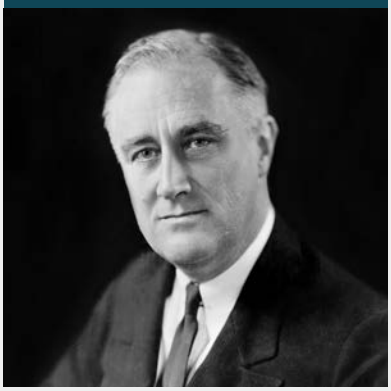
Vyacheslav Molotov was a Bolshevik revolutionary and close associate of Stalin. He survived Stalin's purges and was the Soviet Foreign Minister from 1939 until 1949 and signed the Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact with German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop in August 1939. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union, Molotov travelled widely, negotiating with the Western Allies. He accompanied Stalin to the Teheran, Yalta and Potsdam Conferences.

### BENITO MUSSOLINI (1883–1945)



Benito Mussolini was a World War I veteran and socialist journalist. He swept into power as Italy's Prime Minister in 1922 on a wave of dissatisfaction with the Versailles Peace settlement. In 1936, he invaded Abyssinia and therefore aligned Italy with Nazi Germany, declaring war on Germany's side in June 1940. The successive failures of the Italian forces in Greece and North Africa prompted his removal by the Italian king and Fascist Council in 1943. Rescued by the Germans, he was arrested and executed by communist resistance fighters at the end of the war.

### FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT (1882–1945)



Franklin Roosevelt was US President from 1933 until his death in 1945. With Japanese and German aggression looming large, Roosevelt gave financial and military support to China and Britain. When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Roosevelt responded by turning the United States into the 'Arsenal of Democracy'. He developed a working relationship with both Churchill and Stalin over the course of the war. He died in the middle of his unprecedented third term as President in April 1945.

### ALBERT SPEER (1905–81)

Albert Speer trained as an architect. He joined the Nazi Party in 1931 and was invited to help stage-manage the Nuremberg Parade grounds. In 1938, he built Hitler's Reich Chancellery in Berlin. Made Minister of Armaments and War Production, he revolutionised German production, thereby keeping Germany in the war. Captured and put on trial as a major war criminal at Nuremberg, he was fortunate only to receive a 20-year sentence.

### JOSEPH STALIN (1879–1953)

Joseph Stalin emerged as leader of the USSR in the 1920s. Exercising dictatorial power, he used violence and terror to modernise the Soviet Union during the 1930s. Despite being ideologically opposed to Nazism, Stalin signed a non-aggression pact with Germany in 1939. When Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, Stalin oversaw the mobilisation of the Russian home front but largely let his generals run the war. Defeating Germany in May 1945, he emerged from the war as the leader of a superpower.

### MARSHAL GEORGY ZHUKOV (1896–1974)

Georgy Zhukov was a Soviet general who later became Chief of the General Staff (senior commander) of the Red Army. Zhukov fought the Japanese in the east in 1939.



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He organised the defence and counteroffensive outside Moscow in December 1941. In 1942, he helped organise the counteroffensive at Stalingrad and at Kursk in 1943. His army group invaded Germany in 1945 and participated in the capture of Berlin.

## NAZI PARTY

The Nazi Party was founded in Bavaria in 1919. Hitler became an early member and eventually its leader in 1921. The party's program was racist in outlook and demanded the redressing of the Versailles Treaty. Under Hitler's influence, the Nazis also demanded that Germany expand into Eastern Europe. Lacking electoral success, the Great Depression helped the Nazis to become a prominent political party. Hitler and the Nazi Party attained power in Germany in 1933.

## NKVD

The Russian internal security organisation, the NKVD played a prominent role during Stalin's purges of the 1930s and was feared by the Russian people. In 1940, it had a strength of half a million men. During the war, it played an important part, dealing with internal security threats but also interrogating captured German prisoners of war.

## SD

Secret service of the SS.

## SS

Hitler created the SS as his personal bodyguard in 1929; initially, it consisted of four men. When Himmler took command in 1929, it began to challenge the SA as the pre-eminent group in the Nazi Party. Identified by the 'death's-head' and lightning-bolt insignia, the SS took over control of the concentration camps, the German police and the Gestapo. At the Nuremberg War Crimes Trial, it was designated a criminal organisation.

## WAFFEN-SS

The Waffen-SS was the armed formations of the SS, created before the war. They were intended to fight as shock troops on the front; the Waffen-SS had higher physical and 'racial' expectations for its members. However, as Germany's manpower shortages became critical the Waffen-SS had to abandon its racially elite status and allow foreign volunteers to join. Eventually, there were 38 Waffen-SS divisions created.

## WEHRMACHT

The Wehrmacht was Germany's military forces, consisting of the Heer (army), Kriegsmarine (navy) and Luftwaffe (air force). Established in 1935, the Wehrmacht undertook the rapid build-up of Germany's military in preparation for World War II. The Wehrmacht gained a formidable reputation during 1939–40, due to its highly successful invasions of Poland, the Low Countries and France. It met its match with the Red Army in the USSR. Nazi ideology came to influence the Wehrmacht, with its personnel perpetrating numerous war crimes.



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# KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

### Afrika Korps
The name for the German Army in North Africa.

### Anschluss
The union of Germany and Austria in 1938.

### appeasement
A diplomatic policy based on making concessions to a foreign power in order to avoid conflict.

### blitzkrieg
Blitzkrieg ('lightning war') describes a German military tactic of World War II. Blitzkrieg was the method of attack that focused on directing offensives on a small, narrow front using superior numbers of armour and infantry, supported by artillery and ground support aircraft. The objective was to punch holes in enemy lines and continue to advance, thereby encircling enemy troops and creating confusion.

### collective security
If one nation is threatened, others would come to its aid.

### fascism
A political ideology, usually associated with the radical right, that features nationalism, an opposition to communism, liberalism and conservatism, advocates corporatist economic systems, and features a militarised aesthetic and a cult of leadership. First associated with the Mussolini-led movement in Italy, national varieties emerged in most European nations during the interwar period.

### Gauleiter
Regional Nazi Party leaders. The Nazis divided Germany up into regions (*Gaus*), which each had its own leader (*leiter*). There were 42 Gauleiters across Germany. Gauleiters were all-powerful, as they were usually 'old fighters' of the Nazi movement and had direct access to Hitler. It was through his Gauleiters that Hitler kept his finger on Germany's pulse. They were expected to uphold Nazi ideals and instil these in the population.

### genocide
The deliberate killing of an ethnic or national group.

### gulag
Soviet slave labour camp, usually located in Siberia.

### *Hilfswilligen*
Russians who elected to fight for the Germans on the Eastern Front.

### internationalism
A political movement that advocated for greater political or economic cooperation among nations and people. It was in opposition to nationalism or a focus on national interests of a particular nation over the common good. Politically, internationalism has been linked to socialism (supporting the international worker's movement) and also capitalism (encouraging free trade).

### lebensraum
Lebensraum, 'living space', was the name given to the Nazi Party policy of expansion to the east. It was a key part of the Nazi ideology and the aims of its foreign policy. The Nazis wanted to create certain conditions for German expansion into Eastern Europe. Using racist ideology, they planned to remove existing populations and replace them with German farmers and settlers. Lebensraum was also linked to the Nazi desire to remove the hated communist regime in Russia.

### Lend-Lease
Lend-Lease was the policy set up to utilise the economic power of the United States to build weapons and war resources for its Allies. Initially, Lend-Lease was designed to help the British, but after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the USSR also benefited from both British and American supplies. Lend-Lease played an important but not overarching role. Russia received specific supplies that undoubtedly aided its warfare; however, many of the critical battles at the start of the war were won without its help.

### partisans
Irregular military force that fights behind the lines.

### People's Court
Court created in Germany to deal purely with cases of treason.

### rearmament
Rearmament occurs when a nation undertakes an active policy to increase the size and capacity of its armed forces. In the early 1930s, after the memories of World War I had faded and the spirit of 'internationalism' had died down, European nations began to actively rearm as international tensions increased. Rearmament in the 1930s was characterised by a focus on air forces and the construction of bomber aircraft.

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### Hossbach Memorandum

The Hossbach Memorandum consists of notes taken by Colonel Hossbach at a meeting between Hitler and senior military and government figures in 1937. The document suggests that during the meeting Hitler explained his 'plan' for Germany to be at war within four years. The Hossbach Memorandum has been seen as evidence by those who argue that Hitler had a definitive plan for war. Others argue that this was merely Hitler testing the resolve of his senior leaders.

### Lend-Lease Act

The Lend-Lease Act was signed on 11 March 1941. Lend-Lease was the policy set up to utilise the economic power of the United States to build weapons and war resources for its Allies. Initially, Lend-Lease was designed to help the British, but after the German invasion of the USSR, the Soviet Union also benefited from both British and American supplies. Lend-Lease played an important but not overarching role. Certainly, supplies in certain areas were vital, but the critical battles were won without its help.

### Munich Agreement, 30 September 1938

The Munich Agreement was signed on 30 September 1938. It was an agreement, brokered by the British Prime Minister, to concede to Hitler's demands for the transfer to Germany of territory along the Czechoslovakian border called the Sudetenland. This agreement was hailed at the time as preventing a war that seemed evitable, but is now considered the height of a discredited appeasement policy.

### Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, 23 August 1939

The Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact was signed by the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany on 23 August 1939. It allowed Hitler to invade Poland without fear of the Soviet Union aligning with the British and French. This agreement had two parts to it: the first was a non-aggression and trade pact between the two countries; the second was a secret agreement that divided Poland up between the two countries. This agreement lasted until 22 June 1941, when Germany invaded the USSR.

### Tripartite Pact, 27 September 1940

The Tripartite Pact was a defensive alliance between Germany, Japan and Italy, signed in Berlin on 27 September 1940. Made up of six articles, the pact provided mutual assistance should any of the signatories be attacked by another nation not already involved in the war. Primarily directed towards the United States, the Tripartite Pact had little practical effect, as the signatories had different areas of interests and areas of operation.

### Atlantic Charter, 14 August 1941

The Atlantic Charter was a joint declaration signed on 14 August 1941 between US President Franklin Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. It outlined their shared goals and war aims, including that the United States would support the British in the war, that the United States and the United Kingdom sought no territorial gains, that they would support self-determination and freedom from want and fear, and a goal of postwar disarmament.

### Casablanca Conference

The Casablanca Conference was a meeting between US President Franklin Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill in Casablanca, Morocco, from 14 to 24 January 1943. Joseph Stalin was invited but could not attend due to the Battle of Stalingrad. The conference covered a number of logistical and resource issues, but it principally finalised the Allies' strategic goal for the war against the Axis, notably the policy of 'unconditional surrender'.

### *Generalplan Ost*

A series of German documents produced by both the army and SS leadership. In these documents, the Germans outlined their goals after their victory over the Soviet Union. It outlined plans to expel Soviet populations to Siberia and exploit Russia's resources for Germany's benefit.

### Yalta Conference

The Yalta Conference was held from 4 to 11 February 1945 in Crimea, where agreements were reached on the organisation of the postwar world. These included the splitting of the defeated Germany into occupation zones, the shifting of Poland's border further west, Russian agreement to begin fighting Japan, and that Nazi war criminals would be tried before an international court.

### Wannsee Conference

Held on 20 January 1942, the Wannsee Conference was a meeting between the high SS leadership and representatives of the legal, civil and administrative authorities of the German Government. Chaired by Reinhard Heydrich, the minutes of the meeting counted 11 million Jews in Europe that the Nazis planned to murder. The minutes outlined a plan to establish killing centres and begin a process to kill European Jewry. When the meeting was held, the plan was already under way.



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# The causes of conflict in Europe, 1919–39

British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain making his 'peace in our time' address at Heston Airport on his return from Munich, September 1938.

Fox Photos/Getty Images

## STUDENTS WILL INVESTIGATE

- the causes and development of conflict in Europe
- the role of the conflict in Abyssinia and the Spanish Civil War in the collapse of collective security in Europe
- the nature, character and objectives of Nazi foreign policy.

Modern History syllabus

# Growth of European tensions

The end of the Great War was a time of tremendous change in Europe; there was a definitive shift towards democracy and away from authoritarian rule. In Russia, Germany and Austria-Hungary, emperors had fallen. Elsewhere constitutions were written, republics were declared and democracy spread across a Europe ill-prepared for it. In 1914, there were only three republics in Europe; by the end of 1918, there were 13. In 1921, British scholar James Bryce optimistically wrote that there was a 'universal acceptance of democracy as the normal and natural form of government'.[1] In this period of hopefulness, a sense of internationalism existed as the map of Europe was redrawn to support 'self-determination' and give opportunities to smaller ethnic groups, such as the Poles, Hungarians and Czechs, to form their own nations. Internationalism was a political movement that advocated greater political or economic cooperation among nations and people. It was in opposition to nationalism or a focus on national interests of a particular nation over the common good. Politically, internationalism has been linked to socialism (supporting the international workers' movement) and also capitalism (encouraging free trade). Internationalism was particularly evident in the creation of the League of Nations in January 1920 as an international body designed to mediate in future times of crisis. The concept of 'collective security', where if one nation was threatened the others would come to its aid, was not really created in this period but reinvented as the hoped-for means of maintaining peace in the future. However, from its beginning the League of Nations was fatally flawed. There was no provision for it to conduct military action against an aggressor; instead, it was forced to rely on the imposition of trade sanctions as a means of punishment. In this regard, the refusal of the United States – the world's most powerful economy – to join it hopelessly damaged its ability to maintain peace purely by economic pressure.

**Timeline**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1919 | 28 June | Treaty of Versailles is signed, officially ending World War I |
| | September | Hitler joins the German Workers' Party (DAP). In February 1920, it is renamed the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP), or Nazi Party |
| 1920 | January | League of Nations is officially formed |
| 1922 | October | Mussolini launches his March on Rome. This is successful and he is invited to form government by the Italian king |
| 1923 | November | Hitler launches a coup attempt in Munich. He is defeated and sent to prison for nine months |
| 1925 | | In Italy, Mussolini declares his dictatorship |
| 1929 | October | The Great Depression causes worldwide economic turmoil |
| 1930 | September | In Germany, the Nazis' seats in the Reichstag increase from 12 to 107. They become the second largest party in the parliament |
| 1931 | | Japan invades Manchuria |
| 1932 | February | World Disarmament Conference begins |
| 1933 | January | Hitler is made Chancellor of Germany in a right-wing coalition government |
| | February | Japan leaves the League of Nations |
| | October | Germany leaves the League of Nations |



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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1934 | | A Nazi supporter assassinates the Austrian chancellor. Italy mobilises troops in response |
| 1935 | March | Hitler publicly announces the reintroduction of conscription and that Germany is rearming |
| | April | Stresa Front is formed between Italy, Britain and France against German aggression |
| | June | Anglo-German Naval Agreement is signed |
| | October | Italy invades Abyssinia. Italy achieves victory by May 1936 |
| 1936 | March | Germans remilitarise the Rhineland |
| | July | Beginning of the Spanish Civil War |
| | 25 October | Formation of the German–Italian Axis (Rome–Berlin Axis) |
| | November | Japan and Germany create the Anti-Comintern Pact |
| 1937 | July | Beginning of Japanese invasion of China |
| | November | Italy joins Anti-Comintern Pact |
| | December | Italy leaves the League of Nations |
| 1938 | March | Germany absorbs Austria into the Third Reich |
| | November | Munich Agreement; Germany annexes the Sudetenland |
| 1939 | March | Germany occupies the rest of Czechoslovakia |
| | | Britain and France guarantee their support for Poland if it is attacked |
| | August | Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact is signed |
| | September | Germany invades Poland. Three days later, Britain and France declare war |

In the aftermath of World War I, Europe was politically fractured. The survival of communist Russia created a ready-made bogeyman that gave countless reactionaries and conservative groups across Europe fuel for their paranoid fears and agendas. In addition, Europe's attempts to rebuild economically after the Great War were severely hampered by the weakened and politically isolated Germany. Finally, the greatest change in Europe after 1918 was its attitude towards war itself. In 1914, war was not only seen as inevitable but was desired across parts of Europe. However, the terrible potential of modern weapons such as gas, artillery and aerial bombing meant that war was no longer seen as an option by the public or politicians. As a result, while a number of smaller-scale conflicts occurred mainly in Eastern Europe and the Middle East up to 1923 that addressed several postwar boundaries and spheres of influence, among the major powers a sense of apathy developed in Europe towards dealing with more unsatisfactory aspects of the postwar political settlement. As such, these problems were allowed to fester and develop.

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## Remapping Europe and Germany


**SOURCE 1.1** Europe in 1914.


**SOURCE 1.2** Europe in the 1920s.

### QUESTIONS

1 What were the most significant changes to the map of Europe between 1914 and the 1920s?
2 In what ways was the map of Europe more unstable after World War I than before it?



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## Germany's losses due to the Versailles Treaty


**SOURCE 1.3** German territorial losses following the Treaty of Versailles.

### QUESTIONS

1. Identify where Germany's chief territorial losses were located.
2. What were Germany's material losses at Versailles?
3. Looking at the map, what was the main purpose of the demilitarised zone in western Germany?
4. In 1920, votes (plebiscites) were held in Allenstein, Upper Silesia and Mariewerder as to whether these territories wanted to return to Germany or not. What were the results of these votes?
5. Looking at the map, why would Hitler's calls for Germany's expansion eastward possibly be viewed favourably in Germany?

The prospect of devastating aerial bombing attacks accentuated the public's aversion to war. By 1918, both sides had developed heavy bombers. Although no sustained bombing campaigns had been carried out by either side (London was attacked 27 times by aircraft over the entire war, with only negligible damage), a fantastic fear of the bomber developed. In a speech to the British Parliament in 1932 entitled 'A Fear for the Future', British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin depressingly warned that despite the best air defences, 'the bomber will always get through'.[2] Such fears and anxieties reflected a sense that war had become so destructive as to become obsolete.

Versailles

The fragility of the European experiment with democracy was evident before the end of the 1920s. In Germany, a number of left- and right-wing coups had been launched between 1919 and 1923, while in other parts of Europe, in the face of perceived threats from socialists and communists,

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democratic governments had already fallen before 1929. Hungary installed a right-wing dictatorship in 1920; Spain acquired a dictator in 1923; in Italy, Benito Mussolini declared his dictatorship in 1925; and a right-wing authoritarian government assumed power in Poland in 1926. The Wall Street crash in October 1929 and subsequent Great Depression had an enormous impact on Germany and Europe. In Germany, the Nazi Party grew from 12 seats in the German parliament in 1928 to 107 seats in the September 1930 election. By 1939, of all the democracies created in Central and Eastern Europe after 1918, Czechoslovakia alone survived. Even in established democracies, the threat of the right wing was evident. By 1934, several fascist parties were established in France and right-wing demonstrations provoked violence. In Britain, the British Union of Fascists (BUF) was formed in 1932 and claimed to have amassed a membership of over 50 000 in July 1934. The collapse of democracy was nowhere more spectacular than in Germany, where the Nazi Party went from electoral irrelevance in 1928 to power in 1933.

# The weakening of collective security

Getty Images/Keystone-France/Gamma-Keystone via Getty Images

**SOURCE 1.4** Hitler's hatred of the Versailles Treaty and of communism, and his promises to return Germany to greatness made him an extremely popular leader.

The concept of collective security broke apart as belligerent powers began to challenge the peace. Germany was bitterly disappointed with the Treaty of Versailles. Hitler's calls to repudiate this agreement were not unique, but had widespread support in Germany. Similarly, in Italy, Mussolini had exploited the popular idea that Italy had lost out in what was called the 'mutilated victory' of Versailles. These challenges from the political right to the League of Nations were worldwide, as Japan also flouted the condemnations of the League of Nations and the international community with its invasion of Manchuria in 1931. By the mid-1930s, Germany was in a position to challenge collective security among the powers of Europe.

After the horrors of 1914–18, efforts had been made in the 1920s to preserve the peace. The Locarno Treaties of 1925 (between the former enemy powers of World War I) and the Kellogg–Briand Pact of 1928 (which outlawed aggressive war) were examples of the desire to work together in the 1920s. Although the diplomacy of the 1920s can be characterised as being conducted with the Great War in mind, the 1930s saw a clear shift to looking towards the next war. Optimistic agreements based on an understanding of collective security began to evaporate with the rise of Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, militarily aggressive Japan and the fear created by the existence of the Soviet Union. Policy such as appeasement, pursued in the 1930s, was conducted with only one side displaying optimism for the continuation of peace.



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Instead, from the 1930s onwards, the nations that were dissatisfied with the Treaty of Versailles were growing more powerful and belligerent and began to challenge the peace. Mussolini refused to sign a naval agreement as he demanded Italy should have parity with Britain and France rather than a percentage of their fleet size. In May 1931, the Germans launched the *Deutschland*, the first of three planned 'pocket battleships', technically within the rules of Versailles, but with enough firepower to challenge any vessel. It was in this climate of increasing tensions that one of the last examples of the international spirit of the 1920s was attempted with the Geneva Disarmament Conference opening in February 1932.

It should not, however, be considered a foregone conclusion that fascist Italy and Nazi Germany were always going to create an alliance against the Allies. In July 1934, when pro-Nazi elements assassinated the Austrian chancellor, Mussolini responded by mobilising his troops on the Austrian border as a warning. On 14 April 1935, the Stresa Agreement was signed between France, Britain and Italy. This was designed to address German aggression, and the signatories declared that they were committed to an independent Austria and agreed to resist any future attempt by the Germans to change the Treaty of Versailles. The Stresa Agreement failed for a number of reasons. Firstly, the terms were vague (how the powers intended to resist Germany was not clear). Secondly, Britain showed it was willing to work with the Germans to further its own interests at the expense of 'collective security'. A few months after the signing of the Stresa Agreement, the British concluded a unilateral naval agreement with the Germans. Thirdly, Italy's commitment to peace was nonexistent. Mussolini was impatient to begin building his modern-day Roman Empire. An obvious demonstration of this occurred only months after Stresa when Italy invaded Abyssinia in October 1935.

British Cabinet interwar memoranda

## The League of Nations Peace Ballot in Britain, 1934–35

The Peace Ballot of 1934–35 was a nationwide questionnaire in Britain of five questions attempting to discover the British public's attitude to the League of Nations, collective security, disarmament and the arms trade. About 11 million Britons took part (this represented about one half of the British voting public). The ballot was held in 1934 and the results were announced in 1935.

**TABLE 1.1** The League of Nations Peace Ballot of 1934–35

| QUESTION | YES | NO |
|---|---|---|
| 1 Should Great Britain remain a member of the League of Nations? | 11090387 | 355883 |
| 2 Are you in favour of all-round reduction of armaments by international agreement? | 10470489 | 862775 |
| 3 Are you in favour of an all-round abolition of national military and naval aircraft by international agreement? | 9533558 | 1689786 |
| 4 Should the manufacture and sale of armaments for private profit be prohibited by international agreement? | 10417329 | 775415 |
| 5 Do you consider that, if a nation insists on attacking another, the other nations should combine to compel it to stop: | | |
| (a) by economic and non-military measures? | 10027608 | 635074 |
| (b) if necessary, military measures? | 6784368 | 2351981 |

Adapted from Harold Nicolson, 'British Public Opinion and Foreign Policy', *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Volume 1, Number 1, January 1937, pp. 57–8

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## QUESTIONS

1. Based on these results, what can you suggest was the British public's attitude towards:
   - the League of Nations
   - disarmament and the arms trade
   - collective security?
2. Can you see a great difference in the British public's attitude towards taking economic or military measures against an aggressive power?
3. Overall, based on these results, how could you summarise the attitude of the British people towards foreign affairs in the 1930s?

## Growth in arms expenditure in France, Britain and Germany

Even before the rise of Nazi Germany in 1933, faith in collective security in Europe was waning. Evidence of this was the rise in military spending across the world. The League of Nations calculated that military spending in the world increased from US$3.5 billion in 1925 to $5 billion by 1934.[3] Similarly, the international arms trade rose from US$34 million in 1932 to $60 million by 1937.

**TABLE 1.2** Arms spending of France, Britain and Germany, 1932–39

| | FRANCE | | BRITAIN | | GERMANY | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year | (Billion fr) | GDP % | (Million £) | GDP % | (Billion RM) | GDP % |
| 1932 | 13.8 | 5.0 | 103.3 | 2.5 | 0.76 | 0.8 |
| 1933 | 13.4 | 5.2 | 107.6 | 3.0 | 1.2 | 1.9 |
| 1934 | 11.6 | 4.9 | 113.9 | 3.0 | 3.6 | 4.1 |
| 1935 | 12.8 | 5.8 | 137.0 | 2.0 | 5.4 | 6.0 |
| 1936 | 15.1 | 6.3 | 185.9 | 5.0 | 10.2 | 10.8 |
| 1937 | 21.5 | 7.1 | 256.3 | 7.0 | 10.9 | 11.7 |
| 1938 | 29.1 | 8.6 | 397.4 | 8.0 | 17.2 | 17.2 |
| 1939 | 93.6 | 23.0 | 719.0 | 22.0 | 38.0 | 30.0 |

Richard Overy, *The Origins of the Second World War*, Longman, London, 1998, p. 54



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**TABLE 1.3** Aircraft production of France, Britain and Germany, 1933–40 (includes combat and non-combat aircraft)

| | FRANCE | BRITAIN | GERMANY |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1933 | n.a. | 633 | 368 |
| 1934 | n.a. | 740 | 1968 |
| 1935 | 785 | 1140 | 3183 |
| 1936 | 890 | 1877 | 5112 |
| 1937 | 743 | 2153 | 5606 |
| 1938 | 1382 | 2827 | 5235 |
| 1939 | 3163 | 7940 | 8295 |
| 1940 | 2113 | 15049 | 10247 |

Richard Overy, *The Origins of the Second World War*, Longman, London, 1998, p. 54

**QUESTIONS**

Refer to Table 1.2.

1 As a percentage of its GDP ('national income'), France's military spending is never less than ___.
2 What happened to British military spending from 1933 until 1939?
3 When does German military spending become increasingly significant?

Refer to Table 1.3.

4 When did German aircraft production really begin to increase dramatically?
5 When did British and French aircraft production really begin to become significant?
6 Looking at both of these tables, which country clearly took advantage of the period after 1938, when war was arguably delayed by the Munich Agreement?

# Fascism in Italy

The Italian road to fascism started shortly after World War I. In postwar Italy, severe economic problems, inflation, and food and raw material shortages sapped all the euphoria gained from its victory. Italy had little experience with mass politics; near universal male suffrage had only been introduced in 1912. In the 1919 election, two parties emerged as the largest: the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) and the Catholic Party. While the PSI had been founded in 1892, the Catholic Party was only created in 1919. These politically divergent parties had little common ground, but neither mustered sufficient support to govern in its own right. In the context of poor economic conditions after World War I, the influence of socialism spread throughout Italy. Between 1918 and 1920, trade union membership grew significantly (the main socialist union grew from 250000 members to 2 million, the Catholic Union from 160000 to 1 million) and the prevalence of strike action and occupations rose steeply. Nationalists in Italy did not see this mobilisation of workers as a fight for basic rights, but rather the beginning of a Bolshevik takeover.

A victorious power in World War I, the Italians had nevertheless felt cheated at Versailles, with their Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando departing the conference early. This led ex-servicemen and nationalists to regard the treaty as a 'mutilated victory', as they felt Italy had not received what it was due. In truth, Italy did receive most of what had been promised it in the wartime treaties. What Italy did not get were North African colonies and coveted territory around the Adriatic Sea. Indicating the rejection of Versailles

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among nationalists, the poet-adventurer Gabriele D'Annunzio held the Adriatic city of Fiume 'in the name of Italy', in defiance of an international occupying force, from September 1919 to December 1920. Benito Mussolini had created his first fascist group as early as 1914. At this stage, he espoused a strong socialist platform, one that he would later reject. Precipitating the Italian dissatisfaction with the final Versailles Agreement, in March 1919 Mussolini created a party known as the Italian Fasci of Combat. They championed a republican, anti-clerical message that demanded female suffrage and workers' participation in managerial decisions. Fascism was particularly popular among ex-servicemen, but initially not with the electorate, and they polled badly. In the November 1919 election in Milan – a particularly strong base for the fascists – they only won 5000 out of 250 000 votes. However, after this electoral disappointment, a number of rival fascist parties died off, but Mussolini's group, with the help of wealthy anti-socialist backers, slowly continued to grow. One area of growth was in rural areas, where the anti-socialist message was increasingly popular. In November 1921, the fascists under Mussolini split from the socialists to form the Nationalist Fascist Party (NFP). The fascists also began to use political violence, organising squads to attack socialist and trade union meetings. This violence contributed to the sense that Italy was descending into anarchy. In this climate, membership of the NFP grew to over 250 000 by mid-1922. The fascists had also begun to appeal to a wider audience, and on the back of fears of socialism and communism began to appeal to the middle class and upper class of Italian society.

BIPs/Getty Images

**SOURCE 1.5** Benito Mussolini's March on Rome allowed him to take power in Italy with a purportedly 'popular' movement.

Despite the myth of the fascist revolution and the March on Rome in 1922, fascism and Mussolini owe their ascendancy primarily to the influence of the conservative sections of Italian society. By 1922, conservative, business and Catholic Church groups began to push for fascism to have its turn in power. After unsuccessful anti-fascist strikes, the fascists resolved to march on Rome to seize power. They had only 30 000 poorly armed troops. The Italian Prime Minister, Luigi Facta, sought the support of the King, Victor Emmanuel III, who had ruled Italy since 1900. The King initially agreed to the Prime Minister's request to enact martial law to deal with the fascists, but then changed his mind. The Prime Minister resigned and Mussolini was appointed in his place by the King. The March on Rome went ahead, its success already assured. In November 1923, under pressure from fascist violence, the Italian parliament approved the Acerbo Law. This stated that if one party got just 25 per cent (or more) of the votes cast in an election, they would get 66 per cent of the seats in parliament. In the 1924 election, the fascists became the dominant party in the Italian parliament. A few weeks later, the Unitary Socialist Party leader, Giacomo Matteotti, was murdered by fascist thugs. In January 1925, Mussolini – under pressure from radical elements within the NFP who demanded an end to the facade of democracy – took responsibility in parliament for the fascist violence. Shortly afterwards, legislation was introduced that restricted or cancelled common democratic liberties in Italy. Therefore, through a combination of favourable electoral reforms, propaganda and thuggery over a three-year period, the NFP was the only party left in Italian politics.

## QUESTIONS

1. What was the attitude of the Italian fascists to the Versailles Treaty?
2. What was the major fear of Italian conservatives after World War I?
3. Who were the fascists? What was their party platform?
4. Despite early setbacks, who did the fascists appeal to by 1922?
5. Describe the circumstances in which Mussolini was named Prime Minister.



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# The failure of collective security

## The Italian invasion of Abyssinia

The Italian invasion of Abyssinia is a useful example of the extent to which collective security had collapsed by the mid-1930s. In the aftermath of the Stresa Agreement (1935), Mussolini indulged in an act of pure self-interest with his invasion of Abyssinia. He had felt that signing the Stresa Agreement had entitled him to engage in his war of imperial conquest without risking the disapproval of Britain or France. Abyssinia had long been a goal of Italian imperialism. In 1894 to 1896, the Italians had failed to conquer the territory with the loss of over 10 000 troops. After World War I, the Italians tried to increase their influence over Abyssinia, sponsoring its membership in the League of Nations and signing a Treaty of Friendship in 1928. On 3 October 1935, Mussolini used a minor diplomatic incident as a pretext to launch an invasion.

Underwood Archives/Getty Images

**SOURCE 1.6** Barefoot Abyssinian troops marching to the front, December 1935. The Abyssinians were no match for the Italians with their aircraft, armour and poisonous gas.

The Abyssinians had little hope against a modern Italian military, especially one that used poison gas. Mussolini's assumption that the British and French would not interfere was not entirely wrong. Showing their lack of resolve in the face of a bully, the French and British proposal for peace – called the Hoare–Laval Pact after the British and French foreign ministers, Samuel Hoare and Pierre Laval – involved giving Italy most of Abyssinia. When this proposal was made public, it caused outrage and was quietly dropped. The League of Nations attempted to enforce its authority and voted for economic

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sanctions against Italy. However, these proved farcical, as the vital resource of oil was not included, while the British still allowed the Italians to use the Suez Canal. In addition, neither Germany nor the United States stopped trading with the Italians, as neither were members of the league. By May 1936, the Abyssinian Emperor, Haile Selassie I, had fled and the war had been won; it had cost in the order of 750 000 Abyssinian lives. The sanctions lasted from November 1935 until July 1936, when the league decided to end them. Confirming the direction it was heading in, Italy left the league in December 1937.

Abyssinia was the last time that the league intervened in an international crisis. From then on, as incidents arose, it was bypassed for intervention by Britain and France. Abyssinia provided an important example, as it showed that collective security would always be flawed as long as leading powers such as Italy, Britain and, to a lesser extent, France were concerned more with self-interest than with what was right. The reactions of the British and French governments through the Hoare–Laval proposal highlight their overriding concerns: they perceived greater threats such as Russia existed in Europe and, as a result, they were willing to sacrifice Abyssinia in order to keep Italy onside – although they failed in this regard anyway. Abyssinia also provided an important and unfortunate lesson to Hitler, as it showed the discord and weakness as well as the reluctance of the British and French to act.

Getty Images/George Rinhart/Corbis

Haile Selassie I addresses the League of Nations, June 1936

**SOURCE 1.7** Benito Mussolini announces the defeat of Abyssinia and the creation of the new Italian Empire, May 1936.

## The Spanish Civil War, 1936–39

The major European conflict between the world wars was the Spanish Civil War. Spain was economically backward and remained neutral during World War I. It had a history of political unrest in the 20th century. In the midst of an unpopular war with Morocco, a right-wing dictatorship



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was installed in 1923. Eventually, the king was removed and the republic restored in 1931. In July 1936, the fragile second Spanish republic was thrown into chaos when a group of army leaders decided to overthrow the democratically elected left-wing **Popular Front** government. The coup was originally led by General José Sanjurjo, but after he died in a plane crash in 1936, the leadership of the Nationalists, as they were known, passed to General Francisco Franco (1892–1975). The coup began in the peripheral areas of Spain and in the colonies (where most of the senior officers were stationed).

**Popular Front**
A coalition government formed by agreements with several left-wing parties

France and Britain did very little to stop the Republicans from being overthrown due to a combination of fear of the leftist government in Spain and their own domestic concerns. The major consequences of the Spanish Civil War were military. For Spain, the devastation of the three years of conflict was enough to keep it out of a future European war. A similar impact was felt by the Italians. Their significant involvement in Spain – 60 000 troops and more than 750 aircraft and significant naval units – drained Italy's military strength before World War II began. The Italians benefited little from their involvement in the conflict and the war was unpopular at home. The Germans, on the other hand, gained valuable combat experience, even though their efforts were relatively small. The use of bombing against civilian targets (mainly by the Nationalists) seemed to confirm fears of the devastation of these weapons. The German bombing of the Basque township of Guernica on 26 April 1937 was highlighted as a particular example of 'terror bombing' of a civilian target. Although the casualties added up to a relatively low 200 to 300 people killed, the European press exaggerated the impact of the raid and bombing more generally.

Popperfoto/Getty Images

**SOURCE 1.8** Atrocities were committed by both sides. After soldiers from the Montana Barracks in Madrid tried to rebel against the Republican government in July 1936, those that surrendered were killed in cold blood.

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A significant legacy of the Spanish Civil War to World War II was the creation of the 'fifth column' myth. The term was coined in 1936 by General Emilio Mola, a Nationalist leader, who claimed that for their offensive on Madrid, Nationalist forces had 'four columns' heading towards the capital but a 'fifth column' inside ready to commit acts of sabotage to assist the attack. The fifth column was a complete fallacy; however, the idea became popular in the Western media that reported on the conflict. It was seen as a specifically right-wing device, as its allure in the press was that individuals in prominent positions in society would suddenly be revealed as traitors or fifth columnists. In the early years of World War II, the fifth column was revived and became a major concern on the Allied home front in 1940.

German dive bomber of the Legion Condor, 1939 (b/w photo)/© SZ Photo/Scherl/Bridgeman Images

**SOURCE 1.9** A Stuka Ju 87 dive-bomber from the German 'Legion Condor' prepares to attack a target in Spain. Germany supplied tanks and troops, but its main contribution was in aircraft.

# The aims and strategy of German foreign policy to September 1939

**lebensraum**
Nazi foreign policy goal of obtaining 'living space' for Germany in Eastern Europe

Nazi foreign policy was dominated by a number of key aims. Foremost were redressing the impositions of the Treaty of Versailles and the extension of Germany's borders, with the creation of 'living space', or lebensraum, in the east. The other important aim was to destroy what the Nazis perceived to be the greatest threat to Europe: Bolshevism. The Nazis were convinced that Bolshevism was a worldwide conspiracy and that it was intrinsically linked to Judaism. Therefore, the concept of 'Jewish Bolshevism' – that Jews and Bolsheviks were one and the same – was regarded as true by the Nazis as they linked their racist hatred of the Jews with their political hatred of communism. Part of their



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strategy was to create an anti-communist alliance with like-minded right-wing powers. After taking power, the Nazis embarked on creating the Axis Alliance based on an anti-communist alliance with other right-wing countries. This was mainly shown in the Anti-Comintern Pact eventually signed by Japan, Germany and Italy. The strategy of Nazi foreign policy was to make deals and agreements purely for short-term gains and to also use aggression and bullying tactics to achieve their aims. Hitler's aim to extend Germany's borders had, at its heart, the pure threat of violence and aggressive war. Every major foreign policy incident in the Nazi period, including the remilitarisation of the Rhineland, the **Anschluss** with Austria, the Munich Agreement and the annexation of Czechoslovakia, involved the threat of the German military.

Hitler outlines his foreign policy in 1933

**Anschluss**
The union between Austria and Germany

In terms of defining and achieving these aims, Nazi ideology played an enormous part. First and foremost were racism and nationalism. The Nazis firmly believed in the superiority of the German people and that they were destined to colonise the inferior eastern races. The Nazis were convinced that Jewish Bolshevism was an illegitimate form of government in Russia and needed to be destroyed. They believed that communism was an international conspiracy and that 'world Jewry' was behind it. For this reason, much Nazi aggression was directed towards facilitating an eventual showdown with the USSR. The other part of Nazi ideology that played a role in their foreign policy was nationalism. The Nazis used the German sense of being maltreated at Versailles to justify their aggressive policies during the 1930s. The reuniting of German people located in Czechoslovakia and Poland gave the Nazis a foreign policy narrative before the war.

## Hitler defines his foreign policy goals in *Mein Kampf* (1925)

And so we National Socialists consciously draw a line beneath the foreign policy tendency of our pre-War period. We take up where we broke off six hundred years ago. We stop the endless German movement to the south and west, and turn our gaze toward the land in the east. At long last we break off the colonial and commercial policy of the pre-War period and shift to the soil policy of the future. If we speak of soil in Europe today, we can primarily have in mind only Russia and her vassal border states … For centuries Russia drew nourishment from this Germanic nucleus of its upper leading strata. Today it can be regarded as almost totally exterminated and extinguished. It has been replaced by the Jew. Impossible as it is for the Russian by himself to shake off the yoke of the Jew by his own resources, it is equally impossible for the Jew to maintain the mighty empire forever. He himself is no element of organization, but a ferment of decomposition … [the Russian] empire in the east is ripe for collapse. And the end of Jewish rule in Russia will also be the end of Russia as a state. We have been chosen by Fate as witnesses of a catastrophe which will be the mightiest confirmation of the soundness of the folkish theory. Germany is today the next great war aim of Bolshevism.

Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (trans. Ralph Manheim), Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1973, pp. 597–8

### QUESTIONS

1. Where does Hitler argue Germany needs to turn its attention towards expansion?
2. What does Hitler mean when he says that there must be a 'break of the colonial and commercial policy' and a 'shift to the soil policy of the future'?
3. Who does Hitler suggest is dominating Russia? Which religion and ideology does he clearly link together?
4. What condition does Hitler believe the Russian Empire is in at the time he wrote this?
5. Who does Hitler suggest is the greatest threat to Germany?

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## The early years of Nazi foreign policy

Hitler's foreign policy moves began from a position of weakness. Initially, he did not have full control in Germany (until his death in August 1934, President Paul von Hindenburg remained the Head of State) and the German military was in no condition to fight a war immediately. In addition, at least for this early period, Hitler was following the objectives of conservative elements inside Germany. Hitler's first foreign affairs moves (the German departure from the World Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations in October 1933) had already been intended by previous conservative Weimar governments.[4] The Nazi Foreign Minister, Baron Konstantin von Neurath, had been Foreign Minister under Chancellor Franz von Papen since 1932. He continued as Foreign Minister until February 1938, when he was finally replaced by radical Nazi Joachim von Ribbentrop.

Hitler made international agreements that assisted Germany in the short term but that he did not intend to honour. In January 1934, Hitler signed a non-aggression pact with Poland. This was designed to annoy the French – who had an alliance with the Poles – and to give the appearance that Hitler was not interested in Russia and the east. Not all of Hitler's moves were successes. In July 1934, Austrian Nazis assassinated the Austrian Prime Minister in an attempt to launch a pro-Nazi coup. Hitler claimed not to have known about their plan. The coup failed and only succeeded in stirring Italian suspicions of Germany as Mussolini ordered Italian troops to the border as a warning.

Hitler began to strengthen his position with the success of the Saar plebiscite in January 1935. The Saar had been administered by an international body since the Versailles Treaty. After 15 years, the inhabitants were allowed to vote whether to return to Germany. Being overwhelmingly German, it probably was not surprising that they voted to do this by a 90 per cent majority. In March, Hitler shrewdly took advantage of defence announcements by the British and French to declare that Germany was rearming and reintroducing conscription, and that it was creating an air force (Luftwaffe). For greater effect, when discussing the Luftwaffe with foreign diplomats, Hermann Göring doubled its actual size. Indicating how self-interest was dictating the reaction of the British and French, Ian Kershaw recounts Hitler describing the reactions of the ambassadors of France, Britain and Italy to his conscription announcement:

> The Italian ambassador, Vittorio Cerruti, went white with anger; the French, André François-Poncet, delivered an immediate verbal protest; the British ambassador, Sir Eric Phipps, merely inquired whether Germany's offers to Britain on relative sizes of air-forces and fleets still stood.
>
> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: 1889–1936: Hubris*, Allen Lane, London, 2000, p. 551

In June 1935, the British signed the Anglo-German Naval Agreement with the Germans. In this agreement, the Germans accepted that they would only increase their navy to 35 per cent of the British. This was an approval of German rearmament and a rejection of Versailles by the British. The British were happy with this agreement, as it kept their naval superiority over the Germans. Hitler liked it too; navy had little significance in Hitler's plans for German foreign policy, and besides, he only stuck to agreements as long as they suited him.

1. What does the reaction of the foreign ministers to Germany's announcement of conscription suggest about collective security by 1935?
2. What does the British signing of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement suggest was their attitude to German rearmament?



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## The remilitarisation of the Rhineland

WS
British attitudes to Nazism

In the midst of the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, in March 1936 Hitler authorised the Germans' first bold foreign policy move, the remilitarisation of the Rhineland. The Versailles Treaty had designated that an area 54 100 square kilometres, or 18.5 per cent of Germany's land area and holding 15.4 million people (24 per cent of the population), on the German–French border would remain demilitarised. This meant that no German military units could occupy it, despite it being within German territory. Hitler's plan to remilitarise it was considered a bold move, as the German Army was not yet ready if it turned into a conflict. However, Hitler believed that the British and French were not keen for this to happen. On 7 March 1936, 22 000 German troops marched into the Rhineland to cheering crowds. The French and British did nothing. Germany's provocative gesture was followed by an offer to France, Belgium and Holland of a 25-year non-aggression pact (with Britain and Italy to act as guarantors) and Hitler's claim that 'Germany had no territorial demands to make in Europe'.[5] Showing the lie to that statement, in October 1936 Hitler appointed Hermann Göring as the head of the Four Year Plan, which demanded that the German economy become self-sufficient in resources and that the German Army and people be ready for war within 'four years'. That same year, German military spending took off and jumped to 13 per cent of its GDP.

Hulton Archive/Getty Images

**SOURCE 1.10** German cavalry are given flowers by jubilant Rhineland German crowds during the reoccupation, 7 March 1936. Such scenes justified the British and French inaction against Germany.

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# The Hossbach Memorandum

On 5 November 1937, Hitler held a meeting with his military and foreign policy leadership in which he outlined his expansionist policies. According to the memorandum (called the Hossbach Memorandum after Colonel Friedrich Hossbach, Hitler's army adjutant who took the notes), this meeting outlined Hitler's plans for expansion in Europe. Besides Colonel Hossbach and Hitler, those attending the meeting were Foreign Minister Konstantin von Neurath, the War Minister, Field Marshal Werner von Blomberg, the Commander of the Army, General Werner von Fritsch, the Commander of the Luftwaffe, Hermann Göring, and the Commander of the Navy, Admiral Erich Raeder. Hitler stated that 'the aim of German policy was to make secure and to preserve the racial community and to enlarge it. It was therefore a question of space'. Hitler claimed that the two 'hate-inspired antagonists', namely Britain and France, were blocking German foreign policy goals at every turn, and that by 1943–45 the conditions for a war would not get any better for Germany.[6]

Blomberg, Fritsch and Neurath all argued that the foreign policy Hitler had outlined was too risky and that the early use of force was a mistake, as there was a grave danger that Germany would once again find itself at war with both Britain and France. None of them rejected the idea that a war would be favourable to Germany; it was the timing and opponents that they disagreed with. Hitler was well aware of their reservations and in fact may have held the meeting in the first place to test their resolve. As a result, by the following February, Neurath, Fritsch and Blomberg had been removed from their positions and Hitler's control of the military increased even more with the abolition of the War Office and the creation of the High Command of the Armed Forces (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht – OKW). On 4 February 1938, Hitler assumed personal command of the armed forces. After the November 1937 meeting, the Third Reich entered a new, more radical phase. According to Ian Kershaw, 'nothing had been decided, no plains laid, no programme established', but irrevocably Europe was moving closer to war.[7]

## Intentionalists versus structuralists

Historians' interpretations of Nazi foreign policy are often broken down into two major schools. Intentionalists argue that Hitler's role was paramount and that he was following a specific plan that was largely laid out in his writings, such as in *Mein Kampf* (1925). On the other hand, structuralists, while considering Hitler's role as important, identify other factors, such as the dynamics of the Nazi movement and economic and social factors, as of equal significance.

Intentionalist thinkers seek to place Hitler as the central figure from which Nazi foreign policy (and other policies, such as anti-Semitic policy) flowed. Intentionalists argue that Hitler had always planned to redress Versailles through an aggressive war to gain Germany 'living space'. This argument is also applied to the debate concerning the Nazi motivation for the Final Solution. Intentionalists assume that Hitler had always desired and intended the annihilation of the Jews, and that Nazi anti-Semitic policy was a result of his own aspirations. Structuralists believe that there was a greater context than just Hitler's own misgivings about the Jews that led to the eventual implementation of the Final Solution. They claim that it was the 'improvised shaping' of Nazi policies towards Jews that led to the ultimate order for their extermination.[8]

**QUESTIONS**

1 In your own words, define the intentionalist and structuralist arguments.

2 Which theory do you think is more valid in terms of describing Nazi foreign policy to 1939?



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## The significance of the Hossbach Memorandum, November 1937

The Hossbach Memorandum is often used by intentionalist historians such as Gerhard Weinberg, Andreas Hillgruber and Richard Overy to prove that Hitler planned to start a general European war. However, structuralist historians such as Timothy Mason, Hans Mommsen and Ian Kershaw argue that it shows no such plans, instead contending that the Hossbach Memorandum was an improvised response by Hitler to the growing crisis in the German economy in the late 1930s. Kershaw also sees the memorandum as Hitler testing the resolve of his military leaders: 'He wanted to see how the chiefs of staff would react to the bold ideas for expansion that he put forward'.[9] Certainly, it appears that there was genuine confusion among participants. The navy chief, Admiral Raeder, later claimed that he simply did not take what Hitler said seriously, while General Fritsch needed reassurance from Hitler that a European war was not imminent as he was due to go on leave.

More forthright, historian AJP Taylor dismissed the Hossbach Memorandum as evidence of Hitler's intent, pointing out that the document had been edited by US lawyers for the Nuremberg trials, that most of the people who attended the meeting were dismissed soon afterwards, making the resolutions pointless, and that the actual memorandum itself was filed away and forgotten. Instead, Taylor believes that the meeting was merely an attempt by Hitler to drum up support from the military.

### EXTRACTS FROM THE HOSSBACH MEMORANDUM

Hitler outlined three scenarios that he thought would eventuate in Europe.

> Case 1: Period 1943–1945: After this date only a change for the worse … could be expected. Our relative [military] strength would decrease in relation to the rearmament which would by then have been carried out by the rest of the world. Nobody knew today what the situation would be in the years 1943–45. One thing only was certain, that we could not wait longer … it was his [Hitler's] unalterable resolve to solve Germany's problem of space at the latest by 1943–45.
>
> Case 2: If internal strife in France should develop into such a domestic crisis as to absorb the French Army completely and render it incapable of use for war against Germany, then the time for action against the Czechs had come.
>
> Case 3: If France is so embroiled by a war with another state that she cannot 'proceed' against Germany … in the event of our being embroiled in war, [Germany' s aim] must be to overthrow Czechoslovakia and Austria simultaneously in order to remove the threat to our flank in any possible operation against the West. In a conflict with France it was hardly to be regarded as likely that the Czechs would declare war on us on the very same day as France. If Germany made use of this war to settle the Czech and Austrian questions, it was to be assumed that Britain … would decide not to act against Germany. Without British support, a warlike action by France against Germany was not to be expected.
>
> The Hossbach Memorandum, 7 November 1937

### AJP TAYLOR

> Hitler, it is claimed, decided on war, and planned it in detail on 5 November 1937. Yet the Hossbach Memorandum contains no plans of the kind, and would never have been supposed to do so, unless it had been displayed at Nuremberg. The memorandum tells us what we knew already, that Hitler (like every other German statesman) intended Germany to become the dominant power in Europe. It also tells us that he speculated how this might happen. His speculations were mistaken. They [Hitler's scenarios outlined in the Hossbach

➜

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Memorandum] bear hardly any relation to the actual outbreak of war in 1939 … Hitler did not make plans – for world conquest or for anything else. He assumed that others would provide opportunities, and that he would seize them.

AJP Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, Penguin, Ringwood, 2011, p. 128 (first published 1961)

**QUESTIONS**

1. Summarise the three scenarios that Hitler outlines in the Hossbach Memorandum.
2. Does the Hossbach Memorandum contain a plan for war or is it more concerned with speculation about the future? Discuss your response with examples from the text.
3. What is Taylor's central argument about the Hossbach Memorandum and how Hitler conducted his foreign policy?
4. Which historical perspective of the Hossbach Memorandum do you consider to be the most valid? In your response, explain your decision with reference to key features of Nazi foreign policy and the debate between intentionalists and structuralists.

# The creation of the Axis

The creation of the Axis Alliance against Soviet Russia between Germany, Japan and Italy was a key aim of Nazi foreign policy. These agreements reached between the three countries reveal the impact of anti-communist ideology but also their desire to embark on aggressive expansionist policies. On 1 November 1936, reflecting their common interest in destabilising the European order, Germany and Italy announced the signing of the Rome–Berlin Axis one week after signing a treaty of friendship. Later that month, Germany and Imperial Japan signed the so-called Anti-Comintern Pact directed at the Soviet Union, with Italy joining this pact on 6 November 1937. On 22 May 1939, Germany and Italy signed the Pact of Friendship (or Pact of Steel), formalising the Axis Alliance, and declared that if either country was attacked, the other would come to its aid. The Italians signed the pact with an understanding that neither power would provoke a war within three years. However, the political importance of this pact was weakened as the Japanese refused to sign it because they did not want to expressly provoke either the United States or European powers that had interests in Asia. Instead, they were focused on building alliances that were directed against the Soviet Union.[10]

Getty Images/ullstein bild

**SOURCE 1.11** The signing of the Tripartite Pact, September 1940. Japanese Ambassador Saburo Kurusu reads out a statement while Italian Foreign Minister Count Galeazzo Ciano and Adolf Hitler listen.

Finally, on 27 September 1940, Germany, Italy and Japan signed the Tripartite Pact, which became known as the Axis Alliance. This agreement was primarily intended to forestall US intervention in the war, as the provisions included mutual aid if any of the signatories were attacked by a power not involved in the European war. In November



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1940, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia all joined. Russia was also asked to join, but these talks stalled. Bulgaria and Yugoslavia signed in March 1941, and in June, Croatia also agreed to join. However, indicating the lack of strategic direction in these agreements – unlike the arrangements made that created the alliance with Britain, France and Russia – this pact had no agreed strategy for fighting the war. While the Tripartite Pact was directed primarily at the United States, its practical effects were limited, since the Italo-German and Japanese operational theatres were on opposite sides of the world and the Axis powers all had different strategic interests.

# Britain, France and the policy of appeasement

**Appeasement** is essential to understanding the circumstances in which Europe went to war in 1939. Among both the British and French leaderships and publics, appeasement had many supporters in the 1930s. The French and the British were alarmed by the rise of Nazi Germany; however, both saw dealing with this threat through different perspectives. In France, the aggressive enforcement of the Versailles Treaty, which saw them send their troops into Germany several times in 1920–21 and occupy the Ruhr in 1923, had completely evaporated by the late 1920s. The French came to the realisation that Germany – with its larger population and industrial base – would always remain a threat and that the provisions in the Versailles Treaty alone could not guarantee its security. The French therefore developed a defensive mindset, clearly illustrated with the beginning of the Maginot Line defensive works in 1929.

**appeasement**
A diplomatic policy based on making concessions to a foreign power in order to avoid conflict

A general desire among the French and British to avoid conflict at all costs was part of the reasoning behind placating German demands. This was helped by fears that the newly created German Air Force would lay waste to British and French cities. Of course, the state of British and French rearmament was also a factor, as it was considered that the Germans had got a head start on the Allies, who needed more time to better prepare themselves for war. In Britain in particular, the desire to appease the Germans also developed from the idea that the Allies had been too harsh in their peace settlement of 1919. The Treaty of Versailles certainly carries some blame: by trapping significant numbers of Germans behind new borders, it made their grievances garner more sympathy.

British Cabinet interwar conclusions

Moreover, to varying degrees conservative politicians (mainly in Britain) had come to admire Hitler and his anti-communist stance. This anti-communist outlook played a role in Allied thinking that a revitalised Germany was seen as a valuable ally against what was considered the real evil in Europe: Soviet Russia. Therefore, when the Nazis began rearmament, the British tried to get the Germans to limit their rearmament in areas they cared about (such as the navy). In Britain, the traditionally bellicose conservative side of politics (the British Conservative Party was in government from 1935 to 1940) became determined to avoid war at all costs. They allowed the Nazis a series of significant foreign policy wins, such as remilitarising the Rhineland in 1936 and a union with Austria in 1938. These wins enhanced the prestige of Hitler and made him appear as a charmed negotiator. For these various reasons, mostly conservative British leaders felt that German demands should be met.

Getty Images/ullstein bild

**SOURCE 1.12** Hitler is met by cheering crowds during the German takeover of Austria, March 1938. These occupations of the Rhineland, Austria and Sudetenland, were known as the 'flower wars', due to there being no fighting, only flowers.

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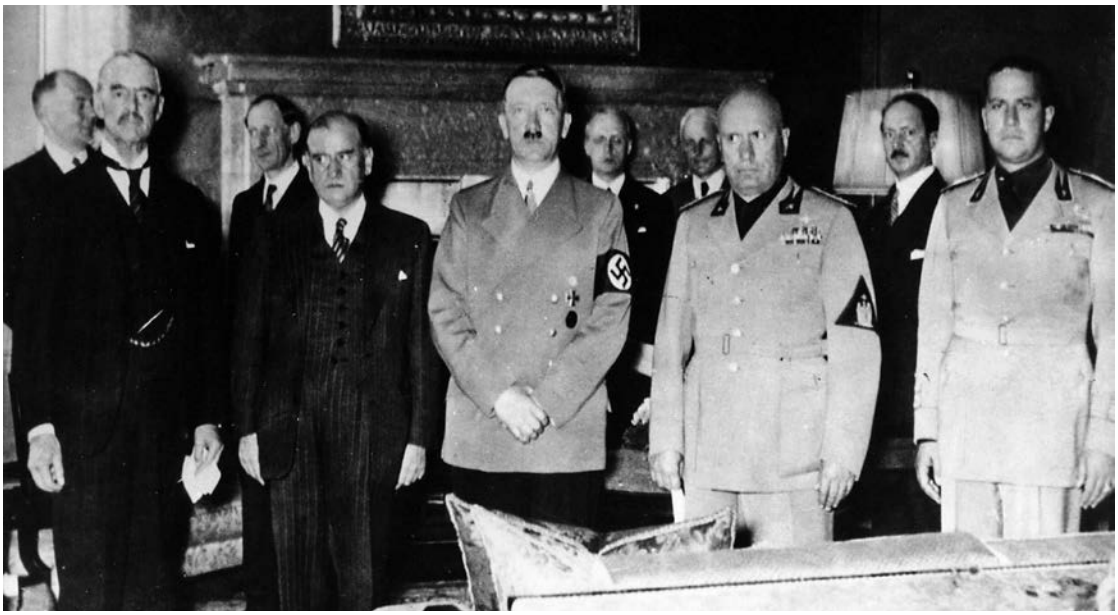
## Austria

By 1938, Hitler had achieved significant successes in terms of foreign policy, initiating German rearmament in contravention of the Treaty of Versailles, the return of the Saar territory and the remilitarisation of the Rhineland. In early 1938, after placating Italy, Germany was allowed to take over Austria, again in direct contravention of the Treaty of Versailles. After the Nazi-inspired assassination of the previous Chancellor, Engelbert Dollfuss, in 1934, the new Chancellor, Kurt Schuschnigg, tried to cooperate with Hitler as much as possible to avoid giving Hitler an excuse for aggression. In 1936, he signed a German–Austrian Agreement that recognised Austria's independence in exchange for its foreign policy being consistent with Germany's and allowing Nazis to hold official posts in Austria. Austria's position was undermined when the Rome–Berlin Axis was signed, as this removed the protection offered by Italy. In 1938, Schuschnigg gave in to Hitler's demand that a leading Austrian Nazi, Arthur Seyss-Inquart, be named as Minister of the Interior (in charge of police and the law). At this time, Hitler ordered Austrian Nazis to cause chaos and damage so Hitler could claim that Germany was required to restore law and order. In response, Schuschnigg declared that a referendum would take place in Austria as to whether they wanted to join with Germany. Hitler was furious, as he knew that a vote could go against him, so he ordered his generals to prepare to invade Austria. Knowing that Italy would now not help them, nor would the British or French, Schuschnigg conceded and resigned. He named Seyss-Inquart as Chancellor, who immediately 'invited' the Germans into Austria, and the Anschluss was complete. The Anschluss with Austria had special significance for Hitler, as Austria was his birthplace. The Anschluss was considered a personal triumph as much as a significant foreign policy victory.

## The Sudetenland

After the success of the Anschluss, Hitler began to demand the return of the 3 million Germans living in an area of Czechoslovakian territory known as the Sudetenland. In May 1938, he ordered his army commanders to draw up a plan for the military invasion of Czechoslovakia. The Czechs were willing to compromise, but Hitler demanded all the territory returned. Elements within Czechoslovakia were willing to fight and the Czechs had significant military assets at their disposal. However, Czech Prime Minister Edvard Benes refused to do this without Western support.



Getty Images/Alinari Archives/Alinari

**SOURCE 1.13** A picture taken after the Munich signing. Chamberlain looks satisfied; Daladier angry (refuses to look at the camera); Hitler defiant; Mussolini is unsure of who has won; Count Ciano, the Italian Foreign Minister, knows the German dictator has got all that he wanted.



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## Chamberlain and appeasement

At the height of the negotiations with Hitler in September 1938, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain explained his motives for appeasement.

> I must say something to those who have written to my wife or myself in these last few weeks to tell us of their gratitude for my efforts and to assure us of their prayers for my success. Most of those letters have come from women – mothers or sisters of our own countrymen – but there are countless others besides from France, Belgium, and Italy, and even Germany, and it has been heartbreaking to read of the growing anxiety they reveal and of their intense relief when they thought, too soon, that the danger of war has passed … How horrible, fantastic, incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and fitting gas masks because of a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing. It seems still more impossible that a quarrel which is already settled in principle should be the subject of war. However much we may sympathise with a small nation confronted by a big and powerful neighbour, we cannot in all circumstances undertake to involve the whole British Empire in war simply on her account. If we have to fight, it must be on larger issues than that. I am myself a man of peace to the depths of my soul; armed conflict between nations is a nightmare to me … War is a fearful thing, and we must be very clear before we embark on it, that it is really the great issues that are at stake.
>
> Neville Chamberlain, *The Times*, 28 September 1938, p. 10

### QUESTIONS

1. What does the source make clear were Chamberlain's goals in September 1938?
2. Who does Chamberlain suggest agrees with his attempts to find a peaceful solution?
3. What does Chamberlain find particularly 'horrible, fantastic, incredible' about the situation?
4. Using the source and your own knowledge, what does this source reveal about the policy of appeasement?
5. What does the source say about the commitment of the British Government to collective security?

French decision-making was governed by different circumstances. The main effects of the Great Depression had not been felt in France until 1935 and no recovery was evident until 1938. Against this backdrop was political instability. France had 43 prime ministers between 1917 and 1940 (11 governments between 1932 and 1935 alone). In addition, the political extremes of both fascism and communism influenced French policy during the 1930s. It was in 1936 that the left-wing Popular Front coalition had significantly increased the French military budget. By 1938, Prime Minister Edouard Daladier was keen to take a firmer stand with Germany, but his Foreign Minister, Georges Bonnet, favoured appeasement. However, the key to French policy was Britain. France never entertained the idea of getting involved in a war without British support. The French felt they needed the British navy and air force, as theirs had been so neglected. Under-resourced for the role it was asked to play, France looked to Britain to share the resolve to act; this was not forthcoming.

With the threat of the German invasion and the German minority inside Czechoslovakia mobilising, on 1 October 1938 the British, French and Italian leaders (Mussolini now supporting Hitler) gave the Sudetenland to Germany. Neither the Czechs nor the Russians were invited to this meeting. The rump Czechoslovakian territory was now virtually defenceless due to the fact that its fortified border territories were now in German hands. In addition, Neville Chamberlain had received a written undertaking from Hitler that this would be the last territorial claim that he would make. French Prime Minister Edouard Daladier considered Munich a mistake. 'Within six months' he predicted, 'France and Britain would be face to face with new German demands'.[11] He had tried to get Chamberlain to stand firmer against Hitler. His efforts fell on deaf ears, a senior British official calling his proposals 'awful

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Getty Images/Daily Mirror/Mirrorpix

**SOURCE 1.14** British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain arriving back in England, holding his 'agreement' with Hitler that ensured 'peace in our time', September 1938.

rubbish'.[12] 'I am not proud' Daladier said in the aftermath of the agreement.[13] On the other hand, Chamberlain considered Munich a triumph of diplomacy, as it appeared that war had been unavoidable. 'Peace in our time' he declared on his return from Germany.[14] The public's relief was palpable, even in Germany, to Hitler's disgust. However, it also created a situation where Hitler's territorial demands were widely seen to be at an end. Any further demands were to be met by a sterner resolve.

## Was Munich necessary?

Debate has raged ever since the Munich Agreement about whether the British and French needed to delay the start of the war to better prepare themselves. Certainly, at the time, the British were concerned that they were not prepared for war. Before Munich, the British and French were yet to hold military staff talks, crucial if a coordinated military response was to be an option. Their fears of the destructive capability of bombers were allegedly confirmed by the bombing of Guernica in 1937. If we look at Table 1.4, it is obvious who better utilised the 12-month delay in the war starting. However, these figures do not tell the whole story. By September 1939, while the number of Royal Air Force (RAF) aircraft still lagged behind the Luftwaffe, in that very month, for the first time, British monthly aircraft production actually exceeded Germany's.[15]

WS
Chamberlain defends appeasement

**Responses to Munich**

**TABLE 1.4** Military strength of the European powers, 1938–39

| ARMY STRENGTH (FULLY EQUIPPED DIVISION) | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Country** | **January 1938** | **August 1939** |
| Germany | 81 | 130 |
| Great Britain | 2 | 4 |
| France | 63 | 86 |
| Italy | 73 | 73 |
| Soviet Union | 125 | 125 |
| Czechoslovakia | 34 | 0 |
| Poland | 40 | 40 |



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| AIR FORCE STRENGTH (NUMBER OF AIRCRAFT AVAILABLE) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Country | January 1938 | August 1939 |
| Germany | 1820 | 4210 |
| Great Britain | 1050 | 1750 |
| France | 1195 | 1234 |
| Italy | 1301 | 1531 |
| Soviet Union | 3050 | 3361 |
| Czechoslovakia | 600 | 0 |
| Poland | 400 | 400 |

Allan Todd, *The Move to Global War*, CUP, Cambridge, 2015, p. 186

## QUESTIONS

1. Which country increased its army and air force strength the most between January 1938 and August 1939?
2. What did the British and French lose in terms of military strength by surrendering Czechoslovakia without a fight?
3. Looking at the information in the text and the air force figures in Table 1.4, what positive could the British take out of the delay in conflict that the Munich Agreement created?

### SOVIET REACTION TO THE MUNICH AGREEMENT


Heritage Image Partnership Ltd/Alamy Stock Photo

**SOURCE 1.15**
A Russian cartoon after the Munich Agreement shows the British and French 'feeding' the German wolf with Czechoslovakia. The flag one carries says: 'Towards the east!'

## QUESTION

What does the cartoon indicate was the Soviet attitude to the Munich Agreement?

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Getty Images/Sovfoto/UIG

**SOURCE 1.16** German troops drive into Czechoslovakia amid angry crowds, March 1939.

## After Munich

In March 1939, the Czechoslovakian Prime Minister was summoned to Berlin. After being kept waiting for hours, he was threatened with immediate war if he did not agree with Germany occupying Czech territory for its own protection. Under severe pressure, he agreed to this, and on 15 March 1939 Nazi Germany occupied a foreign territory for the first time.

One week later, the Nazis threatened Lithuania with invasion unless it handed over Memelland, a small parcel of land taken from Germany by the Versailles Treaty. The Lithuanians complied and Hitler gained this last piece of territory before the beginning of World War II. At this point, with their 'guarantee' of no further claims from Hitler in tatters, the British decided to make a stand. Two weeks after the German takeover of Czechoslovakia, on 31 March 1939, the United Kingdom pledged its support and that of France to guarantee the independence of Poland, Belgium, Romania, Greece and Turkey. On 6 April, Poland and the United Kingdom agreed to formalise the guarantee as a military alliance, pending negotiations.


**SOURCE 1.17** By the start of 1939, Nazi Germany's revisions of the Versailles Treaty had redrawn the map of Europe.



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# The Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact

Hitler's foreign policy goal of lebensraum and his 'Jewish Bolshevism' rhetoric made clear that Nazi Germany viewed communist Russia as its mortal enemy and that a war with the Soviet Union was inevitable. Thus, it appeared to the rest of the world that an alliance between Nazi Germany and communist Russia was virtually impossible. This was certainly believed by the Western Allies. Before World War I, the democratic powers in Britain and France were happy to align themselves with autocratic Tsarist Russia because they perceived the greater threat to their security was imperial Germany. Yet, in the 1930s, the British were unable to consider an alliance with communist Russia, as they perceived Russia rather than Nazi Germany as being the greatest threat to their security.

The French had always shown an interest in working with Eastern Europe. Shortly after the end of World War I, they created the 'little entente', an agreement between themselves, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia. The French were willing to work with the Russians, but would not enter into a tangible agreement without the support of the British. In May 1935, they concluded the Franco-Soviet Treaty of Mutual Assistance. The British viewed this agreement with suspicion, as they felt that the greater threat to European peace was not Germany but Soviet Russia.

As Hitler grew more demanding, there was an opportunity for the British to establish a relationship with the Soviet Union, but the British conservative government steadfastly refused to get involved. Several factors shaped this position, the most significant of which were hostility to communism and the British support of Poland. Nonetheless, in August 1939 a British delegation visited Russia. Travelling by steamship, it suggested a lack of urgency. Moreover, the leader of the delegation was a minor official unable to sign a formal agreement. This confirmed the Soviet fear that the Western powers were trying to steer the Germans towards the east. This policy immediately raised the question of whether the Soviet Union could avoid being next on Hitler's list. The Soviet leadership believed that the West wanted to encourage German aggression in the east and that France and Britain might stay neutral in a war initiated by Germany in the hope that the warring states would wear each other out and put an end to both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.

For Germany, feeding its arms industry with raw materials from the Soviet Union was appealing. Moreover, an expected British blockade in the event of war would create massive shortages for Germany in a number of key raw materials. After the Munich Agreement, talks between the two countries occurred from late 1938 to March 1939. The third Soviet Five Year Plan required new infusions of technology and industrial equipment. German war planners had estimated serious shortfalls of raw materials if Germany entered a war without Soviet supply. On 28 April, Hitler denounced the 1934 German–Polish Non-Aggression Pact and the 1935 Anglo-German Naval Agreement. Concerned at the prospect of a two-front war, Hitler was eager to negotiate terms with Stalin. The Germans and Soviets signed the Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact on 23 August 1939. In this 10-year


David Low/Solo Syndication, via British Cartoon Archive

**SOURCE 1.18** David Low cartoon from the *Evening Standard*, 20 September 1939. Hitler greets Stalin with the words: 'The scum of the earth, I believe?' to which Stalin replies: 'The bloody assassin of the workers, I presume?'

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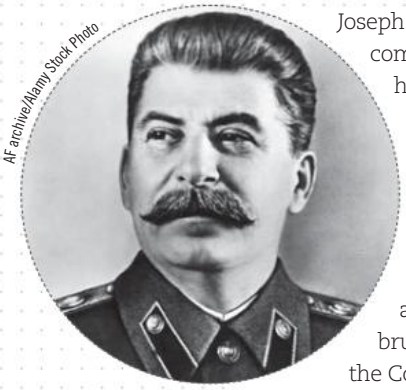
Getty Images/ullstein bild

**SOURCE 1.19** A happy German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop (left) with his Russian opposite, Vyacheslav Molotov (right), and Joseph Stalin (centre) after signing the Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, August 1939.

agreement, the two sides agreed to settle all differences through negotiation and not to attack each other. Additional secret protocols gave the USSR control of the Baltic States as well as the eastern half of Poland, while the Germans would gain the western half. In addition to stipulations of non-aggression, the treaty included a secret protocol that divided territories of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland and Romania into German and Soviet 'spheres of influence', anticipating 'territorial and political rearrangements' of these countries.[16] With these assurances, Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939. Soviet Union leader Joseph Stalin ordered the Soviet invasion of Poland on 17 September.

## JOSEPH STALIN (1879–1953)

AF archive/Alamy Stock Photo



Joseph Stalin was the wartime communist leader of Russia. Stalin had won the power struggle after Lenin's death and had embarked on a crash modernisation program for Russia from 1928. This program had been largely successful, but nevertheless, Stalin feared internal enemies and had embarked on a deep and brutal purge of the Russian people, the Communist Party leadership and all branches of the military from 1938. Stalin was suspicious of the rise of Nazi Germany and was willing to sign a treaty with Britain and France, but was rebuffed. In August 1939, to the astonishment of the world, he instead signed a non-aggression pact with the Nazis. As part of this agreement, the Russians invaded Poland on 17 September 1939 and annexed territories in Eastern Europe. He also launched an invasion of Finland in November 1939, which was far costlier to the Red Army than it should have been. Indicating that his brutal methods were sustained during the war years, in 1940 he ordered the murder of more than 20 000 captured Polish officers.

Stalin could not believe that the Germans would invade Russia without having defeated Britain. As a result, when the German invasion came in June 1941 the Soviet forces were not properly prepared. The Red Army performed poorly initially, but after severe defeats in 1941 Stalin managed to rally the Soviet people to the defence of 'mother Russia'. He issued a series of brutal decrees as a means of galvanising the Soviet soldiers to continue the fight. As German troops approached the Soviet capital of Moscow, Stalin remained there to direct the fighting. Initially, Stalin interfered greatly in military operations with disastrous effects. However, by mid-1942 he began to trust his generals to fight the war, although he chaired the Stavka, the High Command of the Soviet armed forces, until the end of the war. Successes at Stalingrad changed the Allies' attitude towards Stalin and he became popularly referred to as 'Uncle Joe'.

Stalin worked himself hard and frequently was involved in meetings and planning for 12 to 14 hours a day. He demonstrated a good ability to recall detail, places and officers. Yet he maintained a large portion of paranoia and refused to allow his high-ranking functionaries to have meetings without him. As the war progressed, Stalin participated in the major Allied conferences, although he remained deeply suspicious of his Western Allies, especially what he considered to be their deliberate delay of the 'second front'. As the Red Army moved through Eastern Europe, Stalin ruthlessly began the process of setting up communist governments in Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and other countries. At the end of the war, Stalin had led Russia to victory and to the status of a world power.



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## The significance of the Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact

The significance of the Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact was great. It set the scene for where World War II would start. The isolation of Poland, along with the pact's secret protocols, made clear that the Nazis and Soviets intended to destroy Poland. It also created a situation where there was very little practical help the British or French could offer the Poles. Hitler would gain another easy victory. The deal also gave the Germans significant material benefits to power their war machine for the first few years of the war.

Why did the Soviets make a deal with Hitler? They did so partly out of pure frustration with the British. Shortly after the arrival of the impotent British delegation, Stalin made an angry speech in which he denounced world powers who were not meeting aggression 'head on'. Stalin also had opportunistic motives for the pact; the secret protocols gave Russia control over the eastern part of Poland and more territory from Finland, through the Baltic States and down to Romania. The deal also ensured that Hitler would first head west and that, if a long conflict eventuated, it would weaken Germany, France and Britain to Russia's benefit. Finally, if war with Germany was an eventuality, then a deal with the Nazis would at least give the Soviets more time to prepare for it.

### Why did Germany go to war in 1939?

Why Nazi Germany went to war in 1939 is among the key historical debates of modern history. Unsurprisingly, numerous historians have attempted to explain this development. After the war, the dominant explanation mirrored the conclusions of the Nuremberg war crimes trials. This thesis maintained that Hitler and key Nazi leaders deliberately planned and pursued a program for war.

In 1961, in the book *The Origins of the Second World War*, AJP Taylor argued what was then a controversial contention: that the war did not simply stem from the actions of Hitler and the Nazi leadership. Drawing on a broad range of public documents, but not the closed files of government sources, Taylor argued provocatively that Hitler's expansionistic policy had been an enduring theme of German foreign policy – Hitler was simply 'just an ordinary German politician'.[17] Taylor dismissed *Mein Kampf* as simply daydreams. Hitler, he argued, rather than having a clear plan, was opportunistic – responding to the weaknesses and incompetence of the British and the French as he sought to reverse the limitations of the Treaty of Versailles.

Intentionalists such as Richard Overy and Andreas Hillgruber argue that Hitler's foreign policy was following a predetermined program that he outlined in countless speeches, his 1925 autobiography *Mein Kampf* and documents such as the Hossbach Memorandum. These reveal a consistent foreign policy position that was programmed long in advance. This means that the Nazis had predetermined going to war and that war could have easily occurred over Czechoslovakia in 1938 and instead happened over Poland in September 1939. In this scenario, Germany invaded Poland in 1939 with no regard for the acts of Britain and France.

On the other hand, structuralists such as Martin Broszat and Hans Mommsen argue that Hitler's position was not the sole determinant. They acknowledge the importance of Hitler's position, but suggest a lack of specific planning. They also argue that other factors, including key Nazi figures such as Göring and Ribbentrop, the economy, the armed forces and opportunity, shaped the path to war. For example, Tim Mason argues that the overheated German economy's need for resources and manpower, and the conditions of domestic politics, led to war in 1939.[18] By extension, structuralists tend to believe that Hitler thought that Britain and France would not get involved and that a localised conflict with Poland would be the outcome. Ian Kershaw argues that on the issue of foreign policy the structuralists are on the 'least firm ground', as he believes that Hitler made his intentions clear.[19]

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Kershaw offers his perspective of the situation for the Germans in September 1939:

> Hitler had led Germany into a general European war he had wanted to avoid for several more years. Military 'insiders' thought the army, 2.3 million strong, through the rapidity of the rearmament programme, was less prepared for a major war than it had been in 1914. Hitler was fighting the war allied with the Soviet Union, the ideological arch-enemy. And he was at war with Great Britain, the would-be 'friend' he had for years tried to woo. Despite all warnings, his plans – at every turn backed by his warmongering Foreign Minister [Ribbentrop] – had been predicated upon his assumption that Britain would not enter the war – though he had shown himself undeterred even by that eventuality. It was little wonder that, if [Hitler's translator] Paul Schmidt's account is to [be] believed, when Hitler received the British ultimatum on the morning of 3 September, he angrily turned to Ribbentrop and asked: 'What now?'
>
> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: 1936–1945: Nemesis*, Allen Lane, London, 2000, p. 223

**QUESTIONS**

1. What are the different historical views on why Germany went to war in 1939? Identify which historians agree with which view.
2. Based on your reading from this chapter, which explanation is the most valid for why Germany went to war in 1939?
3. Reading the Kershaw extract, what are the reasons he gives about why Hitler did not expect to be at war in 1939?

# Chapter summary

- World War I changed attitudes in Europe towards war and conflict.
- Democracy was implemented across Europe after 1918. However, democracy almost came under immediate threat by right-wing forces across Europe.
- The greatest threat to Europe was seen in communist Russia.
- By the early 1930s, the will of the Allies to enforce the Treaty of Versailles began to wane.
- Nazi foreign policy had an aim of redressing Versailles and creating the conditions to expand Germany to the east.
- The British led the policy of appeasement towards Germany and principally surrendered the Sudetenland to Germany in October 1938.
- In the wake of the German occupation of Czechoslovakia, Britain and France guaranteed Poland's security.
- Britain and France made approaches to the Soviet Union to form an alliance, but distrusted Stalin.
- Eventually, in August 1939, Germany and Russia signed a non-aggression pact.
- On 1 September 1939, Germany invaded Poland.



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# CHAPTER REVIEW

## CHAPTER REVISION QUESTIONS

1. To what extent was Hitler's foreign policy driven by agreements based on short-term gains?
2. Assess the extent to which Hitler's foreign policy was concerned with redressing the Versailles Treaty.
3. Evaluate the view that Hitler's foreign policy was solely driven by ideology.
4. 'Italy also bears responsibility for the collapse of collective security in the 1930s.' Discuss.
5. What was the significance of the Italian war in Abyssinia in 1935–36?
6. Explain the significance of the Spanish Civil War to the developing tensions and understanding of warfare in Europe in the 1930s.
7. Assess the reasons why the League of Nations was unable to maintain collective security during the 1930s.
8. What were the most significant factors in the British and French decision to pursue their policy of appeasement in the 1930s?
9. Evaluate the context that brought about the Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact in August 1939.
10. What factors contributed to the weakening of collective security in Europe?

## EXTENDED-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

11. 'Appeasement led directly to war in 1939.' How accurate is this statement?
12. Evaluate the significance of the Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact to the outbreak of war in September 1939.
13. Assess the aims and strategies of Nazi foreign policy to September 1939.
14. To what extent did the major foreign policy steps taken by Nazi Germany from 1934 to 1939 directly lead to the outbreak of war in 1939?
15. Assess the impact of the Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. Use the following extract from the Hossbach Memorandum, November 1937, to support your response.

> The Fuehrer then continued: The aim of German policy was to make secure and to preserve the racial community [*Volksmasse*] and to enlarge it. It was therefore a question of space. Germany's problem could only be solved by means of force and this was never without attendant risk … there remain still to be answered the questions 'when' and 'how'. Our relative strength would decrease in relation to the rearmament which would by then have been carried out by the rest of the world. It was his [the Fuehrer's] unalterable resolve to solve Germany's problem of space at the latest by 1943–45. The necessity for action before 1943–45 would arise …
>
> Hossbach Memorandum, November 1937



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02

# The ascendancy of the Axis, 1939–42

## STUDENTS WILL INVESTIGATE

- the reasons for the Germans' successes in 1939 and 1940
- the Battle of Britain and the Blitz
- the beginning of the Germans' campaign against the Soviet Union.

Modern History syllabus

Originally published in the German Army's *Signal* magazine in February 1942, this photo shows German infantry advancing during a snowstorm near Moscow.

Art Media/Print Collector/Getty Images

# Introduction

Having secured Soviet neutrality with the Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, German attention turned to the issue of Poland. However, the British and French declarations of war on Germany following the invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939 expanded what the Germans had hoped would be a local incident into a continental conflict. In a series of extraordinary military campaigns that included the defeat of Poland, the Low Countries, France and the Balkan States, and the occupation of vast territories of the Soviet Union in 1941, Nazi Germany and its allies established a dominant position in Europe.

**Timeline**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1939 | 1 September | German invasion of Poland begins |
| | 3 September | Britain and France declare war on Germany |
| | 7 September | The French launch an offensive into Germany, advancing 7 kilometres before turning around |
| | 17 September | Red Army invades Poland |
| | 6 October | Poland surrenders |
| 1940 | 9 April | Germany invades Denmark and Norway |
| | 10 May | Germany launches its offensive in the west |
| | 14 May | The Netherlands surrenders; German Army crosses the French frontier |
| | 28 May | Belgium surrenders |
| | 10 June | Italy enters the war on Germany's side |
| | 22 June | France surrenders |
| | 10 July | Start of the Battle of Britain |
| | 27 September | Germany, Italy and Japan sign the Tripartite Pact |
| | 28 October | Italy invades Greece |
| 1941 | February | General Rommel and the Afrika Korps arrive in North Africa |
| | 9 April | Germany invades Yugoslavia and Greece |
| | 22 June | Germany launches Operation Barbarossa against Russia |
| | 10 July | Smolensk is captured |
| | 8 August | Siege of Leningrad begins; lasts nearly three years |
| | 14 August | Atlantic Charter is signed by US President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill |
| | 19 September | Kiev is captured; more than 600 000 Red Army troops are made POWs |
| | 24 October | Germans launch Operation Typhoon, their attack on Moscow |
| | 5 December | Within sight of Moscow the German advance stalls; the Russians launch a counteroffensive, pushing the Germans back |
| | 11 December | After the United States declares war on Japan, Germany declares war on the United States |



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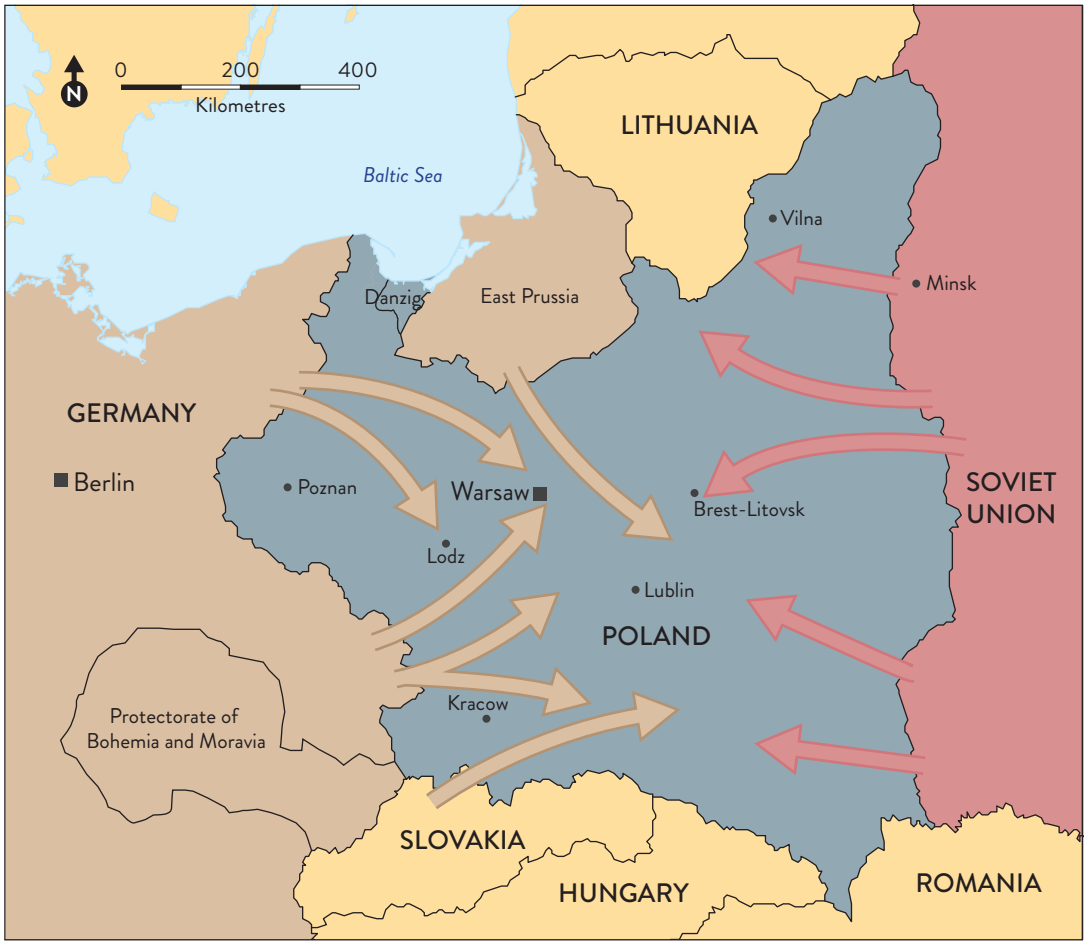
# Blitzkrieg goes to war in Poland

The German attack on Poland named 'Case White' began on 1 September 1939. Table 2.1 outlines the competing strengths of the Germans and Poles, but it does not tell the whole story. Most Polish armour was light tanks. Their most numerous vehicle was the TKS Tankette, which weighed less than 3 tons, only had a crew of two and was armed with a single machine gun. The Polish Air Force was particularly outdated; its most significant fighter, the PZL P.11, still had a fixed undercarriage and open cockpit, similar to aircraft of World War I. The Germans outnumbered the Poles about 15 to one in armoured and motorised divisions and three to one in combat aircraft. The weaknesses in their equipment, combined with being completely outnumbered, saw the Polish Air Force destroyed over the first few days of the campaign.

**TABLE 2.1** Relative strength of the German and Polish forces

| | DIVISIONS | TANKS | AIRCRAFT |
|---|---|---|---|
| Germany | 56 | 2500 | 2315 |
| Poland | 40 | 900 | 400 |

David G Williamson, *Poland Betrayed: The Nazi–Soviet Invasions of 1939*, Pen & Sword Military, Barnsley, 2009, pp. 10–13, 21, 22, 25




**SOURCE 2.1** The German attack on Poland, 1 September 1939. Russia launched its offensive on 17 September.

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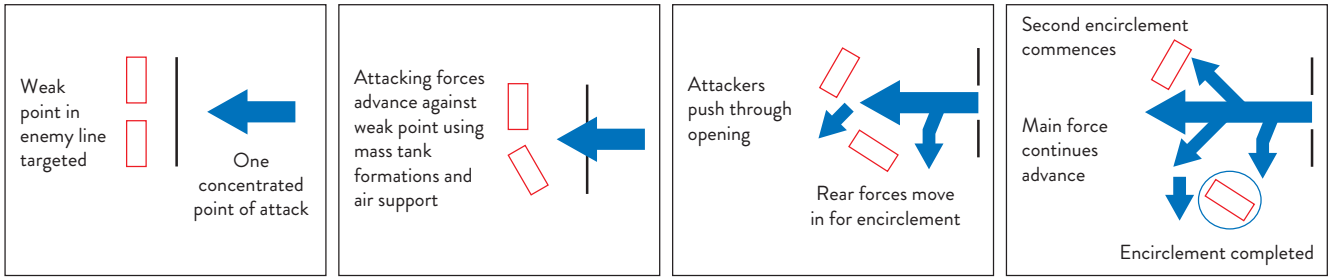
Using their 'blitzkrieg' ('lightning war') tactics, the highly mobile German units, led by mass columns of tanks and working in close cooperation with the Luftwaffe, attacked along a very narrow front, quickly making deep inroads into the Polish defences and forcing them into disorientation and retreat. The speed and violence of the assault paralysed the Polish response. German spearheads scattered the enemy, overrunning command, supply and railheads, stopping the Poles from reforming their lines or bringing up their reserves. German armoured units stayed in communication by radio, coordinating with each other and the Luftwaffe, which was able to help the ground forces with Stuka dive-bombers serving as mobile artillery. The culmination of these armoured drives came behind the front lines. As the German forces linked up, they trapped confused Polish formations in a series of encirclements.




**SOURCE 2.2** Blitzkrieg. The German tactic was essentially to focus its mobile forces on a narrow section of the front to punch through the enemy's line and continue to drive with the help of mobile artillery and close support aircraft to ensure the enemy were unbalanced and uncoordinated in their response. The remainder of the enemy forces, which have been encircled, are mopped up by the rest of the army.

akg-images/Alamy Stock Photo

**SOURCE 2.3** German and Russian troops relax after the defeat of Poland.

While the Poles did have some localised successes, any hopes of resisting the Germans were dashed when the Russians invaded on 17 September. Polish resistance finally ended on 6 October 1939. Despite their guarantee to support Poland, the British and French had been unable to help the Poles at any stage during the German campaign.

## Poland after defeat

After the defeat of Poland, in accordance with the Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of August 1939, the Soviets and Germans divided Poland between them. Poland ceased to exist. The Soviets annexed the eastern regions while the Germans annexed the western parts, which represented about a quarter of the country. These territories were named Wartheland and Danzig-West Prussia and were incorporated into 'Greater Germany'. A little more than 10 million people lived in these newly incorporated German territories, the vast majority (about 8.9 million) being ethnic Poles, the rest being Germans (600 000) and Jews (600 000).

The remaining area of the former Poland was called the 'General Government' and was ruled by Nazi Governor Hans Frank. From September 1939, SS killing squads (*Einsatzgruppen*) began to operate in these



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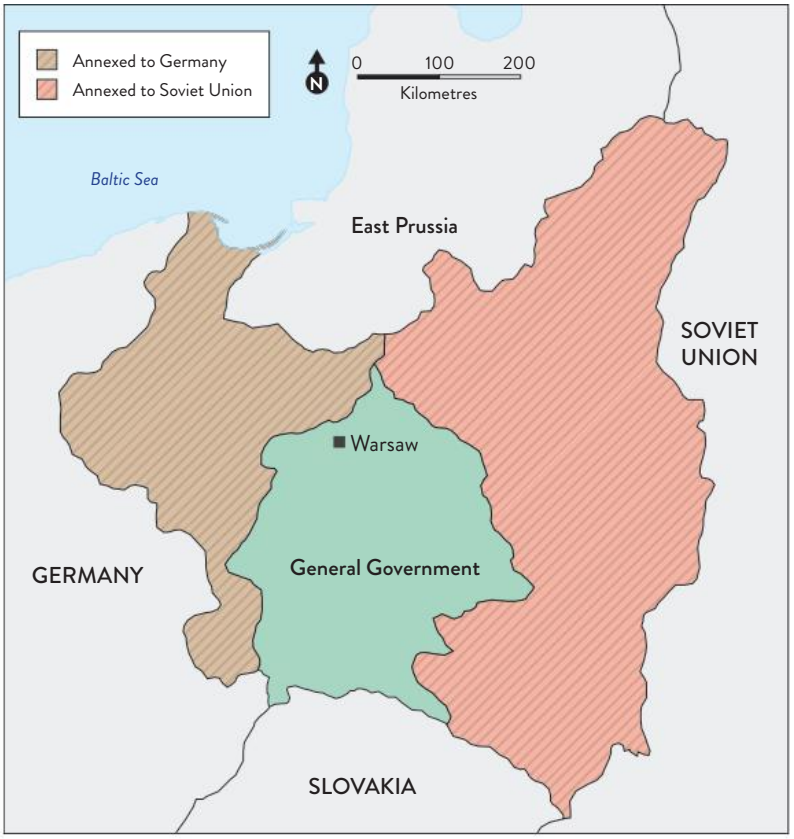
territories and by December they had killed an estimated 15 000 Polish intelligentsia, clergy and officers. Murders and executions were also carried out by various army units. Such actions highlight that the National Socialist war in Europe would distinguish itself from other conflicts by its application of brutal and racialised occupation policy.

## Generalplan Ost

In January 1940, the SS initiated *Generalplan Ost*, which articulated the Nazi policy of 'Germanisation' of the annexed western Polish territories. The Nazis sought to Germanise the new territory by removing so-called 'racial inferiors', colonising the land with Germans, and eliminating 'harmful' influences. To make room for migrants, Poles and Jews were evicted from their homes. The process started in December 1939 when 88 000 Jews and Poles were deported into the General Government in horrific conditions.




**SOURCE 2.4** The partition of Poland following the conquest by Germany and the USSR.

Over the course of 1940, Himmler deported an additional 260 000 Poles from Wartheland and thousands more from areas such as Upper Silesia and Danzig-West Prussia. Not all Poles were deported; the Nazis sought to Germanise suitable adults and also sought out children of good racial stock for Germanisation. Sent to special camps, they were given German names, forged birth certificates and Nazi indoctrination. The Germans also sought to destroy Polish culture. They closed schools and specially targeted churches, which were viewed as a key to Polish culture and nationalism. The Nazi Governor, Hans Frank, declared that 'the Polish lands are to be turned into an intellectual desert'. Poles in Warsaw received a ration of only 669 calories a day, compared to 2613 per day for Germans and a mere 184 for Jews. No-one could live on such poor rations, and health deteriorated rapidly.[1]

WS
Beginning of the race war in the east

1. In what ways were the Polish forces most deficient?
2. What factors helped the Germans to defeat the Poles so comprehensively in 1939?
3. Define 'Blitzkrieg'. Why was this tactic so successful against Poland?
4. Explain what *Generalplan Ost* was and how it was implemented in Poland.

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# Blitzkrieg in the west

In the aftermath of the invasion of Poland, the German Army turned its attention to the west. On 7 September 1939, the French had actually launched an offensive into Germany, marching into the Saarland. However, indecision and poor leadership saw them withdraw a month later. From that point on, the Allies fell into inaction. This period became known as the 'Phoney War'. During this time, the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) moved into France and took up fixed positions along the Belgian–French border, similar to their predecessors at the start of World War I; however, this time they did not shoot, but waited.

Blitzkrieg

The Phoney War ended with the German invasion of Norway in April 1940. Both Britain and Germany had planned to invade Norway, which was seen as important due to its major all-season port at Narvik and its iron ore. The British attempt to move naval and ground forces into Norway was prevented by the full-scale German invasion, which struck on 9 April 1940. The Allies were taken by surprise, as it was felt that British naval superiority would prevent the Germans attempting an invasion. However, the German attack, using simultaneous assaults along Norway's long coastlines in combination with paratroopers landing, overpowered the Allies' forces to claim victory by 10 June 1940.

Infantry Advance, in Norway before the 9th April, from 'Signal' Magazine, Number 3, fifteenth edition of May 1940 (litho)/ Private Collection/Bridgeman Images

**SOURCE 2.5** German infantry in Norway, April 1940.

The most significant outcome of the occupation of Norway was the appearance of Nazi collaborators. During the German invasion, Major Vidkun Quisling, the leader of a Norwegian fascist party, publicly declared himself the leader of a government of national emergency supporting the Germans. This offered the Germans no practical help, as they had no idea of his plan. Nevertheless, Quisling became a focus of rage in the Allied world – so much so, that his name entered the English language as a word for traitor. In addition, because of his actions, the fear of the fifth column came back into vogue.

## Preparations for France

The German plan for attack on France was given the name 'Case Yellow'. This had gone through a number of modifications, all of which contained a German drive through northern France, ominously similar to the failed Schlieffen Plan 26 years earlier. In early 1940, under instruction from General Gerd von Rundstedt, General Erich von Manstein suggested that part of the German armoured thrust should be directed through the Ardennes Forest, just north of Sedan, which the French thought was too narrow for armour to travel down. Another incentive for changing the plan was that in January 1940 a German aircraft carrying a copy of their attack plan was forced down in Belgium and captured by the Allies.

The Allies and the French in particular put much of their faith in the Maginot Line, an extensive and elaborate series of defensive fortifications along the French–German border. They believed



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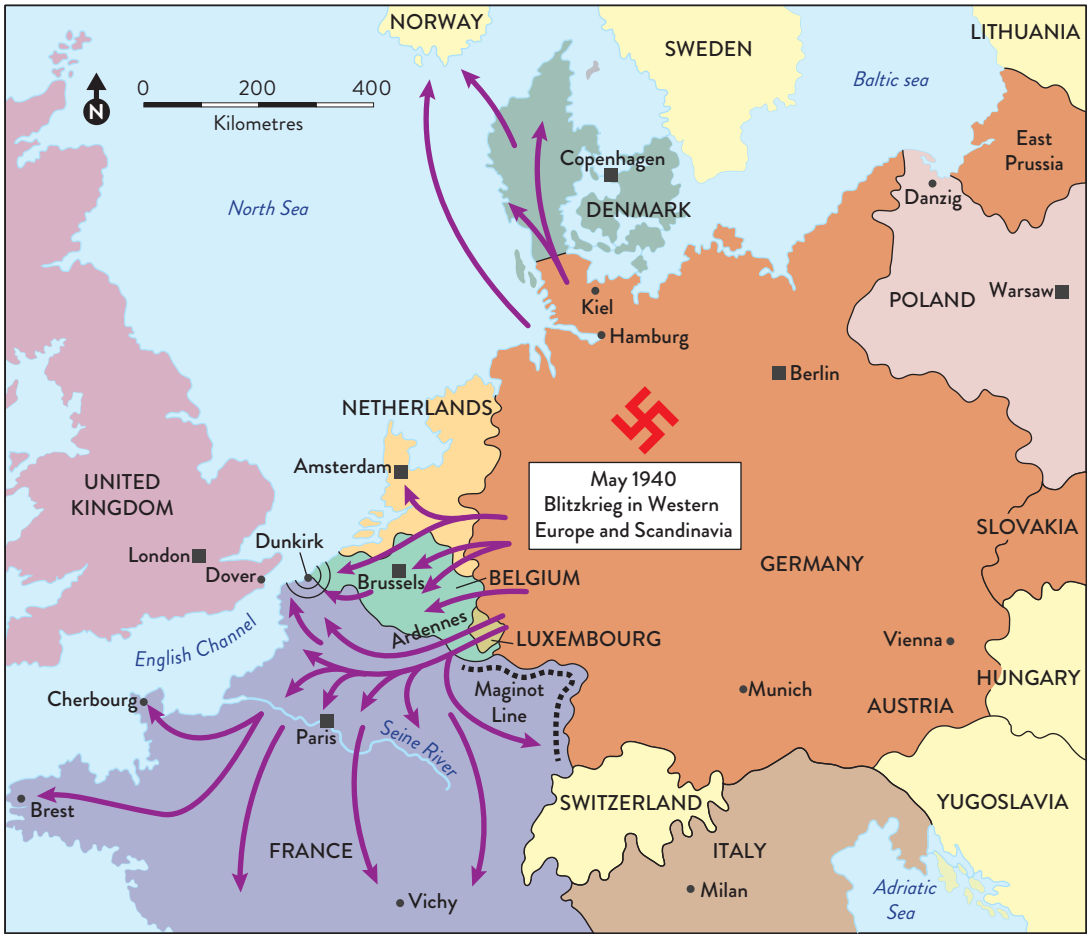


**SOURCE 2.6** German advances in the west.

that this defensive barrier would allow them to concentrate their armies in northern France, where they expected the German advance to take place. However, the Germans' unexpected advance through the Ardennes Forest bypassed most of the Maginot Line and Allied troop concentrations further north.

At the start of this campaign, the Allies actually had the advantage in terms of men and equipment (see Table 2.2). However, the Germans had a distinct advantage in terms of their plan and the technical skill and experience of their soldiers and airmen. German pilots were better trained to offer greater tactical assistance to their ground forces as they advanced. Light bombers and Stuka dive-bombers, previewed in the attack on Poland, now performed on a far wider scale and carried out the vital task of destroying Allied defences before the arrival of the German armour.


Getty Images/Lt. L A Puttnam/MM

**SOURCE 2.7** Trench manned by the BEF during the Phoney War. This image indicates the British expectation of the fighting, static warfare reminiscent of World War I.

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**TABLE 2.2** Allied and German forces available in May 1940

| | DIVISIONS | TANKS | AIRCRAFT | ARTILLERY |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Germany | 141 | 2445 | 2589 | 7378 |
| Allies | 144 | 3383 | 1413 | 13318 |

Adapted from Benoît Lemay, *Erich von Manstein: Hitler's Master Strategist*, Casemate Publishers, Havertown, 2010, p. 140, and Alan Levine, *Axis Victories to the Turn of the Tide: World War II, 1939–1943*, Potomac Books, Washington, DC, 2012, p. 17

1. In what way were the German forces superior to the Allies?
2. How could this advantage be particularly important in their offensive?

The BEF consisted of 10 divisions (approximately 400 000 men), with 25 000 vehicles, artillery and other support. Much of the Allied equipment was substandard, but not all of it. French fighter aircraft were generally inferior, except for a few Curtiss Hawk fighters purchased from the United States. The British sent no Spitfires to France; however, their Hawker Hurricane fighters were more than a match for the Germans. However, both the bombers of the BEF's tactical air support component, the Fairey Battle and Bristol Blenheim, were hopelessly outclassed. In terms of armour, most British tanks were inferior – although they were nearly impervious to German light anti-tank guns – while the French Char B1 heavy tank was probably the best heavy tank in Europe at the time. However, French tanks had poor coordination with their infantry. About 80 per cent were not equipped with radios, making communication in battle extremely difficult. The French used their tanks in the role of infantry support weapons. They were parcelled out in small numbers to infantry units, instead of in concentrated masses. In May 1940, the BEF was more armour-intensive than the German Army, having two armoured divisions per 10 infantry; yet, the coordination between the British armour and infantry was poor.

Arthur Tanner/Fox Photos/Getty Images

**SOURCE 2.8** A Fairey Battle bomber plane being loaded up with 250-pound general-purpose bombs.



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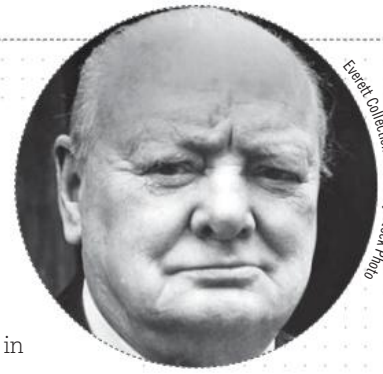
## Churchill becomes Prime Minister

By the time of the German invasion of Western Europe, the British public had lost confidence in Neville Chamberlain as British Prime Minister. With Chamberlain's resignation, it was decided to make Winston Churchill Prime Minister, although Chamberlain remained the Leader of the Conservative Party until his death in November 1940. On the first day of the war, Churchill had been returned to Chamberlain's Cabinet by being named First Lord of the Admiralty (same position he held in World War I). During the Phoney War, Churchill's public profile increased as the British Navy began fighting the Battle of the Atlantic against the Germans. Churchill had not been first choice to replace Chamberlain; in fact, he seems to have been the second choice (behind Lord Halifax). As soon as he was appointed leader, Churchill set about galvanising the British people to fight on despite the impending defeat in France.

On 13 May, he gave his 'Blood, toil, tears and sweat' speech in the House of Commons. This was followed on 4 June with the 'We shall fight on the beaches' speech. Lastly, as the French surrender was about to occur, Churchill again addressed the House of Commons with his 'This was their finest hour' speech.

> But if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new dark age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science. Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves, that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, this was their finest hour.
>
> Winston Churchill, House of Commons, 18 June 1940

### WINSTON CHURCHILL (1874–1965)


Everett Collection Inc/Alamy Stock Photo

Winston Spencer Churchill was from an aristocratic family. He initially joined the British Army in 1893 and saw action in Cuba, India and Sudan. After unsuccessfully running for parliament in 1899, he became a war correspondent and reported on the Boer War in South Africa (1899–1902), at one stage being captured by the enemy. He was elected to parliament in 1900 and by 1911 was appointed First Lord of the Admiralty. Although he commissioned the development of the first tanks, in late 1915 he resigned from the government and served on the Western Front. He returned to parliament in July 1917, where he was appointed Minister of Munitions.

He held various postwar parliamentary positions, but found himself on the outer during the 1930s due to his outspoken opposition to appeasement. On 3 September 1939, the day Britain declared war on Germany, Churchill rejoined the Cabinet and was appointed First Lord of the Admiralty. This gave him a significant public profile, as naval action was all that happened during the Phoney War. On the day of the German attack on the Low Countries and France, Churchill was appointed Prime Minister. He immediately set about encouraging British morale, defiantly stating that Britain would 'never surrender' and lionising the pilots during the Battle of Britain in 1940 as 'the few'. He proved himself a good organiser and concerned with the need for efficiency, prodding both his bureaucrats and his generals. His speeches and tours of bomb-damaged areas and of troops – often being photographed making the V-for victory sign with his fingers – made him popular with the people, although he remained a divisive figure in the parliament.

After the threat of invasion passed, Churchill defined the British strategy and decided to send forces to North Africa and pursue the bombing campaign against Germany. He established good working relationships with Stalin and Roosevelt and was able to direct Allied strategy, convincing Roosevelt of the validity of the North African campaign. With Stalin he was able to put aside his deep loathing of communism and often reminded his generals that the Russians were bearing the brunt of the German war effort. After the success of North Africa, he advocated a 'flanking strategy' of invading Norway, Turkey or Italy rather than France, but his ideas were sidelined as US decision-making began to dominate. As the war drew to a close, he became increasingly concerned for the postwar situation, especially in Eastern Europe. Despite his wartime popularity among the people, Churchill easily lost the general election in July 1945.

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Getty Images/Keystone-France/Gamma-Keystone

**SOURCE 2.9** Central Rotterdam after its bombing, 14 May 1940.

# Blitzkrieg in Western Europe

## The Netherlands

The German invasion of the Netherlands, Belgium and France began on 10 May 1940. The Netherlands was attacked by superior forces, the Germans having a two-to-one advantage in troops and artillery and a 10-to-one advantage in aircraft and tanks. The use of paratroopers immediately paralysed the Dutch defenders, and on 14 May a defenceless Rotterdam was bombed by the Luftwaffe, killing more than 800 people. The Dutch surrendered on the same day.

## Belgium

Similar to the French, the Belgians had placed a lot of faith in fixed defence forts at Eben-Emael. These were largely destroyed immediately by German paratroopers. The Allies had concentrated their forces in Belgium, but on the second day the Germans launched an offensive through the Ardennes Forest. While the battle continued in Belgium, the bulk of the German armour raced towards the English Channel. In panic and confusion at the speed of the Germans, the Allies began to pull back, and by 28 May Allied troops in Belgium surrendered.

# The fall of France

Militarily, the French were poorly led. The French military commander, Maurice Gamelin, favoured a static defence, one that gave the advantage to the aggressive Germans. His inept response to the speed of the German assault led to his dismissal on 17 May 1940. Politically, the French were also divided. French Prime Minister Paul Reynaud and the Minister of Defence and former Prime Minister Edouard Daladier were rivals. This resulted in Gamelin surviving far longer than he should have. In addition, there was a degree of sympathy for fascism within the country. When Reynaud was sacked on 17 June, he was replaced by World War I hero Marshal Philippe Petain, who immediately sought an armistice.

The fall of France

Getty Images/Heinrich Hoffmann/ullstein bild

**SOURCE 2.10** The Germans advance with long lines of armoured vehicles moving on a single road in France, May 1940. The German control of the sky prevented the Allied air forces from exploiting such a vulnerable scene.

The shock and speed of the German advance were huge. On 20 May, German units reached the English Channel, cutting France in two. By the end of May, a significant portion of Allied troops were pushed towards the beaches at Dunkirk. In what is considered a significant strategic blunder, on the advice of General von Rundstedt, then commander of Army Group A, Hitler gave the Luftwaffe the job of enticing the Allied troops to surrender rather than using his tanks and troops. This allowed the Allies to organise an evacuation. In the space of eight days, over 330 000 troops (including 120 000 French) were saved, thereby salvaging something out of a major defeat.



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Eventually, France surrendered on 25 June 1940. What the Germans had not been able to achieve in the Great War in four years of fighting, they had managed to do in eight weeks.

The German victory over France sent shock waves around the world. Poor leadership and a faulty strategy had contributed to the Allied defeat. The speed of the German advance, along with its daring nature, had been enough to throw the Allies into disarray and prevented them from holding the line or launching a counteroffensive. Contrary to the blitzkrieg legend – that the Germans' equipment as well as their strategy was superior to the Allies' in 1940 – the German Army was far from fully mobile; just 10 per cent of Germany's army was motorised in 1940 and the Wehrmacht could only muster a total of 120 000 vehicles, compared to the 300 000 of the French Army alone. Most of the Germans' logistical tail consisted of horse-drawn vehicles. Moreover, only half of the German divisions available in 1940 were actually combat-ready, most having inferior equipment compared to the Allies. Most importantly, it was the Germans' plan of attack and fighting skill that routed the Allies. There were some distinctly negative outcomes for the Germans as well. Most of Hitler's General Staff had tried to dissuade him from attacking France. This meant that he lost some faith in the abilities of his senior General Staff. It also meant that the German Army leadership and Hitler developed an unrealistic idea of the capabilities of the Wehrmacht.

Getty Images/Heinrich Hoffmann/ullstein bild

**SOURCE 2.11** Long lines of Allied troops await evacuation to England on the beach of Dunkirk, June 1940. Before the surrender, over 330 000 troops were saved, turning a major defeat into a significant victory.

## The fall of France

### SOURCE A: WILLIAMSON MURRAY AND ALLAN MILLETT

> In every respect, German victory represented one of the greatest military triumphs of history. There were two causes. On one side lay the excellence of the Germans at the tactical and operational levels of war. In no sense did German success represent a revolution in military affairs; rather, an evolutionary process of developing a combined-arms doctrine for mobile warfare and committing their forces to hard training provided the German advantage. General Erich Marcks noted in his diary shortly after the armistice that 'the change in men weighs more heavily than the technology' … In other words, ideology had been the key component in the German victory, from Marcks's point of view. The willingness of German infantry units to absorb heavy losses and keep going certainly suggests he was right. Almost immediately after their defeat the French began to search for scapegoats. There were of course, substantial problems with the doctrine and training of the French Army. Yet, it is also clear that French soldiers, for the most part, stood and fought. Over 123 000 died in slightly more than five weeks of fighting. But their sacrifice was in vain, because their leaders throughout the higher levels of command had utterly failed to meet the German challenge. The culprits were Gamelin, Weygand, and hundreds of other generals, who served between 1919 and 1940.
>
> Williamson Murray and Allan Millett, *A War to be Won: Fighting the Second World War*, Belknap Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2001, pp. 82–3



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### SOURCE B: PETER CALVOCORESSI, GUY WINT AND JOHN PRITCHARD

> The French forces were badly equipped, badly trained and badly led. They had not been modernised after the First World War because the military and political chiefs of the Third Republic had based their policies more on hope than on preparation. They had hoped after 1919 that Germany had been as much sickened by war as France and would not start another one, and later they had postponed rearmament and re-equipment because post-depression economics gave them an added reason for doing so. In the vital sectors of tanks and aircraft, industry was producing too many types and too few machines. French tanks were too lightly armoured to survive and their tactics were obsolete. The air force had adopted a modernisation plan in 1934 but four years later, when the Czech crisis came, its first line strength was below 1400 (half the size of the Luftwaffe) and only one in ten of these aircraft belonged to the 1934 programme.
>
> Peter Calvocoressi, Guy Wint and John Pritchard, *The Penguin History of the Second World War*, Penguin, London, 2001, p. 144

**QUESTIONS**

1. What are the reasons identified for the German success in France?
2. In Source A, who do Murray and Millett blame for the French failing to meet the German challenge?
3. In Source B, what do Calvocoressi, Wint and Pritchard attribute the French defeat to?
4. What equipment shortfalls did the French suffer from in 1940?
5. Looking at these two opinions, what do you think was the main reason for the French defeat in 1940?

**TABLE 2.3** Reasons for the German victory in 1940

| |
|---|
| Poor strategy and tactics of Allied forces in France |
| Strength of German equipment and commitment of their troops |
| Allied air power completely ineffective, German air power completely effective |
| Germans' bold plan gambled on a short, sharp campaign |
| Particularly poor leadership on the part of the French |

1. What was the main outcome of the German invasion of Norway?
2. As a class or in small groups, compare and contrast the German and Allied forces assembled before 10 May 1940.
3. Summarise the German plan of attack for the invasion of France.
4. How significant was blitzkrieg in the defeat of France?



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# To Britain

Following the fall of France, Nazi Germany faced its next strategic challenge. While driven from France, Britain remained at war. Hitler had long regarded the British and their empire as admirable potential partners, and during the 1930s several overtures of cooperation had been rejected. Some British conservative politicians, as late as May 1940, had felt similarly, but the rise of Churchill to the position of Prime Minister ensured that such a partnership would not be supported. Nonetheless, German attempts to negotiate a peaceful settlement continued but were rejected by the British.

It is against this background that Hitler approved a military option, Operation Sea Lion, a seaborne invasion of Britain. The success of this campaign, however, required that Germany establish air superiority over the English Channel and southern England. Without air superiority, the invading forces would be prone to attack by the British Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy. So began what Churchill described as 'the Battle of Britain'.[2]

## The Battle of Britain

After defeat in France, British morale was relatively low as the British Commonwealth was now fighting Nazi Germany virtually alone. RAF Fighter Command had only really become a priority in early 1938, as the British Government had preferred a doctrine of defence through counterattack by bombers. Under the command of Air Chief Marshal Hugh Dowding since 1936, during the Battle of France fighter command had suffered moderate losses but had also gained critical experience. The RAF fighter force in England was organised into 11 Group (defending south-east England) under Air Vice-Marshal Keith Park and 12 Group in East Anglia and the Midlands under Air Vice-Marshal Trafford Leigh-Mallory. It was 11 Group that would bear the brunt of the Luftwaffe attacks.

The British had critical infrastructure in place to help with their defences. In 1938, work began on an underground pipeline system that ran from British oil refineries to RAF stations, which meant they would have a constant supply of aircraft fuel. Shortly before the outbreak of the war, the British had built a radar network. This offered them the opportunity to identify the approach of enemy aircraft and scramble their own fighters in good time. The importance of this was obvious. It took the Germans 16 minutes to fly across the Channel and be over the 11 Group fighter bases; the time taken for a radar station to detect the Germans and alert a squadron of Spitfires and have them take off and reach 6000 metres was 17 minutes. In the summer of 1940, this virtually untried technology became critical to the defence of England. In terms of actual fighter aircraft numbers, improvements in British aircraft production meant that the RAF was never really short of aircraft but instead short of the pilots to fly them. Dowding had about 900 fighters available for service, but could only put 600 in the air at any one time.

Radar – the battle winner?

The Luftwaffe was organised into Luftflotten: Air Fleet 2 under Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, Air Fleet 3 under Field Marshal Hugo Sperrle and Air Fleet 5 under General Hans-Jürgen Stumpff. These men had all enjoyed considerable success in their operations in Poland and Western Europe. However, the situation over England was somewhat different.


Getty Images/Fox Photos

**SOURCE 2.12** The Supermarine Spitfire (rear) and Hawker Hurricane fighter (foreground) were both armed with eight .303 machine guns. Although less glamorous and less feared, the Hurricane shot down more German aircraft than the Spitfire in 1940.

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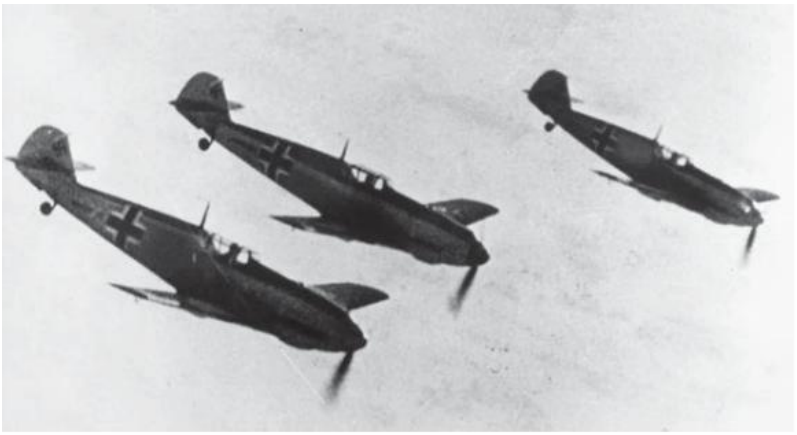
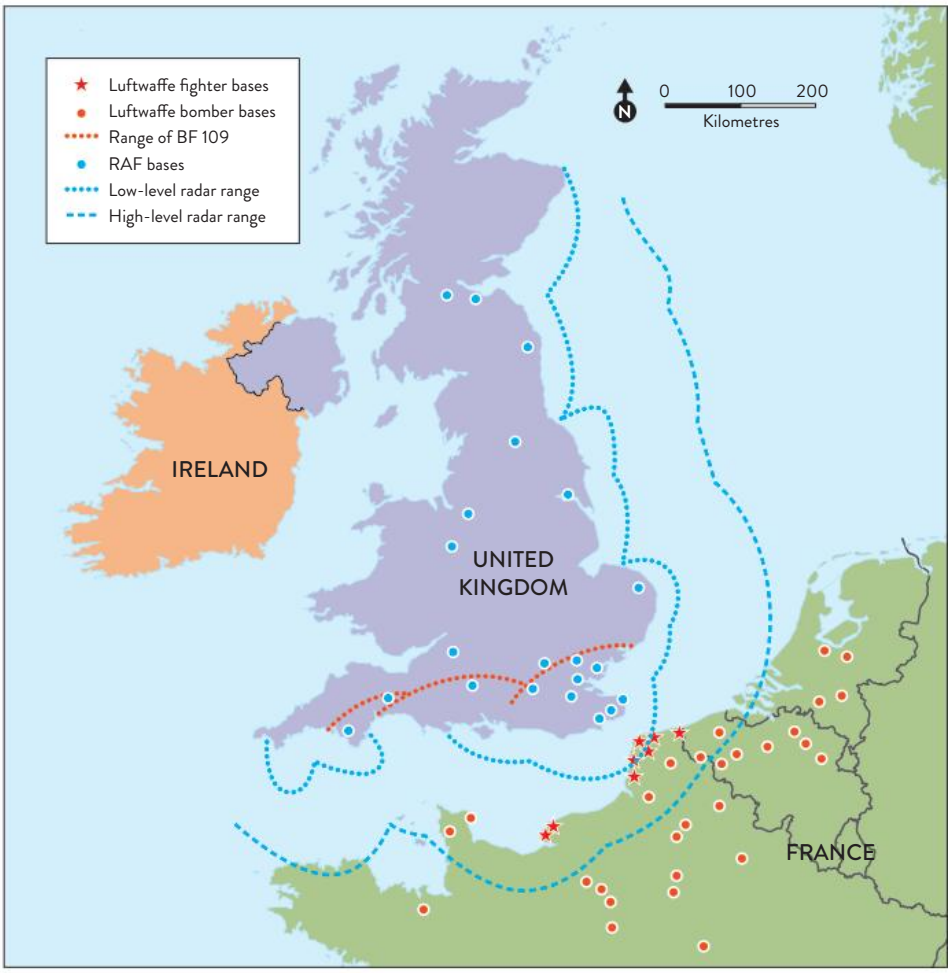
Firstly, their previous successes mainly centred on the close support they had provided the German ground forces. This time they were given an independent task, to prepare the way for the German invasion codenamed 'Sea Lion'. This battle would be entirely in the air. Secondly, the Germans had previously enjoyed complete air superiority, which allowed them to use aircraft – principally Stuka dive-bombers and twin-engine fighters – as they pleased. These types of aircraft would be no match against the high-performance British fighter force.



WORLD WAR II: GERMAN PLANE German Messerschmitt fighter planes in flight during World War II, 1940./Granger/Bridgeman Images

**SOURCE 2.13** A formation of Messerschmitt Bf 109E-7 fighters. The Bf 109 was the Germans' only single-engine fighter in 1940. It was well armed, with two cannons and two machine guns, but suffered from having a short range. It could spend no more than 20 minutes over London.

The Germans had a significant numerical advantage, with 1260 bombers available, 320 dive-bombers, 800 single-engine fighters and 280 twin-engine fighters. The main German fighter, the Messerschmitt Bf 109, was an excellent aircraft, hard-hitting with its cannon armament, but suffered from short range. It had fuel injection, meaning that negative G did not stop the fuel supply, which was a significant advantage over the British fighters, which did not have fuel injection. The main disadvantage the German fighters




Battle of Britain boundaries, bases and RADAR coverage, based on Wikimedia map by Hohum, adapted from map in *Strategy for Defeat, The Luftwaffe, 1933–1945* by Williamson Murray, U.S. Government Printing Office Washington, D.C. 20402, January 1983

**SOURCE 2.14** Radar coverage over England in 1940



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had was acting as bomber escorts, which meant that they had to fly at slower speeds and at lower altitudes, taking away their performance advantage. The German bomber fleet was entirely made up of tactical bombers, all being twin-engine aircraft that could only carry moderate-sized bombloads. Lastly, as this was the only German operation at the time, the German Air Fleet commanders had to contend with interference from both Hitler and the Luftwaffe Chief, Hermann Göring.

The Germans were also unsure about how to defeat the RAF. As the German invasion was yet to be launched, any short-term success could not be exploited on the ground. There was also confusion about target selection. The early part of the battle focused on coastal convoys; this then moved to targeting fighter command airfields and bomber airfields to industrial targets, which tended to be of general military value but not specific. The radar stations, the eyes of RAF fighter command, were left virtually untouched.

## The battle begins

The early part of the German offensive was mainly focused along the English coast. Between June and mid-August, hoping to stretch Fighter Command's resources, the Luftwaffe concentrated its attacks on shipping in the English Channel and light raids on the English coastal ports. The results were meagre; few RAF units were drawn into the Channel and of the estimated 1 million tons of shipping passing through the Channel in a week, the Germans sank 30 000 tons for the whole two-month period. By the end of July, with the German planning of Sea Lion at an impasse, it was decided to shift the focus to defeating the RAF in the sky.

On 13 August 1940, the first concentrated attacks on the British airfields were launched. These initial attacks were uncoordinated and poorly executed and not overly successful, although several airfields were severely damaged. By targeting the RAF directly, the vulnerability of some of the German aircraft became evident. Although they had been successful against inferior opponents on the continent, the Junkers Ju 87 Stuka dive-bomber and the Messerschmitt Bf 110 twin-engine fighter both proved to be death traps over England. The bombers of Air Fleet 5, which operated from bases in Norway, too far away for fighter escorts to accompany them, were also severely mauled. A major impediment to the Germans' effort to 'wear down' the RAF, and a factor that sapped their own strength, was that most of these air battles were fought over England itself, meaning that any Allied pilots who bailed out or survived a crash landing could be returned to service, whereas the Germans became POWs (only one, First Lieutenant Franz von Werra, ever managed to escape and make it back to Germany). The fightback of the RAF was used by the British Government to boost morale. On 20 August, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill made his famous speech that 'Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few', attributing the defence of Britain solely to the work of its fighter pilots.[3]

While the German tactic of attacking the RAF bases was proving costly, the British themselves were unsure about how to best meet the German threat from the sky. A disagreement developed between the Air Vice-Marshals Park and Leigh-Mallory over how best to defend against the Luftwaffe. Leigh-Mallory and his supporters, who

Getty Images/Museum of Flight/Corbis

**SOURCE 2.15** The German Heinkel He 111 medium bomber. Numerically, this was the most important German bomber. Although German aerial gunners were good, in the He 111 they were hampered by its limited defensive weapons of a single machine gun per turret. It could carry two tons of bombs.

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Getty Images/Staff/Mirrorpix

**SOURCE 2.16** RAF pilots waiting to scramble. Some pilots made several sorties (missions) a day.

included the famous double amputee fighter pilot Squadron Leader Douglas Bader, argued that the most effective way was to meet the German attackers with superior numbers. Their tactic called **Big Wing** was to simultaneously scramble a number of squadrons at once, thereby meeting the Germans with between 60 and 80 aircraft. Part of the reasoning for the Big Wing idea was that the German units were divided into groups of 30 aircraft compared to the British squadrons, which could put 12 aircraft into the sky at once. On the other hand, Park and Dowding thought it was more important that some of the British fighters remain to guard the airfields from attack.

**Big Wing**
Tactic of assembling a large force of fighters to meet the Luftwaffe attackers

### Changing focus

By the end of August, the Germans were convinced that Fighter Command was down to only 300 aircraft, when in fact the British had only lost 200 aircraft in total, leaving them 600 fighters. At this point, Göring ordered a change of tactic. Thinking that this was the last of the RAF, he ordered the Luftwaffe to use fewer bombers and concentrate on forcing air battles between the fighters by attacking targets the British would definitely defend. The remaining bombers were to switch to night attacks to further stretch the RAF and terrorise British civilians. This was a dangerous situation for the RAF, as it stretched its resources and did not allow it the easy pickings of its fighters attacking German bombers. However, as the Germans thought the British were closer to defeat than they were, when defeat did not come, they changed their tactics again.

What is considered the climax of the Battle of Britain occurred on 15 September 1940. On that day, the Luftwaffe did not repeat its tactic of sending up feints and diversions; this allowed British radar to pinpoint early the direction of the main attack. This enabled Park to meet the bombers with sufficient forces, including the Big Wing, which contacted the Germans over east London. A second attack later in the day was met with the same force. At the end of the day, the British claimed to have destroyed 175 German aircraft (the real tally was closer to 60). Nevertheless, the claim was a huge propaganda boost to the British at home and internationally, as they were defeating what was considered the world's best air force. Importantly, two days after this raid, the German invasion was postponed indefinitely. From this point on, London was to be tested as the Germans switched to attacking the English capital and RAF Fighter Command was no longer the focus of the German attack. Between 10 July and 31 October, the RAF had lost approximately 788 aircraft to the Luftwaffe's 1294. It was a victory for the British, but the pain of the Blitz was yet to come.

## The Blitz

The Blitz began as the Battle of Britain reached its peak. In early September 1940, the Luftwaffe began to attack London, as Hitler wanted to strike at London in retaliation for RAF attacks on Berlin. Although the British thought the strategy behind the Blitz was to test the British morale by attacking the capital, historian Richard Overy has recently argued that the intention of the Germans was actually economic warfare via the destruction of factories and ports. Even the infamous Coventry raid in November 1940 was actually aimed at damaging the city's vital aircraft industry rather than targeting



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the civilian population. However, it was also an expedient for the Germans to try to bomb the British into submission while their invasion plans had stalled. For the Germans, who had up to this point only committed a third of their bomber fleet, the Blitz was to bring them into the offensive against England. On 5 September, Hitler ordered 'disruptive attacks on the population and air defences of major British cities, including London, by day and night'.[4] While the Luftwaffe's primary goal was to destroy the RAF and its factories, it was also decided to attack the capital's infrastructure, supply and power sources. By October, when it became apparent that Germany had lost the Battle of Britain, the attacks turned increasingly towards simply terrorising the population.

Despite the many other preparations made for aerial bombing, in early September London was unprepared for the onslaught. Initially, London only had 92 anti-aircraft guns ready for defence. The capital's searchlights were not effective above 3500 metres, while few British night fighters were fitted with radar to actually find the enemy above England. In the raid on 7 September, normally considered the start of the Blitz, the city's fire control system failed, the night-fighters did not engage the enemy and hardly any anti-aircraft guns were fired. In this attack, 300 German bombers, escorted by 600 fighters, attacked in two waves during the day, followed by 180 bombers at night. Their main target was the London docks, but many bombs also fell on residential areas. In the raid of 11 September, the anti-aircraft gunners were allowed to fire at will. Their huge barrage, along with the improved searchlights, boosted the population's morale as they now felt that they were being defended. It also forced the German bombers to a great height, which affected their accuracy, but the bombs nevertheless continued to fall. In the opening phase of the Blitz, which lasted until mid-November, on average 200 Germans (and some Italian) bombers attacked London each night but one. In addition, German fighter-bombers carried out nuisance raids during the day and single-bomber runs on cloudy days.

The attack on 15 October was particularly heavy. On a brightly lit moonlight night, 400 German bombers hit the railway system, the Beckton Gas Works, the Battersea Power Station and the BBC headquarters, while three water mains were fractured. More than 900 fires were reported; six of these were considered major and nine were serious. The RAF sent up 41 night fighters, but only one German bomber was brought down. By mid-November, the Germans had dropped 13 000 tons of high explosive and nearly 1 million incendiary (fire-starter) bombs on London.

## Remembering the Battle of Britain

**PILOT OFFICER TONY BARTLEY OF 92 SQUADRON, A SPITFIRE FIGHTER ACE WITH EIGHT VICTORIES**

We did five sorties a day. We never stopped – we just went. You went to your dispersal hut half an hour after dawn, but when the tannoy [radio] said scramble, you scrambled. You went up and you fought all day long until the sun went down. Whether it be three, four, five missions a day – you just fought and fought and fought. At the end of the day we got off the airfield, because they used to bomb us at night, so we would go down to the White Hart at Brasted [a village in Kent] and drink beer.

Max Arthur, *Forgotten Voices of the Second World War*, Ebury, London, 2005, p. 77

**QUESTIONS**

1. Why would the RAF pilots be required to fly so many missions in a single day?
2. What did the pilots rely on to know when to scramble?
3. What threat was evident to the pilots at night?

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### A TEENAGE GIRL'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE BLITZ

Gwendoline Stewart recalls her experience of the Blitz as a teenager in Birmingham:

> My father built a shelter in the garden. You wouldn't know it was there. It had steps going around and around – my father said that a curved entrance stopped the blast from coming inside the shelter. He painted the walls with butterflies – there was a stove and bunk beds. It was home from home, really. That was the routine of the day – home from work, an evening meal, and sleep right through in the shelter to save on broken sleep in the house, because we had very heavy raids. The factories were still burning, and the trams weren't running, but no matter what happened, I had to get across Birmingham through craters, hosepipes and chaos. Even if you got to work at eleven, you received a warm welcome, because everyone else had gone through the same thing.
>
> Max Arthur, *Forgotten Voices of the Second World War*, Ebury, London, 2005, p. 109

**QUESTIONS**

1. Why was their shelter located in their backyard?
2. Why would this teenager make such an effort to get to the factory?
3. What attitude of the British people during the Blitz do her actions reflect?

### GETTING USED TO THE AIR RAIDS – AN 11-YEAR-OLD BOY'S PERSPECTIVE

> Games at school were liable to be enlivened by dog-fights between aircraft overhead and it was sometimes necessary to run for cover as a stream of bullets ploughed across the pitch. However, we were soon back collecting cartridge cases. On one occasion, being in the sitting-room with the family, I looked up from my book to see nothing but a bouncing ball of wool, unravelling behind my mother who had disappeared for the shelter with the rest of them. I sauntered through to learn that they had heard the whistle of a bomb which I, absorbed in my book, had not. We did not hear the explosion, but next day discovered that it had gone clean through into the basement of the mayor's house two roads away and killed the entire family.
>
> Robert Westall, *Children of the Blitz*, Viking, Harmondsworth, 1986, p. 109

**QUESTIONS**

1. What dangers does this boy remember about the air raids?
2. What was the problem with 'getting used' to the air raids?
3. What was the terrifying reality about the fate of the mayor's family?

In mid-November, the Germans switched to bombing other English cities and raided Birmingham and Bristol (both were first raided on 15 October), Coventry, Southampton, Liverpool and Plymouth. In January, Cardiff, Portsmouth and Avonmouth also became targets. Between mid-November and February 1941, as the Germans expanded their targets, the pressure was taken off London, with only eight attacks on the capital during this time. It was at this point that the German High Command grew critical of the purpose of these attacks. In early February 1941, the German Naval Chief, Admiral Raeder, convinced Hitler to issue an order giving greater priority to attacks on British ports rather than London. By May, the German bomber squadrons were withdrawn to take part in the attack on Russia. The Blitz had cost 43 000 civilian lives, with another 139 000 injured. It caused significant damage to Britain's infrastructure and housing stock and tied up huge amounts of resources for home defence and rescue and fire services. However, in terms of the goals set by the Germans, the ability of the British to build aircraft was not impaired and by the end of 1940 factories were turning out over



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450 fighter aircraft a month. In addition, the morale of the British was not harmed and the legend of the 'Blitz spirit' – the ability to tough out the situation – was created. For the Luftwaffe, this campaign had cost them over 600 bombers, losses that the Germans struggled to replace.

Importance of the Battle of Britain

1. How well prepared were the British for the Luftwaffe's attacks in 1940?
2. What were the various strategies employed by the Luftwaffe over England?
3. Which elements of the Luftwaffe proved deficient when facing the RAF?
4. What difficulties did German fighter aircraft face over England?
5. What strategic differences of opinion did the British have?
6. What did the Luftwaffe switch to attacking by the end of August 1940?
7. How well did the RAF deal with the London Blitz?
8. Why can the Battle of Britain be considered such a turning point in World War II?

## The Balkans campaign

As the Germans prepared for their invasion of Russia, an unforeseen event demanded their attention in the Mediterranean. Despite Mussolini claiming that he had no interest in Greece, the Allies pledged that they would help defend both Greece and Romania. On 10 June 1940, Italy declared war on the Germans' side and invaded France, but by the time the French capitulated they had gained little. Participation of their air force in the Battle of Britain had also achieved nothing, except further losses. Determined to win a victory and without consulting Hitler, Mussolini invaded Greece across the Albanian border on 28 October 1940. Although the British forces were already stretched, immediately they sent five RAF squadrons to help in Greece. Understrength at the outset, the Italian offensive completely collapsed due to a combination of inept leadership, poor timing, deficient equipment and the resolute Greek defence. The bad news for the Italians was compounded on 11 November, when the British – using 21 obsolete biplane torpedo bombers – attacked the Italian fleet at Taranto, sinking a battleship and heavily damaging two more; all for the loss of two aircraft. On 14 November, the Greeks launched an offensive of their own and pushed the Italians 50 kilometres back into Albania.

Since November, the Germans had begun to plan their intervention. With their attention focused on the invasion of Russia, their motive was not so much to help their Italian allies as to protect the Romanian oilfields and their southern flank. Meanwhile, the British sent in 62 000 British, New Zealand and Australian troops. These Allied soldiers were highly experienced but lacked armour and sufficient air cover. A coup d'état in Yugoslavia installed a Western-leaning government, which led to the German invasion on 6 April 1941. Belgrade fell one week after the invasion started and the whole campaign had only cost the Germans 151 lives.

On the same day the Germans invaded Yugoslavia, they also invaded Greece. The combination of superior armour and aircraft meant the Germans had spectacular success. By 21 April, the British had decided to withdraw their forces and over 50 000 Allied troops were saved. The campaign had cost the lives of 13 048 Greeks (since October 1940) and 3700 British Empire troops. For the Axis, 13 755 Italians (since October 1940) were killed and 1423 Germans. While the losses for the Germans in Greece were relatively light, they suffered higher casualties in the subsequent invasion of Crete in May 1941. The German attack succeeded but cost the lives of 4000 paratroopers. It also cost the Germans 350 transport aircraft lost or damaged. The Allies too suffered, but far less: 1750 troops were killed, with 12 250 succeeding in escaping.

The decision to send Allied troops to Greece was considered a strategic blunder by Churchill. Some German military figures, notably Paul Ludwig Ewald von Kleist, the commander of the 1st Panzer group in the Balkans and for the invasion of the Soviet Union, considered the Balkans campaign a blunder ➜

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that reduced German capacity in Operation Barbarossa. However, this is not strictly true. Hitler insisted that the Greek campaign must not have any impact on the preparations to invade Russia and neither it nor the operation at Crete impacted on the start date of Barbarossa. Certainly there were some material losses for the Germans, but these were relatively light and the campaign did secure the southern flank for the Germans.

**QUESTIONS**

1. How well did the Italian invasion of Greece progress?
2. Why did the Allies intervene in Greece? What was the extent of their involvement?
3. For what various reasons did the Germans intervene in Greece?
4. How did the Greek campaign progress after the arrival of the Germans?
5. While the German invasion of Crete succeeded, why could it be considered a loss for them?

# War on the Eastern Front

There was good reason for the Germans to maintain their non-aggression pact with the Russians. Britain continued to fight on and needed to be dealt with, while the relationship with the Soviets was benefiting the Germans. In fact, the Soviets were doing all they could to be good allies. In the first four months of 1941 alone, they supplied raw materials to the Germans including 232 000 tons of petroleum and 632 000 tons of grain.[5] Nevertheless, Hitler was determined to have his final reckoning with his lifelong enemy. The German leader's hatred for 'Jewish Bolshevism' was going to lead the Third Reich into the abyss.

The significance of the Russian campaign to the defeat of the Germans cannot be overstated. The Wehrmacht that crossed the Russian border in the early hours of 22 June 1941 was, up to that point, an undefeated army brimming with confidence. The Germans had an impressive force of 2.9 million men. The Eastern Front provided the centrepiece to Hitler's race war. The mass murders carried out against Jews, Russian civilians and Russian POWs in the territory of the Soviet Union and its satellite states in the name of Germany were unprecedented in human history. The Eastern Front was the incarnation of Hitler's dreams of racial cleansing.

## Preparations and aims

It was Hitler's Führer Directive 21, issued on 18 December 1940, that set in motion the plan for Operation Barbarossa. The plan was to split the German forces into three enormous spearheads. Army Group North (under Field Marshal Wilhelm von Leeb) was to attack towards Leningrad, Army Group Centre (under Field Marshal Fedor von Bock) was directed towards Moscow and Army Group South (under Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt) had a target of the Crimea. The German strategy was to draw the Red Army into battle and destroy it in a number of encirclement operations west of the Dnieper River. The objective was not to capture the Soviet capital Moscow, but simply to 'crush Soviet Russia', and the timing required was for 'a swift campaign'.[6] The Axis forces assembled for Operation Barbarossa numbered roughly 3 million soldiers, including 2 million Germans and the balance from Italy, Romania and Hungary. The invasion force included 3500 tanks and armoured vehicles and nearly 3000 aircraft. Indicating that the German Army was far from entirely mechanised, the Wehrmacht also took almost 750 000 horses with them. In all, the Germans were to march into Russia with almost 70 per cent of their total military strength.



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In terms of war aims in Russia, before the campaign started Hermann Göring, the Wehrmacht and the SS were working out plans for the economic exploitation of the Soviet population. Built upon the *Generalplan Ost*, called 'Oldenburg', these plans demanded that millions of tons of raw materials, oil and food be seized and sent back to Germany. As part of this, in May 1941 the 'Hunger Plan' was devised; this envisaged that Germany would feed its army and people with food taken from the Soviet Union. The plan predicted that this would lead to a major famine, causing the deaths of upwards of 20 to 30 million people. As previously mentioned, *Generalplan Ost*, which had already been brutally applied in Poland, was further revised to include what would happen after victory over the Soviet Union. The combination of these plans meant that every resource in Russia would be economically exploited by the Germans. Millions of Soviet citizens were expected to die of starvation, while the survivors would be expelled into Siberia, making way for German settlers.

Further to this, the war was to be fought in the most brutal fashion. On 3 March 1941, Hitler explained that the Eastern Front would be a 'war of annihilation', meaning that it would be conducted with few rules and would lead to the destruction of the entire Soviet state. To effect this, the Wehrmacht issued orders approving immediate execution for captured political commissars of the Communist Party. This order, called the Commissar's Order, was issued by the High Command of the Wehrmacht (OKW) on 6 June 1941 to only the most senior commanders. All of this was in place even before Barbarossa had begun.

Facing this force, one of the largest invasion forces ever assembled, was the Red Army. Demoralised by purges under Stalin, the Red Army was nevertheless an imposing force. The Russians had slightly fewer troops to meet the Germans but superior numbers in terms of equipment – having close to 20 000 tanks and 10 000 aircraft, far surpassing the Germans. However, the Soviet hardware was in a poor state. The majority of its tanks were outdated or light tanks, thinly armoured and poorly armed. Improved models, such as the T-34, had only started production and were yet to be built in significant numbers; in 1940, the Red Army only had 114 of these tanks available. Their air force was in a similar situation. Their main fighter aircraft was still a first-generation monoplane fighter, the Polikarpov I-16, which had an open cockpit and poor power plant; newer models had not yet been put in mass production. Only 250 of the highly successful Ilyushin IL-2 ground-attack aircraft were ready to face the Germans in June 1941.

## Operation Barbarossa

The German attack on Russia began at dawn on 22 June 1941. Despite troop build-up being known to the Russians, the Germans achieved complete surprise and all three army groups made rapid progress. In the skies, the Luftwaffe achieved total air supremacy, enabling it to control the battlefields. By the end of July, the German armies had penetrated deeply into Russian territory, but they began to meet tougher resistance, especially on the central front, with the German Army Group Centre creating a vast pocket of Red Army units around the cities of Minsk and Bialystok. The Soviets fought fiercely, and reducing the pocket caused significant German casualties. Eventually, 290 000 Red Army troops were captured, with 1500 guns and 2500 tanks destroyed.

Army Group Centre's initial objective was the city of Smolensk, which commanded the road to Moscow. Elements of Army Group Centre crossed the Dnieper River and closed on Smolensk from the south while other units closed in on the city from the north, trapping three Soviet armies in a pincer movement by 26 July. Eventually, 300 000 Red Army troops were captured. These early victories and the sheer numbers of prisoners taken convinced the Germans that, despite the tough fight, victory was only a matter of time. On 11 July, only three weeks after the campaign had started, Hitler's Führer Directive 32 outlined the postwar German plan for Russia.

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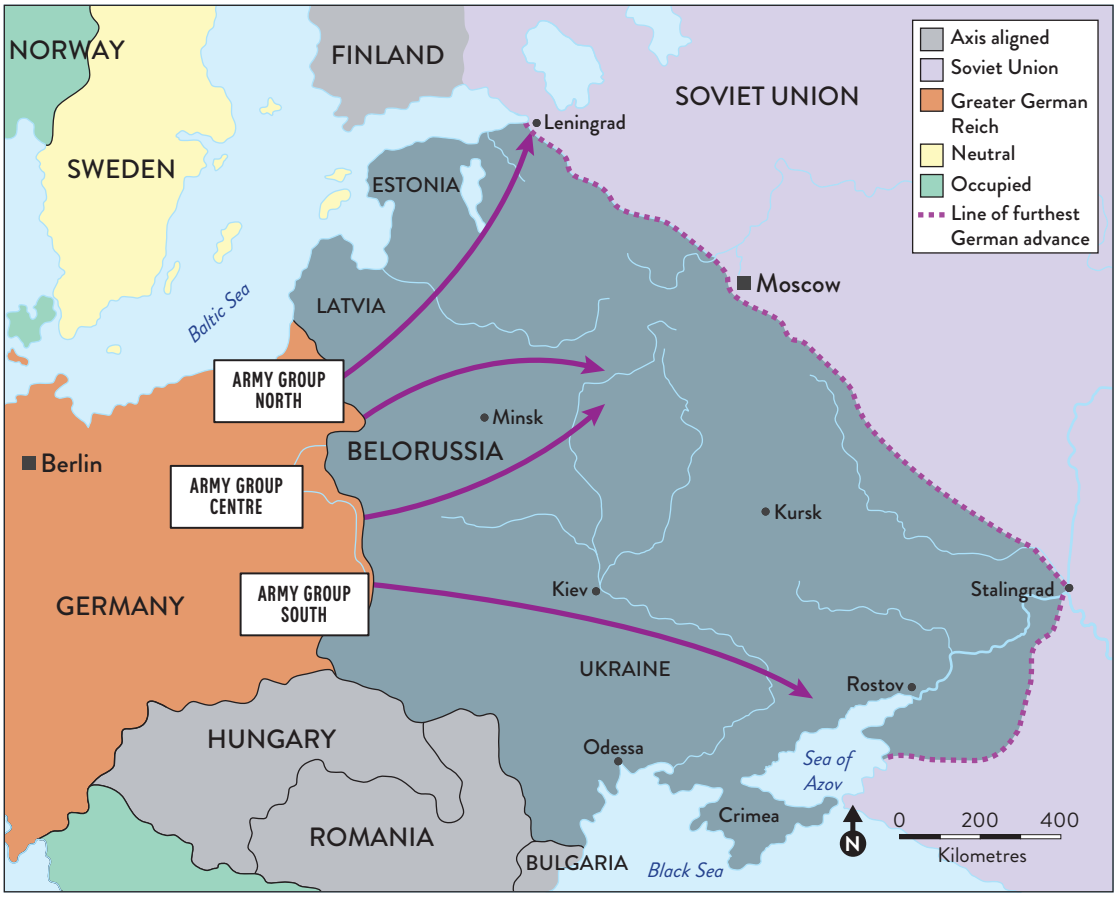


**SOURCE 2.17** The development of the German offensive in 1941.

akg-images/Alamy Stock Photo

**SOURCE 2.18** The reality of Barbarossa: the German Army made up of horses, carts and men moving through the Russian countryside.

After the initial shock of the German attack, Stalin regained his composure. Although this meant that he began to interfere in military operations to the detriment of the Red Army – forcing commanders to stand and fight in even hopeless situations – he was also able to galvanise the Soviet people into fighting back. On 23 June 1941, Stalin and the Communist Party Politburo (Cabinet) created the **Stavka** of the Red Army High Command. This body was created to provide 'uninterrupted and qualified command and control' of the Soviet forces and proved vital in beginning the process of centralised control.[7] On 3 July 1941, Stalin proclaimed the 'Patriotic War', demanding that the Soviet people engage in a 'relentless struggle' against the Germans and calling for 'scorched earth' tactics, whereby the people should destroy anything useful before it fell into enemy hands. He also called for the beginning of partisan actions by those trapped behind the lines. Despite their low opinion of the Soviet soldier, the Germans soon discovered the Red Army's will to defend and readiness to face the enemy were undiminished.

**Stavka**
Headquarters of the High Command of the Armed Forces of the USSR



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## A change of plan

The continued advances of Army Group Centre created a large salient of about a million Soviet troops between it and Army Group South. This posed a strategic problem for the Germans: whether the destruction of this Soviet force around Kiev was to be left to Army Group South or whether units from Army Group Centre should be used, which would affect the Germans' drive on Moscow. On 19 July, Hitler ordered that the attack on Moscow could wait: after the Red Army pocket around Smolensk had been reduced, Army Group Centre would hand over its panzer groups to its neighbours, Army Group North and Army Group South.

On 12 August 1941, this change in plan was formalised as Führer Directive 34a. This laid out that the salient of Soviet forces on the right flank of Army Group Centre in the vicinity of Kiev was to be cleared before it resumed its drive on Moscow. A few days later, Hitler ordered Army Group Centre to go over to the defensive, while Army Group North was to be reinforced with armour and to press ahead to capture Leningrad. Only after Leningrad's capture was the offensive against Moscow to be resumed. Despite protests from the Army Commander-in-Chief, Field Marshal Walther von Brauchitsch, Hitler insisted on his strategy. To him, the most important aim before the onset of winter was not to capture Moscow, but to seize the Crimea, deny the Soviets their industrial and coal region on the Donets, and to cut off their oil supply in the Caucasus. In the north, the aim was to cut off Leningrad and to join with the Finns.[8]

Ra Boe/Wikipedia CC-BY-SA 3.0

**SOURCE 2.19** A German horse-drawn column moves past a destroyed Panzer III, summer 1941.

Bundesarchiv bild-169-0864

**SOURCE 2.20** Soviet POWs being moved rearwards to an uncertain future, summer 1941. The number of prisoners completely overwhelmed the Germans, but also lulled them into thinking the Soviet collapse was at hand.

The German offensive against Kiev began on 23 August. By 16 September, nearly 750 000 men, plus the Soviet commander, Marshal Semyon Budyonny, were surrounded. The encircled Soviets did not give up easily, and a savage battle ensued in which they were hammered with tanks, artillery and aerial bombardment. After a month of fighting, the Germans claimed over 600 000 Soviet soldiers captured. If this is true, it would make it the worst encirclement defeat for any army in the history of warfare; however, a significant number of Soviet troops – as with other encirclements – had escaped, including Marshal Budyonny. Nevertheless, over the whole south-west front, the Soviets lost the equivalent of 43 divisions. It was after Kiev that the Germans became even more convinced that they had broken the back of the Red Army.

WS
Battle of Kiev

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## At the gates of Moscow

After Kiev, the Germans launched Operation Typhoon, their final drive to Moscow, on 2 October. In front of Army Group Centre was now a series of elaborate Soviet defence lines, the first centred on Vyazma and the second on Mozhaisk. Yet, to defend Moscow, Stalin could field only 800 000 men in 83 divisions, and no more than 25 of these were fully effective. To stave off defeat, the Russians resorted to the most brutal tactics to keep their soldiers fighting. On 16 August, Stalin issued Order 270. This demanded that all Red Army units, whether on the front, surrounded or trapped behind the lines, were banned from surrendering and were required to 'fight to the last'. This set out severe penalties for deserters, including an immediate death penalty as well as the arrest of their family back home.

Bundesarchiv bild-146-1981-149-34A

**SOURCE 2.21** German troops struggle to free a vehicle from the mud. The arrival of the rains in October significantly slowed the Germans' advance.

On the other fronts, by November the German forces had surrounded Leningrad in the north, placing the city under a terrible siege for the next three years. The Germans had also made significant advances south, taking Kursk and Kharkov. Targeting Moscow, Army Group Centre resumed its advance on the capital. However, the Germans were now hampered by the autumn rains, which affected their mobility and played havoc with their already stretched supply lines. On 18 October, German units penetrated the Moscow defensive position; Stalin declared the capital a fortress. Most government, military and party authorities were relocated from the capital. However, Stalin remained. With the arrival of more reserves and militia units, Soviet resistance began to stiffen.

On 13 November, a German military conference was held at Smolensk. A difference of opinion developed between the German field commanders and Hitler and the OKW. The field commanders, aware of the terrible fighting conditions, stretched supply lines and exhausted troops lacking proper winter equipment, favoured withdrawal. The consequences of the lack of warm clothing were horrific. In Warsaw, Italian war correspondent Curzio Malaparte saw wounded German troops returning from the Eastern Front:

> Suddenly I was struck with horror and realised that they had no eyelids. I had already seen soldiers with lidless eyes, on the platform of the Minsk station a few days previously on my way from Smolensk. The ghastly cold of that winter had the strangest consequences. Thousands and thousands of soldiers had lost their limbs; thousands and thousands had their ears, their noses, their fingers and their sexual organs ripped off by the frost. Many lost their hair … Many had lost their eyelids. Singed out by the cold, the eyelid drops off like a piece of dead skin … Their future was only lunacy.
>
> Curzio Malaparte, quoted in Andrew Roberts, *The Storm of War: A New History of the Second World War*, Penguin, Camberwell, 2010, p. 165

However, Hitler and the OKW insisted on assuming the offensive, arguing that a final effort of 'willpower' would be enough to finally break the Red Army. The Germans did advance, getting within 30 kilometres of the city. However, they could go no further.

Hoping to get some respite and recommence their operations in the spring – as they had not been supplied with winter clothing – the Germans got a nasty surprise when fresh Russian troops, commanded by Marshal Georgy Zhukov, launched a counteroffensive on 5 December 1941.



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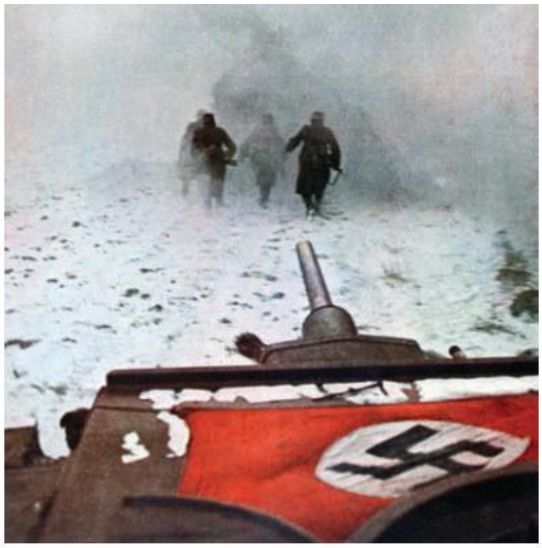
With temperatures at –45 degrees Celsius, the Soviet attack broke through the weak German defences, producing large gaps in the front line. Unable to withdraw reserves from any other front to plug the gaps, it was feared the Germans themselves would be encircled. German frontline commanders demanded permission to withdraw, but Hitler forbade it, condemning thousands of his soldiers to their deaths. On 18–19 December, Hitler sacked his Army Commander-in-Chief, Field Marshal von Brauchitsch, the commander of Army Group Centre, Field Marshal von Bock, and 40 other generals. Brauchitsch, as commander-in-chief, was replaced by Hitler himself. By the end of December, the threat to Moscow was over and the Germans were repelled nearly 300 kilometres from the Soviet capital.



502 collection/Alamy Stock Photo

**SOURCE 2.22** German troops and tanks advance through the winter snow towards Moscow.

**TABLE 2.4** Reasons for German failure in Russia in 1941

| |
|---|
| The Germans wholly underestimated the size of the Red Army and the time it would take to complete the invasion |
| They also underestimated the resilience of the Soviet people to fight on and not submit |
| Despite suffering mortal blows, the Red Army did not collapse |
| The decision to shift armour away from Army Group Centre (Führer Directive 34) |
| The late thaw delayed the German invasion and the severe winter in 1941 slowed their advance on Moscow |

## A turning point?

> The German failure to defeat the Russians in 1941 was the second and greatest turning point in the war in Europe. If Hitler could not beat the Russians in six months he could not beat them at all. He had prepared for a short war. He had not prepared for and could not win a long war. Nor could his relations with his generals survive a long one. At the end of 1941 he took over command of the army himself from Brauchitsch and nine months later would dismiss Halder, his Chief of Staff. More important perhaps, the handling of the 1941 campaign had produced quarrels with more highly respected field commanders and had deepened the mutual distrust between Hitler and the officer corps. By the end of the year Guderian, Rundstedt and Hoepner had all been dismissed. Others would follow later. In assuming personal command in the war in the east Hitler jettisoned his ablest generals.
>
> Peter Calvocoressi, Guy Wint and John Pritchard, *The Penguin History of the Second World War*, Penguin, London, 2001, p. 204

### QUESTIONS

1. If the Germans could not beat the Russians in six months, why not at all?
2. What was the important outcome of the failure to achieve victory in 1941 for the Wehrmacht's leadership?

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1. How did the war in Russia reflect the culmination of a long-held goal of Hitler's?
2. Outline the German plan for the attack on Russia. Where did the Germans hope to defeat the Red Army and by when?
3. How prepared was the Red Army in terms of men, leadership and equipment for the German onslaught?
4. Evaluate the effectiveness of the initial phase of Operation Barbarossa. How well did the German attack proceed?
5. How did Stalin respond to the German attack?
6. What critical decision did Hitler make on 12 August 1941?
7. What factors slowed the German advance on Moscow after October 1941?
8. What did the Russians launch on 5 December 1941?
9. What factors contributed to the failure of the German offensive in 1941?
10. Besides the Russian counteroffensive at Moscow, what other event occurred in December 1941 that can be considered a turning point in the war?



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# Conclusion

In the campaign of 1941, the myth of the invincible Wehrmacht was shattered. By 31 January 1942, the Germans had lost almost a million men, killed, wounded or missing. This represents nearly 30 per cent of their total fighting force on the Eastern Front. Despite having the initial ascendancy with their equipment and tactics, the duration of the campaign and the conditions took an enormous toll. In 1941, the Germans had lost 276 fighter aircraft in action in Russia, but a further 813 had been destroyed in non-combat accidents. The situation was worse on the ground. The 3rd Panzer Division began Barbarossa with nearly 200 tanks; by mid-September, it had only 10 left. Such examples show that the Germans were simply worn down as the fighting on the Eastern Front continued.

The Germans had wholly underestimated the will to defend and the tenaciousness of the Red Army, and the German defeat was a major blow to Hitler's political objectives. His plan for lebensraum and the exploitation of the USSR's resources was in ruins. Blitzkrieg had failed as a strategy; the war would now go into a phase where the Germans were wholly unprepared. Germany now had to fight a war against the Soviets, the British and also the United States with all their superiority in resources and capacity. The Eastern Front was the greatest challenge to Hitler's belief in his own genius as a war lord. He had sent his troops into Russia convinced of their ability, but more so of his own. The failure of the German forces led him to develop an incredible sense of paranoia. From now on, failures and setbacks were blamed on treachery and cowardice rather than poor planning. The Red Army had suffered grievously; in 1941 alone, over 3.35 million of its troops were captured. But as they were about to show, they could make good their losses in both manpower and machines. By repelling the Germans before US Lend-Lease (see Chapter 3) supplies had started to make an impact, this was a victory purely for the Soviets and the Red Army.

For the Allies, the end of 1941 represented a period when they started to work out their strategic goals in the war. Even though the United States had not yet entered the war, on 14 August 1941, in Newfoundland, US President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill agreed to a statement detailing the goals and aims of the war and the postwar world. The Russians' courageous resistance against the Germans began the process of bringing the Soviet Union into the Allied camp. In October 1941, the First Moscow Conference agreed that the United States and Britain would aid the Soviet Union in the common fight against Nazi Germany. At the Arcadia Conference in Washington, held shortly after the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor in December 1941, a grand strategy of 'Europe first' (also known as 'Germany first'), in that the defeat of Nazi Germany was considered a priority, was decided upon by the United States and Britain. Although the United States did not initially dedicate the majority of its resources to the European war, such a statement recognised that Nazi Germany was the most powerful member of the Axis and posed the greatest threat to the British and Russians. On 1 January 1942, as a sign of their new-found alliance, the Soviet Union was invited to be a major co-signatory to the United Nations declaration.

Getty Images/Keystone-France/Gamma-Keystone

**SOURCE 2.23** Hitler declares war on the United States, 11 December 1941. Hitler's decision to declare war on the United States had fateful consequences for Germany.

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For the Axis, the folly of their strategic partnership was apparent. In the wake of the Japanese attack on the American naval base at Pearl Harbor and the US declaration of war, it was Hitler who declared war on the United States to fulfil Germany's promise to assist the Japanese. Operating on different sides of the globe and with different objectives, this promise of assistance was almost impossible to keep.

# Chapter summary

- The Germans began the war with a superior battle tactic in blitzkrieg.
- The Germans overwhelmed Poland with superior armour and aircraft.
- Pre-empting a British landing, the Germans successfully invaded Norway on 8 April 1940.
- The German attack in Western Europe began on 10 May 1940.
- Completely routing the French and British forces, the Germans defeated France in six weeks.
- The Luftwaffe attempted to defeat the RAF over England but underestimated the fighting capabilities of the RAF.
- The Germans began to bomb London and other major centres, inflicting terrible damage.
- The German invasion of Russia began on 22 June 1941.
- The initial German attacks met with enormous success but also determined Soviet resistance.
- In September 1941, Leningrad was surrounded, beginning a terrible siege for the population.
- When the German attack on Moscow resumed, it was slowed down by Red Army resistance, long supply lines and the weather.
- With the Germans almost reaching Moscow, on 5 December 1941 the Soviets launched a counterattack with reserve forces, forcing the Germans back and removing the threat to the capital.

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## Endnotes

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# CHAPTER REVIEW

## CHAPTER REVISION QUESTIONS

1. Why was Germany so successful in the European war up to the end of June 1940?
2. What were the options available to Hitler after the defeat of France?
3. How did the Germans change their strategy during the Battle of Britain?
4. What advantages did the British have during the Battle of Britain?
5. What were the aims and nature of *Generalplan Ost* in Russia?
6. Why can the German failure to defeat the Russians by December 1941 be considered a turning point of World War II?
7. How was the attack on the Soviet Union different from those on Poland, France, Yugoslavia and Greece?
8. What 'grand strategy' did the Allies develop by early 1942? Whose strategy was more coherent, the Axis or the Allied?

## EXTENDED-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

9. Evaluate the reasons for the German military success in 1939 to 1941.
10. 'The failure of Operation Barbarossa to achieve its aims by December 1941 was due primarily to Hitler's decisions.' To what extent do you agree with this assessment? Evaluate this proposition using Source 2.24 in your response.

**SOURCE 2.24** German infantry and horses advance towards Moscow, November 1941.

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# 03

# Turning the Axis, 1942–43

## STUDENTS WILL INVESTIGATE

- the war in Russia, culminating in the German defeats at Stalingrad and Kursk
- an assessment of the effectiveness of the Allied bombing campaign against Germany
- the importance of the Allied victory at El Alamein.

Modern History syllabus

Members of the German 6th Army captured by the Red Army at the end of the Battle of Stalingrad, February 1943

Sovfoto/UIG via Getty Images

# Introduction

Between September 1939 and December 1941, Nazi Germany and its Axis allies had established military dominance over Europe. In these early campaigns, the tactics of blitzkrieg had proved highly effective and had resulted in decisive German victories in Poland, Norway, the Low Countries, France and the Balkans. However, by the end of 1941 Britain was undefeated and Axis forces had become bogged down in a war of attrition on the Eastern Front, although at that point a German victory remained possible. Nonetheless, Germany and its allies faced a war on multiple fronts – something that Hitler had endeavoured to avoid in 1939. In December 1941, the nature of the European conflict changed markedly. Following the American declaration of war against Germany's Axis partner Japan after its attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, Nazi Germany and fascist Italy declared war on the United States. This declaration, unrequired by the terms of the Axis agreement, drew the United States into the European conflict. During 1942 to 1945, the economic might, and later the military capacity, of the formerly isolationist Americans would combine with the British and Soviets to defeat the German-led Axis in Europe. This chapter examines the key turning points of the conflict in Europe during 1942 and 1943.

**Timeline**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1941 | **7 December** | Japan attacks United States Navy at Pearl Harbor. The United States and Britain declare war on Japan |
| | **11 December** | Nazi Germany and fascist Italy declare war on the United States |
| 1942 | **26 January** | First US forces arrive in Britain |
| | **February** | Albert Speer is appointed Minister for Armaments and Munitions |
| | **April** | German offensive resumes in Russia, with a push south to the Caucasus |
| | **May** | First of the RAF's 1000-bomber raids is launched against Germany |
| | **1–27 July** | First Battle of El Alamein |
| | **July** | German 6th Army begins the drive towards Stalingrad |
| | **August–September** | Battle of Stalingrad begins |
| | **17 August** | First United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) raid on occupied Europe |
| | **23 October–5 November** | Allied victory in the Second Battle of El Alamein |
| | **8 November** | Operation Torch landings in Morocco open second African front |
| | **19 November** | Red Army launches Operation Uranus, surrounding and trapping the German 6th Army at Stalingrad |
| 1943 | **14–24 January** | Casablanca Conference is held in Morocco |
| | **27 January** | First USAAF raid is carried out on Germany |
| | **31 January** | The German 6th Army surrenders at Stalingrad |
| | **18 February** | Propaganda Minister Goebbels's speech calling for 'total war' |

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| | |
|---|---|
| **19 February–15 March** | Germans successfully retake Kharkov, their last major success on the Eastern Front |
| **5 March–31 July** | RAF begins a bombing campaign against the Ruhr industrial region |
| **13 May** | Axis forces surrender in North Africa |
| **5–16 July** | The German offensive at Kursk (Operation Citadel) is defeated |
| **9 July–17 August** | Allied invasion of Sicily |
| **24 July–3 August** | Intensive RAF bombing of Hamburg makes over 1 million homeless and kills over 40 000 people |
| **24–25 July** | At Fascist Grand Council meeting, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini is deposed |
| **3–17 September** | The Allies invade Italy |
| **12 September** | Mussolini is rescued from imprisonment by the Germans |
| **November** | Allied air raids begin to target Berlin |

# The Eastern Front, 1942

Russia and the Eastern Front

The Eastern Front in 1942 was in many ways the central focus of the European conflict. These campaigns dominated Germany military thinking and it was the theatre in which the vast bulk of its manpower and resources were deployed. Other commitments, such as those in North Africa and the bombing raids of the British over Germany, were little more than military sideshows.

## German strategic thinking in Russia in 1942

The German Army on the Eastern Front, despite suffering some setbacks, was not beaten in 1941. At OKW, the question of how to proceed after the failure of Barbarossa had come up for discussion as soon as it became plain that there was going to be a need for a 1942 campaign. Although some of his generals favoured even withdrawing from Russia, Hitler had an absolutely clear idea of what he was going to do. He intended to smash the Russians once and for all by breaking the strength of their army in the south, capturing the centre of their economy, and taking the option of either wheeling up behind Moscow or down to the oilfields of Baku. As a result, an operational plan gradually evolved.

A key difference between the Germans and the Soviets in 1942 was the separate directions they went in terms of leadership. While both countries were ruled by murderous despots, Stalin, at least after the winter of 1941, began to slowly place more trust in the Red Army's High Command, an organisation he had done his best to destroy in the 1930s. Upon the German attack in June 1941, Stalin had assumed supreme command with largely disastrous results. However, towards the end of 1941, Soviet commanders had begun to prove themselves as leaders. Both Georgy Zhukov and Ivan Konev had demonstrated their ability in the defence of Moscow, as had others such as Konstantin Rokossovsky, who had been arrested and tortured during the purges and had only been released from prison in March 1940. Though it took a little while (as the disasters of early 1942 show), Stalin's withdrawal from military decision-making proved to be a critical development. In July 1942, the Red Army General Staff was placed in charge of planning. From then on, they drew up plans that Stalin



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had to approve but seldom changed. Stalin came to terms with his lack of military knowledge, in stark contrast to Hitler, and had the ability to recognise his shortcomings. On the other hand, starting with winter 1941, the increasingly difficult military situation saw Hitler rely on fanaticism rather than good military strategy. Mounting losses were merely blamed on the army and the army commanders more and more.

## Hitler as commander

Hitler became increasingly important to the German fortunes in the war. As the war stretched into 1942, Hitler took a greater role in military decision-making. With no experience as an army leader, his ability as a military commander has been the subject of a great deal of scholarship.

### SOURCE A: FIELD MARSHAL ERICH VON MANSTEIN, COMMANDER OF ARMY GROUP SOUTH, FEBRUARY 1943 TO MARCH 1944

In his book *Lost Victories*, Field Marshal von Manstein wrote of Hitler's abilities as a commander:

> He undoubtedly had an eye for operational openings, as had been shown by the way he opted for Army Group A's plan in the west [the attack on France]. Indeed, this is often found in military amateurs – otherwise history would not have recorded so many dukes and princes as successful commanders. In addition, though, Hitler possessed an astoundingly retentive memory and an imagination that made him quick to grasp all technical matters and problems of armaments. He was amazingly familiar with the effects of the very latest enemy weapons and could reel off whole columns of figures on both our own and the enemy's war production. Indeed, this was his favourite way of side-tracking any topic not to his liking. Yet, this belief in his own superiority in this respect ultimately had disastrous consequences. His interest in everything technical led him to overestimate the importance of his technical resources. As a result, he would count on a mere handful of assault-guns detachments or the new Tiger tanks to restore situations where only large bodies of troops could have any prospect of success.
>
> Erich Manstein, *Lost Victories*, Arms & Armour Press, Novato, 1982, pp. 274–5

### SOURCE B: HISTORIAN GERHARD L WEINBERG

> [After Stalingrad] Hitler's inclination to distrust the military leadership was reinforced by the great defeat. He had always resented his dependence on a professional higher officer corps whom he needed for the wars he expected to fight but whom he hoped to replace at the earliest opportunity with men ideologically more attuned to National Socialism. He continued to find most of the higher officers complaisant but not sufficiently enthusiastic about National Socialism, and he was more and more inclined to interfere in tactical details. It is by no means certain that his directives were in general any less unrealistic than those recommended by most of the generals; but he now relieved them with greater frequency while pushing up into the higher ranks those whose dedication to extreme National Socialist views made them more congenial to his way of thinking.
>
> Gerhard L Weinberg, *World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*, OUP, New York, 1994, p. 455

Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo/Alamy Stock Photo

**SOURCE 3.1** Hitler planning his next move in Russia. To his right in the background is General von Manstein.



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QUESTIONS

1 What attributes of Hitler does Manstein identify?
2 What does Manstein regard as Hitler's more valuable attributes?
3 What does Manstein regard as Hitler's worst qualities as a commander?
4 What does Weinberg suggest happened to Hitler and his relationship with his generals in defeat?

## Soviet reforms

A combination of severe weather, the Germans' overstretched supply lines, and the tenacious Soviet defence contributed to forcing the Germans back from the outskirts of Moscow in December 1941. However, as a fighting force the Red Army was a long way from being able to stop a fully prepared Wehrmacht offensive. The Russian Army had been decimated by the Nazi onslaught; Richard Overy claims that in spring 1942 only 8 per cent of the cadres (training organisations) of the Red Army still existed. Led by Soviet General Boris Shaposhnikov, the Russians began to reorganise their armies along the lines of what they had witnessed the Germans doing. They did not completely imitate, but took what they felt were the best parts and reorganised their armies. New tank armies were created, concentrating Soviet armour in tank corps supported by mobile infantry. As Overy states, 'These units were equipped with their own artillery, anti-aircraft guns, engineers and anti-tank battalions, a self-contained and mobile striking force'.[1] In September 1942, these tank armies were joined by newly created mechanised corps, containing more infantry and fewer tanks. Slowly, into 1943 and 1944, the number of tanks and mechanised artillery in these units increased, thereby increasing the firepower. By the end of the war, the battlefield firepower had been quadrupled. It was claimed that Soviet firepower increased from 115 kilograms for each artillery salvo in 1941 to over 400 in 1944. Besides firepower, on all levels Red Army intelligence and communication were dramatically improved. This ranged from radios in tanks (35 000 sets were sent from the United States under Lend-Lease) to various countermeasures, such as jamming German radio (up to two-thirds of German transmissions by 1943 were jammed with the creation of five radio battalions). The Red Air Force (VVS) was reorganised into larger units that also mimicked the German structure.

### Lend-Lease

The Lend-Lease program was designed to utilise the production capacity of the United States as a means of providing aid to countries fighting the Axis. Thirty-eight nations were supplied with equipment deemed 'in the interests of [US] national defence'.[2] Initially, there was great resistance in the United States to its involvement. However, with the German successes in 1940 and the threatened invasion of Britain, attitudes in the United States shifted to see the need to prevent a German victory. In December 1940, President Roosevelt declared that the United States would be the 'arsenal of democracy'.[3] To prepare for this, the United States had initiated a peacetime draft of those of military age and a fivefold increase in its defence budget. On 11 March 1941, the bill approving Lend-Lease was passed through Congress.

Immediately, a flood of supplies in aircraft, oil, food and materials began to flow to the British. In April 1941, this agreement was extended to nationalist China, and in October to Soviet Russia. Hundreds of thousands of tons of supplies were shipped from the United States to Britain. These were mainly by merchant ships. Over 2000 'Liberty Ships' – 10 000-ton cargo ships – were produced by US shipyards to carry these supplies. Initially, these ships took 244 days to construct; this later dropped to only 42 days.



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Shipments to the USSR travelled via the United Kingdom and the Arctic convoys, landing at Murmansk in the north, or from the United States direct to the Persian Gulf and then via a newly built rail line from Persia to Russia. Lend-Lease aircraft were also flown across the Atlantic to the United Kingdom. After June 1941, the British also began to supply equipment, including tanks and army boots, to the Soviet Union. The very first shipment, carrying 40 Hawker Hurricane fighters, arrived in September 1941. Even after the arrival of US forces in the European theatre, Lend-Lease supplies continued to be shipped until the end of the war.

Lend-Lease played an important role in supplying the Allies, but this should not be overstated. It was a hugely successful program designed to deliver America's economic strength to the war effort, and in this regard it worked. However, it played no part in the defence of Britain during the crucial days in 1940 or much of a role in the critical months on the Eastern Front at the end of 1941. These battles were won by the British and the Soviet Union using their own resources. However, resources and raw materials from the United States did play an important role in the Allied war effort. In 1943 and 1944, a quarter of all British munitions came from the United States. Over the course of the war, the Allies supplied the Russians with 53 per cent of their explosives, 58 per cent of their aircraft fuel, and almost half their copper, aluminium and rubber requirements. In addition, they also provided 4.4 million tons of food (about one-third of the Russians' total food needs).[4] Lend-Lease supplies allowed the receiving nation to concentrate its resources in certain areas while being supplied in others. For example, the Russians depended on their railway network, yet they only built 92 engines during the entire war, instead relying on nearly 2000 engines from the United States. The 15 million army boots supplied by the British ensured the Russians did not need to produce them.

The more than 350 000 US-supplied army trucks enabled the Soviets to focus their production on artillery, SPGs and tanks; while the 18 700 aircraft supplied to them by the United States represented about 30 per cent of the total Soviet aircraft production. Yet, in the scheme of things, Lend-Lease constituted about 7 per cent of the Soviet Union's total production.

**SPG**
'Self-propelled gun', mobile artillery; a tank without a turret

**TABLE 3.1** Lend-Lease program supplies to the Soviet Union, 1941–45

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Aircraft | 14 795 | Torpedo boats | 197 |
| Tanks | 7056 | Ship engines | 7784 |
| Jeeps | 51 503 | Food supplies | 4 478 000 tons |
| Trucks | 375 883 | Machines and equipment | $1 078 965 000 |
| Motorcycles | 35 170 | Non-ferrous metals | 802 000 tons |
| Tractors | 8071 | Petroleum products | 2 670 000 tons |
| Guns | 8218 | Chemicals | 842 000 tons |
| Machine guns | 131 633 | Cotton | 106 893 000 tons |
| Explosives | 345 735 tons | Leather | 49 860 tons |
| Building equipment valued | $10 910 000 | Tyres | 3 786 000 |
| Railroad freight cars | 11 155 | Army boots | 15 417 001 pairs |
| Locomotives | 1981 | | |
| Cargo ships | 90 | | |
| Submarine hunters | 105 | | |

Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the Congress, Volume 97, Part 14; Volume 100, Part 2, US Government Printing Office, 1951, p. A5515

## QUESTIONS

1 What were the most significant supplies the Allies sent to Russia?

2 Considering that the Red Army pushed back the Wehrmacht in late 1941 without Lend-Lease equipment, how important would you say it was to Soviet victory?

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Alongside restructuring their forces, the Soviets continued to resort to the most brutal methods to keep their soldiers fighting. In July 1942, Stalin issued his famous order No. 227 in which he declared that 'not one step back' was to be made in the fight with Nazi Germany.[5] It also outlined dire consequences for anyone accused of not fighting to the best of their abilities.

## The offensive of Army Group South

On 5 April 1942, Hitler issued Führer Directive 41, outlining the Wehrmacht's summer offensive codenamed 'Case Blue'. The Germans set out their goals as the capture of Leningrad in the north and holding attacks for Army Group Centre. However, the main German offensive was directed towards the south in an effort to capture the resource-rich Caucasus region. This attack was to be led by Army Group South, which had 1.3 million men in strength, along with nearly 2000 tanks and 1500 aircraft in support. Initially, the German offensive proved as successful as 1941. The Soviet counterattack at the Second Battle of Kharkov (12–28 May) was disastrous and cost the Red Army nearly 300 000 casualties to the Germans' 20 000. However, it was from this point that Stalin began to withdraw his influence from military operations. Stavka was still in charge, but the military leaders now submitted their operational plans to it and Stalin. This allowed the Soviet generals more flexibility in their operations and they began to take advantage of 'defence in depth', which meant that rather than standing and fighting the Germans and allowing themselves to be surrounded and destroyed, the Red Army withdrew as the Germans approached. This prevented the Germans from destroying the Red Army and drew them deeper into Russia, critically affecting their supply lines and communications.

The Germans expected the drive towards Stalingrad to result in a series of grand encirclements of Soviet troops and the destruction of the Soviet armies that they encountered. Their advance began on 28 June 1942 and with quick gains the Germans believed that they were going to have similar success to the previous year. The Russian town of Voronezh on the Don River was encircled by the 4th Panzer Army. However, unlike the previous year, when the encirclement was complete it was discovered that the troops trapped there were mainly stragglers. Unlike the previous year, the Russians, with Stalin's approval, were actually strategically withdrawing. The Germans did not realise this. Instead, confident that the Red Army was a spent force, Hitler decided to split his forces further. Führer Directive 45 designated that Army Group Centre be organised into two separate army groups. Army Group A was tasked with crossing the Caucasus Mountains and reaching the Baku oilfields. Army Group B, which contained the 4th Panzer Army and the 6th Army, was to head towards the Volga River and Stalingrad.

However, all did not go well for the German advance. On 10 September 1942, after his advance had slowed due to the terrain, stretched supply lines and stubborn Soviet resistance, the commander of Army Group A, Field Marshal Wilhelm List, was replaced by none other than Hitler himself. Hitler believed that List's complaints counted for nothing, even though List was actually there at the front while Hitler was at his HQ over 2000 kilometres away. This situation lasted until 22 November, when Hitler was replaced by Field Marshal Paul von Kleist. However, attention was now turned towards Army Group B and the 6th Army under the command of General Friedrich Paulus as it drove towards Stalingrad. Stalingrad had huge symbolic importance to Hitler and he was determined to take the city.

Getty Images/TASS

**SOURCE 3.2** Elements of the German 6th Army push on through the vastness of southern Russia towards the Volga River.



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## The Battle of Stalingrad

The combination of stiffening Soviet resistance and the overstretched German forces stopped the Nazis taking the city. As the German 6th Army under General Friedrich Paulus entered Stalingrad, violent house-to-house fighting broke out with knives, shovels and other improvised hand-to-hand weapons. The German troops lacked experience in this type of fighting and found themselves having to attack buildings floor by floor. German tanks were vulnerable to attack in this urban environment. They also found that the Soviet defenders were using the sewer system. The Soviets' defence was aided by a number of factors:

- German supply lines were already stretched beyond capacity.
- As the weather grew colder, German weapons tended to seize up and break down.
- The Germans were running at their last stretch; the last localised attack in Stalingrad organised by Paulus before the Soviet counteroffensive of 19 November consisted of Luftwaffe troops press-ganged into serving as infantry.
- The Luftwaffe's bombing of Stalingrad had created a defensive 'nest', as many buildings – due to their reinforced concrete construction – had not fully collapsed.
- Since 1941, military intelligence in the Red Army had improved enormously. They now knew the types and strengths of German (and non-German) units they were facing.
- The Russians had the advantage of knowing where the Germans were headed.

As they tried to destroy Soviet resistance in the city, the German 6th Army was drawn into a trap. When central units started to reach the western edge of the city, on 19 November a Soviet counterattack called Operation Uranus fell upon the northern and southern wings of the German line. The Soviet attacking forces, numbering about 1.2 million men, fell on the German force of the 6th Army (approximately 220 000 men) as well as Romanian (around 130 000) and Italian (220 000) units who were guarding the flanks of the 6th Army and whose commitment to Hitler's cause was not as strong. As these units fled, the bulk of the 6th Army (including some Italian and Romanian units) became trapped in a large pocket.

akg-images/Sputnik

**SOURCE 3.3** Soviet infantry move forward using a trench. Stalingrad had formidable defences, which included the bombed-out buildings in the background.

Bundesarchiv bild-1011-617-2571-04

**SOURCE 3.4** German infantry involved in house-to-house fighting in Stalingrad.

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Australian War Memorial [P02018.181]

**SOURCE 3.5** A German transport aircraft flying supplies into Stalingrad.

Initially, things did not look too bad for the Germans in Stalingrad; they had two airfields for resupply and good ground for defence. The Germans supplied trapped troops from the air. The resupply of Stalingrad proved to be beyond the material capabilities of the Luftwaffe. The Luftwaffe did not have enough or the proper aircraft (their Junkers Ju 52, numerically the main German transport aircraft, was basically an old airliner from the 1930s). Nonetheless, Göring insisted that the Luftwaffe was up to the task. The 6th Army needed 600 tons of supplies a day, but on average only 94 tons of supplies per day were delivered to the trapped German Army. On 30 September, Hitler declared that the Germans would never leave the city; therefore, when the Germans attempted an operation to link up with the 6th Army, the intention was only to re-establish the front, instead of trying to get them out. This operation, launched on 12 December, made some good progress and closed within approximately 10 miles of the Germans at Stalingrad (the 6th Army could hear the shelling and see the fire flashes at night).

With dwindling supplies, the situation for the 6th Army grew desperate. Its vehicles ran out of petrol and parts, ammunition had to be rationed and many soldiers in isolated pockets began to starve to death. Within the main pocket, General Paulus was badgered by his subordinates to launch a break-out operation, whereby the 6th Army would attempt to reach the German breaking-in force. However, Hitler declared the 6th Army could only go out and meet the approaching Germans if it also held on to Stalingrad. By the end of December, the German break-in attack was beaten back and retreated back to its starting point. The German 6th Army was doomed. The 6th Army lost its airfields during January, and by the end of that month it had been split into two pockets, with supply now only possible by air drop. On 30 January, Göring delivered a 'eulogy' to the 6th Army, describing its defence as heroic; on the same day, Hitler promoted a number of German officers in the 6th Army, including Paulus to Field Marshal, expecting him to then commit suicide. This he did not do. Instead, in the early days of February, Paulus and the remaining pockets surrendered. Around 90 000 German survivors went into captivity.

Timofey Melnik, Archive Photo

**SOURCE 3.6** Captured German prisoners are marched through the snow.

## Evaluating Stalingrad

The Soviets had won a huge victory, but it had been costly. While the Germans had lost nearly 750 000 men and 500 transport aircraft, the Red Army lost more than a million troops. The success at Stalingrad led to significant changes for the Red Army and Russian people. Stalin ended the influence of the party in the army; he removed the joint command enjoyed by political commissars alongside the 'real' army commanders. By late 1942, commissars had already been



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abolished altogether in smaller units. Officers in the Red Army were issued with new uniforms, uniformed jackets with shoulder boards with rank instead of the shapeless, olive, drab uniforms they had previously. Appeals to patriotism – and not communism – became more common, churches were reopened and people were allowed to worship and pray for loved ones, something the communists had tried to ban completely. The Germans were defeated but not totally beaten. It should be remembered that, although the Soviets were successful at Stalingrad, they also failed with two other offensives at about this same time: Operation Sinyavino (the attempt to relieve Leningrad) in August–October 1942 resulted in the loss of nearly 50 000 dead, while Operation Mars (near Moscow) in December 1942 cost them 100 000 killed.

In the wake of the disaster, propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels held a public rally in Berlin on 18 February 1943 where he declared that the country now must engage in 'total war'. For the German Army, it was a devastating defeat. It had lost its way. Only one idea remained. In August 1943, Hitler told the chief of the navy, Admiral Karl Dönitz: 'We just have to gather all our faith and all our strength and act'.[6]

WS
Hitler's Directive No. 51

## Gerhard L Weinberg

> Having himself made Stalingrad the symbol of the 1942 offensive, Hitler had elevated the fight for the city to enormous public attention. The insistence that the German army hold rather than break out only reinforced this aspect of the situation. The crushing defeat administered by the Red Army to the German army in Stalingrad was therefore a major blow to Hitler's prestige – a matter of vast importance in a dictatorship – at the same time as it greatly enhanced the position of Stalin and the Red Army. The public in the Soviet Union was, of course, kept aware of the desperate fight for the city on the Volga, but around the world as well, attention had been drawn to this epic struggle ... everywhere Stalingrad had been in the public eye for months, and the victory of the Red Army there symbolised at the time and thereafter what to most was the great turn of the tide on the Eastern Front.
>
> Gerhard L Weinberg, *World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*, OUP, New York, 1994, p. 454

### QUESTIONS

1 Who does Weinberg blame for giving the Battle of Stalingrad its significance?

2 What impact did the Soviet victory at Stalingrad have on Stalin and Hitler?

1. What was Hitler's plan for the Wehrmacht offensive in 1942?
2. How did the Red Army restructure itself from 1942?
3. What was the outcome of the Second Battle of Kharkov?
4. By late 1942, how was the German advance on Stalingrad already not going according to plan?
5. What did Führer Directive 45 decree?
6. Account for why the Germans were unable to capture Stalingrad.
7. What did the Soviets launch on 19 November 1942?
8. Explain the German plans for saving the encircled 6th Army in Stalingrad. How successful was this?
9. What was the outcome of Stalingrad for the victorious Red Army?

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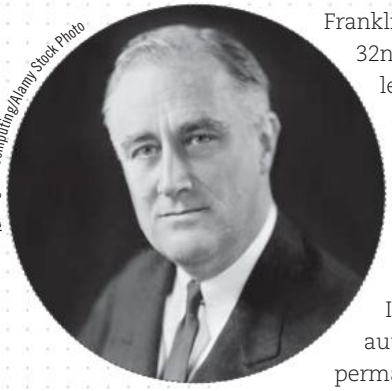
## Unconditional surrender

While the Battle of Stalingrad raged, in January 1943 the Allied leaders met at Casablanca in French Morocco. At this conference, President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill (Stalin was invited but declined attending) decided on the next stage of Allied strategy. The conference decided that a European 'second front' should be postponed but that the Axis should continue to be attacked via the Mediterranean and Italy. It was also decided to intensify the bombing campaign against Germany with the 'heaviest possible bomber offensive against the German war effort'.[7] Most important, even though it seems to have been an off-the-cuff statement by Roosevelt made at the end of the conference, was his announcement that the Allies would accept nothing less than the 'unconditional surrender' of the Axis powers.[8] This meant that the Allies were focused on defeating Nazi Germany completely and that a negotiated peace was not an option.

Getty Images/Bettmann

**SOURCE 3.7** Surrounded by official media, Roosevelt and Churchill meet at Casablanca in Morocco, January 1943.

### FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT (1882–1945)



IanDagnall Computing/Alamy Stock Photo

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the 32nd US President and its wartime leader, serving an unprecedented three terms in office (1933–45). He was elected to the New York State Senate in 1910 as a Democrat and in 1913 was appointed Assistant Secretary of the Navy by President Wilson. In 1921, Roosevelt developed an autoimmune disorder that left him permanently paralysed from the waist down. In 1933, at the height of the Great Depression, Roosevelt was elected to President.

In September 1939, Roosevelt followed congressional and public demands that America should stay out of the war in Europe. He initially signed Neutrality Acts prohibiting US arms sales to Britain and France, but these were overturned towards the end of 1939. At the height of the Battle of Britain in September 1940, Roosevelt engineered a deal with the British for 50 US Navy destroyers in exchange for access to their naval bases, which helped the British greatly with the U-boat threat. Although isolationism in the United States remained strong, in December 1940, after being re-elected, he announced that America would become the 'great arsenal of democracy'.[9] In March 1941, he persuaded Congress to enact the Lend-Lease program to supply the British and, after the Germans launched Operation Barbarossa, the Russians as well. On 9 October 1941, he approved the atomic program that developed the world's first atomic bomb.

Despite increasing instances of US vessels coming into contact with German submarines in the Atlantic in late 1941, it was the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor that finally drew the United States into the war. The Germans declared war on the United States on 11 December 1941. He advocated a 'Europe first' strategy but unrealistically committed to an Anglo-American invasion of Europe by the end of 1942. At the Casablanca Conference in January 1943, Roosevelt defined Allied strategy by committing the Allies to Germany's 'unconditional surrender'. When the Allies were prepared for the invasion of Europe, he wisely picked Dwight D Eisenhower to head the Allied cross-channel invasion, Operation Overlord. He maintained good relations with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and also Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, but he had grave doubts that their alliance would survive in a postwar world.

Despite his failing health, he attended the Yalta Conference in February 1945, the last meeting he had with Stalin and Churchill. On 12 April 1945, he suffered a stroke and died. He was replaced by his Vice-President, Harry S Truman.



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# The Allied bombing campaign against Germany

For all the fears they had of the devastation of strategic bombing, Britain was wholly unprepared to carry out such a campaign against Germany in the first period of the war. The vulnerability of bombers to fighter aircraft saw the RAF adopt the tactic of bombing at night for protection. This did protect the bombers, but created difficulties in terms of hitting specific targets. In July 1941, the Butt Report assessed the effectiveness of the RAF's bombing of Germany. It found that, of the 28 targets attacked between June and July during 100 night-time raids, only two-thirds of the bombers actually reached the target. Of these, only one in three dropped their bombs within 8 kilometres of their intended target. At this point, the British could have abandoned their bombing campaign completely. However, as it offered the only avenue for striking back at the Germans, it was continued. This report led to the intensification of further research into improved navigational technologies, but also the switch to area bombing where accuracy was less of an issue. As a result, the RAF switched from specific targets, such as oil plants or factories, to area bombing.

British bombing strategy in World War II

The purpose of the area bombardment of cities was laid out in a British Air Staff paper in September 1941:

> To break the morale of the population which occupies it [the German civilians]. To ensure this, we must achieve two things: first, we must make the town physically uninhabitable and, secondly, we must make the people conscious of constant personal danger. The immediate aim is therefore, twofold, namely, to produce (i) destruction and (ii) fear of death.
>
> Arthur Travers Harris, *Despatch on War Operations: 23 February, 1942, to 8th May, 1945*, Cass Series: Studies in Air Power, 3, Psychology Press, London, 1995, p. 7

*Time to Remember – the End of the Beginning 1942*

In February 1942, Arthur Harris was appointed Commander-in-Chief of Bomber Command. Harris was of the firm belief that area bombing would have detrimental effects on the German war effort as well as the morale of the population. It was not until February 1942, when the Avro Lancaster became available, that the British had a heavy bomber suitable for the task. With a crew of seven, its maximum normal bombload was 6.5 tons; with some modifications, it could carry the 10-ton 'grand slam' bomb, the war's largest conventional explosive.

From 1942, the RAF focused on bombing western parts of Germany, focusing on attacking the Ruhr industrial region. Harris immediately began to utilise the Lancasters and the rest of the bomber force at his disposal. On the night of 30–31 May 1942, he launched the first 1000-bomber raid, attacking Cologne and dropping nearly 1500 tons of bombs. The raid was in large part a propaganda boost for the British people, as the first serious strike back after the London Blitz. But it also caused serious damage, starting over 2000 fires and destroying or damaging 50 000 homes. Towards the end of 1942, British bombing accuracy was improved with the creation of Pathfinders, aircraft that flew ahead of the bomber force to drop flares to mark targets.


Australian War Memorial [P05155.009]

**SOURCE 3.8** Ground crew in front of an Avro Lancaster bomber. The long, unobstructed bomb bay allowed the Lancaster to take the largest bombs used by the RAF. The maximum it could carry was the 22 000-pound (10 000-kilogram) 'Grand Slam' bombs. A 4000-pound (1800-kilogram) bomb is pictured here.

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## British bombing as propaganda


VintageCorner/Alamy Stock Photo


'They will go on falling', 1939 (colour litho), English School, (20th century) / British Library, London, UK / © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved / Bridgeman Images


Poster Collection, UK 1791, Hoover Institution Archives


Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy Stock Photo

**SOURCE 3.9** British wartime propaganda posters supporting bombing of Germany.

### QUESTIONS

1. Analyse these posters. What do they make clear were the motives of the British bombing campaign?
2. What imagery is shown to highlight the impact of the bombing campaign?
3. What are the statistics used to prove the effectiveness of the bombing campaign?



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The Casablanca Conference held in French Morocco in January 1943 (see page 78) planned the Allied European strategy for the next phase of World War II. In terms of the Allied bombing campaign, it was determined that the focus should be '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'.[10] The conference outlined the primary targets as German submarine construction yards, German aircraft industry, transportation, oil plants and 'other targets in enemy war industry'.[11]

In line with the Casablanca recommendations, in 1943 the British expanded their targets. Between March and July 1943, the Battle of the Ruhr took place. This campaign targeted German heavy industry, and attacks were mounted against the Krupp works and various armaments and industrial concerns. Nearly 20 000 sorties were flown in total, involving up to 700 aircraft in each raid. The results were a hampering of German steel production and over 20 000 civilian deaths. An ambitious part of this campaign was what became known as the 'dam buster' raids. On 16–17 May 1943, Lancaster bombers armed with 3-ton 'bouncing bombs' attacked German dams in an attempt to release the 330 million tons of water they held. The objective was to destroy water supplies and hydro-electric capabilities and damage mines and factories in the local areas. The raids succeeded in breaching two of four dams, but the results were not as significant as hoped for.

In July 1943, Hamburg was targeted by 700 aircraft and bombed for a week. The city was largely destroyed and a firestorm developed, killing 45 000 people. The following month it was raided again; this time, 60 per cent of Hamburg's buildings were destroyed and another 60 000 to 100 000 people were killed. From November 1943 to March 1944, the RAF fought the Battle of Berlin, attacking the German capital. In that month, 700 bombers attacked the city, the first of 18 raids on the capital in the following months. These raids caused significant damage to the capital but the cost of them was high, with 3300 air crew killed in those raids. Unlike the daylight campaign, the Luftwaffe was able to effectively attack the bombers at night. Using radar-equipped twin-engine night fighters, German pilots were able to attack from below (using upward-firing machine guns), as the RAF bombers were not equipped with belly turrets for protection. On a raid to Nuremberg in March 1944, in clear skies and a full moon, of 700 bombers, 106 were shot down, killing 545 aircrew in one night. Over the course of the war, the RAF lost 8325 bombers. Bomber Command aircrews suffered an incredibly high casualty rate; from a total of 125 000 aircrew, over 55 000 were killed (a death rate of 46 per cent). Harris firmly believed the cost was worth it, stating in December 1943 that the bombing campaign could bring about the collapse of Germany by April 1944.

Getty Images/SSPL

**SOURCE 3.10** A RAF bomber over Hamburg at night, July 1943. The bombs dropped were usually a mixture of HE (high explosives), designed to destroy buildings and infrastructure, and incendiaries to start and sustain fires.

## The arrival of the Americans

The Americans and British split the duties, with the American bombers having the difficult task of bombing Germany during the day, while the British focused on night attacks. In 1942, the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) arrived in Europe to assist in the bombing offensive. The commander of the USAAF, General Henry Arnold, thought that strategic bombing had its merits

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**SOURCE 3.11** A US B-17 dropping its bombload in heavy flak. The USAAF suffered heavy losses during 1943, but the development of US long-range fighter escort and the Luftwaffe's fuel shortages reduced the losses dramatically.

but was unconvinced that area bombing was worth the effort. Besides, the B-17 Flying Fortress, the principal US bomber in Europe, was unsuited to night flying. In June 1942, the first missions by American bombers were flown in Europe. From 1943, they attacked specific sets of targets: the German ball-bearing and aircraft industries. Flown during the day, the American bombing missions were extremely hazardous. Flying without fighter protection for much of their journey, the American bombers were harassed by German single- and twin-engine heavy fighters and also flak over the targets. Two American raids on the ball-bearing factories in Schweinfurt in August and October 1943 cost the Americans 130 shot down out of a combined force of 560 bombers. The results were also meagre; the Germans' ball-bearing making capacity was hardly affected, as they rebuilt their manufacturing facilities, dispersed production, increased imports and began to use alternatives, such as roller bearings.

**drop tanks**
External fuel tanks, used to give fighter aircraft extra range; could be released if required

In February 1944, the Allies launched 'Big Week', which was a concerted effort to lure the Luftwaffe into battle by targeting the German aircraft industry. By this time, American P-51 Mustang escort fighters equipped with auxiliary fuel **drop tanks** were available in numbers to escort the bombers for their entire journey. The result was the loss of nearly 350 Allied bombers, but the Germans lost more than 250 irreplaceable aircrew. It also saw the withdrawal of the German twin-engine fighter force, forcing the Germans to use more of their single-engine fighters in anti-bomber duties. This eventually began to take a toll on the German fighters. German production could not meet the losses sustained. In addition, the bombing raids drew German fighters from the Russian Front to the 'defence of the Reich'; this gave air superiority to the Russians. In April 1944, there were only 500 German aircraft left on the Eastern Front to face 13 000 Soviet aircraft.

## Evaluating the bombing campaign

Even during the war the RAF bomber command had come under criticism for the conduct of this campaign. These arguments have centred around two points: firstly, did it actually affect the German war effort and, secondly, was it morally unjustified to carpet-bomb urban centres. It must be recognised that a significant amount of British resources were invested in the bombing campaign, nearly 40 per cent of the British war effort at its peak. Some argue that these resources, aircraft and aircrew may have been better spent dealing with the U-boat threat in the Atlantic. As the war turned against the Germans, the Allied bombing grew in its intensity. The continued use of heavy bombing attacks appeared as 'overkill'. In 1945, the commander of RAF bomber command was identifying lesser targets purely for their 'burnability'. Certainly, as Germany's defeat became increasingly imminent, its ability to defend itself with fighter aircraft and flak decreased. It is often quoted that 60 per cent of all Allied bombs dropped on Germany during the war fell after July 1944. However, many of these bombs were not dropped by heavy bombers but rather far more accurate tactical fighter-bombers. After September 1944, many of these were stationed in France, making bombing easier.

### Economic impact

Bombing proved highly inaccurate. It was determined that only one in five aircraft were able to get within 8 kilometres of their intended target; therefore, hitting particular facilities was difficult. It has been argued that, since German industry reached its peak production in 1944, the bombing campaign



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had little impact. The move to decentralised production – where parts were made at several different locations – and to underground facilities suggests that this was not the case. It can also be argued that German production could have reached even higher levels if the bombing campaign had not existed. It was estimated that Germany's tank production was 25 per cent lower by January 1945 than was planned. The bombing had an undeniable impact on Germany's oil production, which nosedived in 1944 (see Table 3.2). Imported and synthetic production – making oil from coal in a facility – had always been an important means of supply for Germany. The collapse of these sources therefore had a huge effect. However, overall, the loss of the Romanian oilfields when Romania changed sides in August 1944 must also be taken into account for the disastrous situation the Germans found themselves in.

**TABLE 3.2** German oil supply, 1941–44 (thousands of tons)

| YEAR | TOTAL IMPORTED | HOME PRODUCTION – NATURAL | HOME PRODUCTION – SYNTHETIC |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1941 | 2807 | 1562 | 4116 |
| 1942 | 2359 | 1686 | 4920 |
| 1943 | 2766 | 1883 | 5748 |
| 1944 | 961 | 1681 | 3822 |

Ian Dear, *The Oxford Companion to the Second World War*, OUP, Oxford, 1995, p. 1061

Adam Tooze argues that Bomber Command's campaign did have an effect on Germany's military production. In 1943, after the raids on the Ruhr, German steel production fell by 200 000 tons. Overall, the armaments industry was facing a steel shortfall of 400 000 tons. After doubling production in 1942, production of steel increased by only 20 per cent in 1943. As a result, the increase in aircraft production also came to an abrupt halt. Monthly production failed to increase between July 1943 and March 1944. Bomber Command had stopped Speer's armaments miracle in its tracks.[12]

## German morale

The effect that the bombing campaign had on the German people is more obvious. The shift to area bombing in 1942, where whole suburbs were targeted, had a significant effect on the German population. About half of the Allied bombs fell on residential areas and 12 per cent on what was meant to be the primary targets in factories and war industries. Around 600 000 civilians were killed by Allied bombing raids. Certainly, the Nazi regime did lose face over the intensity of the bombing and their inability to stop it. Before the war began, Luftwaffe chief Hermann Göring publicly remarked that if an enemy bomber flew over the Reich his name would be 'Meyer' (a nobody). Consequently, air-raid sirens in Germany became known as 'Meyer's trumpets'. Across Germany, a huge level of frustration and anger developed towards the bombing and the authorities for being unable to stop it. But this did not significantly shake the resolve of the people to continue with the war. With a combination of threats from authorities and a sense of camaraderie, the German home front held itself together, unlike in World War I.

## German armament development

The indirect effects of the British bombing campaign were easier to estimate. British attacks on German cities led the Nazis to make two crucial errors in response. Firstly, they responded by directing a significant amount of effort towards the production of anti-aircraft artillery. In 1940, there were 791 flak batteries defending the Reich; in 1944, this had jumped to 2132. This represented over 10 000 heavy (88-millimetre) flak guns plus half a million men and women who had to operate them. The second effect was the strategic response of the Nazi leadership. Conscious of the effect the bombing was having on morale and that the German home front had collapsed in 1918, the Nazi leadership was determined to retaliate in a conspicuous fashion against the Allies.

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The Germans invested heavily in rocket weapons technology designed to redress the Allies' advantage. The Messerschmitt Me 163 rocket fighter, which was designed to attack the US daylight bombers at speeds impossible for them to be intercepted by the US escort fighters, proved an abject failure. The desire for radical solutions also led to the V-1 and V-2 'vengeance' weapons. The V-1 did have some merit as a low-cost weapon of terror, but the V-2 was never able to produce the results its extensive development and cost warranted. It has been estimated that the industrial effort and resources of the V-weapons program were equivalent to the production of 24 000 fighter aircraft.[13]

## American targets

The impact of the US bombing is easier to gauge. The initial US attacks on German industry had little long-term effect. However, the attacks on German aircraft production were more successful. While they did not single-handedly defeat the Luftwaffe, it is arguable that they created the conditions for its demise in 1944–45. There was a significant drop in the Germans' fighter production as early as the last half of 1943. In May 1944, the United States shifted its focus to the Germans' petroleum facilities. Therefore, the Luftwaffe was forced to come to the protection of its industrial bases. By 1943, 70 per cent of fighters were directed towards 'defence of the Reich', along with significant numbers of 88-millimetre flak guns. In the skies over the Reich, the superior numbers and types of American aircraft, P-51 Mustangs and P-47 Thunderbolt fighters, broke the back of the Luftwaffe. Between January and June 1944 – the five months before D-Day – 2262 German fighter pilots died, largely battling the USAAF in the skies over the Reich. The Luftwaffe was effectively destroyed then and there.

This resulted in the Allies gaining air superiority over Europe and enabled them to properly support the D-Day landing at Normandy and other operations in France. Attacks on the petroleum industry had massive implications for the entire German war effort. Fuel shortages forced the Luftwaffe to curtail its operations by 1944, impacting on aircrew training as well. These restrictions were felt on the ground. In January 1945, it is estimated that the Germans had nearly 1800 tanks in Silesia immobile due to lack of fuel.[14]

1. Why did the RAF switch to night bombing against Germany?
2. When was the first 1000-bomber raid carried out and how successful was this?
3. Identify the various campaigns the RAF ran against targets in Germany from 1943. What were the results and how successful were these attacks?
4. What was the American air force's contribution to the bombing campaign against Germany?
5. Evaluate the arguments for and against the view that the Allied bombing campaign against Germany can be considered a success.

## AC Grayling

> Area bombing of cities did not harm civilian morale in Germany, as it was intended to do: rather, it strengthened it, an effect that many in Britain recognised from their own experiences of the Blitz. Thus it was that Joseph Goebbels was cheered in the streets of Berlin … in early 1944 after the winter long 'Battle of Berlin' [Bombing campaign] waged by seemingly endless fleets of RAF bombers – a battle lost by the RAF on more than just the morale front, as great sacrifice to our own courageous airmen. Yes, the Luftwaffe had been defeated by USAAF daylight forces principally, but indiscriminate bombing of cities had given Germany more reason to fight to the end than otherwise. As for the question of German war production, the plain fact is that German output increased every year of the conflict until the end of 1944, and the country's economy was never put on ➜



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a full war footing. With manpower and resources of vast conquered territories in Europe, Germany was in a position to sustain the war for a number of years. What won the war in Europe for the Allied powers was Russian infantry and tanks, and the USAAF daylight precision bombing of Germany's energy supplies, aircraft factories and (with the RAF) transport links. The interdiction [strangling] of fuel supplies was one of the single most important successes of the bombing war. In Europe the USAAF aimed for the jugular vein of the Nazi war machine – energy supplies – and succeeded …

AC Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities: Is the Targeting of Civilians in War Ever Justified?*, Bloomsburg, London, 2011, p. 251

**QUESTIONS**

1 What does Grayling argue the bombing actually did for civilian morale in Germany? What example does he use?

2 Who does Grayling identify as deserving the credit for destroying the Luftwaffe?

3 How does Grayling argue that the RAF bombing had no effect on Germany's war effort?

4 What does Grayling identify as the real reasons for bringing about the end of the war in Europe?

5 Write a paragraph supporting or refuting Grayling's main points. Be sure to identify and address each one.

## Richard Overy

There has always seemed something fundamentally implausible about the contention of bombing's critics that dropping almost 2.5 million tons of bombs on tautly-stretched industrial systems and war-weary urban populations would not seriously weaken them. 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. Bombing turned Germany, in Speer's words, into a 'gigantic front'. The final victory of the bombers in 1944, Speer concluded, 'the greatest lost battle on the German side …'. For all the argument over the morality or operational effectiveness of the bombing campaign, the air offensive was one of the decisive elements in Allied victory.

Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won*, Pimlico, London, 1995, p. 133

**QUESTIONS**

1 What evidence does Overy use to explain the impact of the bombing campaign on Germany?

2 Who does Overy use as evidence for his argument? Why would or why wouldn't this source be reliable in assessing this question?

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# German failure at Kursk

After the disaster at Stalingrad, the Germans were able to regain the initiative somewhat by exploiting the Red Army's overstretched front with an offensive to retake the city of Kharkov. From February to March 1943, this offensive utilised the I SS Panzer Corps, a corps made up entirely of Waffen-SS divisions. After four days of house-to-house fighting, the Germans recaptured Kharkov for the loss of nearly 12 000 casualties compared to the Soviets' 90 000. The success of this offensive created a bulge in the Soviet front line near Kursk. Kursk appeared as a bulge or salient on the Soviet defensive line (an area that stuck out from the Soviet line about 140 kilometres and was about 170 kilometres wide). The Germans intended to use a 'pincer' movement to attack from the north and south (top and bottom) and have their forces cover the 170 kilometres and 'nip off' the Soviet salient. In a strategic sense, the most the Germans could hope for with this operation was a psychological blow to the Red Army and to, as Hitler put it, 'light a bonfire' for German morale.

**TABLE 3.3** Comparative German and Russian strength at Kursk

| | GERMAN STRENGTH | RUSSIAN STRENGTH |
|---|---|---|
| Tanks | 2600 | 5000 |
| Infantry | 650 000 | 1 800 000 infantry and supporting troops |
| Aircraft | 1800 | 3000 |
| Guns | n/a | 20 000 |

Robert Citino, *The Wehrmacht Retreats: Fighting a Lost War, 1943*, University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, 2012, p. 134

Delays and opposition to the offensive came from German commanders themselves. Hitler convened a meeting with his senior commanders to discuss their options and found that the Inspector General of Tank Forces, General Heinz Guderian, and Armaments Minister Albert Speer were against it happening at all.[15] Hitler decided not to cancel but to delay the attack. It had first been set for 4 May, but Hitler delayed it until 12 June to allow more time for new weapons to arrive from Germany, especially the new Panther and more Tiger tanks. However, by the launch of the offensive, the Germans still only had 204 Panther and 146 Tiger tanks available. The spearhead for the northern offensive, the 9th Army, had only 26 Tiger tanks but 85 000 horses at its disposal. Nevertheless, by the time of the attack, these newer tanks were still only available in small numbers. Over the next few weeks, the Germans continued to increase the scope of the forces attached to the front, stripping their front line of practically anything remotely useful for deployment in the upcoming battle. The newly organised II SS Panzer Corps was also to be used in the offensive. Finally, Hitler ordered the attack to begin on 5 July, two months after its original date. The Russians knew of the German attack – via the British, who were decrypting German coded messages, and from their Soviet spies in England as well – and they created a formidable defence in depth, with six defensive lines and using over a million anti-tank and anti-personnel mines. They had also constructed a specially built

How Alan Turing cracked the Enigma code

Battle of Kursk, 1943 (b/w photo), German Photographer, (20th century)/Private Collection/ Peter Newark Military Pictures/Bridgeman Images

**SOURCE 3.12** At Kursk, a dead German soldier lies alongside a knocked-out Panzer IV tank. The Germans could not break through the Soviet defences, even with their massed armour of the panzer units.



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railway to ship in materials for making the defences. This meant that, rather than the hoped for swift 'breakthrough' type advance, the Germans would be drawn into a battle of attrition, fighting through static defences, similar to World War I.

The German attack at Kursk stalled almost from the beginning. From the north, the Germans had advanced a little over 10 kilometres by the second day. By 11 July, the southern advance, which had fared better, had still only advanced 35 kilometres. However, over the next few days, in the face of increasing Soviet resistance and use of their enormous reserves, the German advance was halted. On 17 July, Hitler cancelled the operation and ordered his entire II SS Panzer Corps to be transferred to Italy, where news had arrived that the Allies had landed in Sicily. Despite the significant Soviet victory, it still cost them nearly 255 000 casualties compared to 200 000 for the Germans. It also cost the Red Army about 6000 assault guns and tanks, compared to 750 for the Germans. These were men and equipment the Germans could not afford to lose. Kursk can be considered as decisive because, from this point on, the Red Army permanently held the initiative on the Eastern Front. As shown in Sicily, the problems for the Germans only multiplied.

# German manpower issues

In June 1941, 3 million German soldiers took part in Operation Barbarossa, but so did nearly 1 million non-Germans. For the rest of the war, German strength inside the Soviet Union sank to about 2.5 million soldiers, while the number of foreigners rose another million, the vast majority of them former Soviet soldiers or citizens prepared to fight alongside the Wehrmacht or assist it in some way as auxiliaries. Indeed, non-Germans not only kept the Wehrmacht in the field after 1943, they made Barbarossa possible in the first place. The German–Soviet front on 22 June 1941 was 2000 kilometres long, with the Finns covering 600 kilometres of that total and the Hungarians and Romanians between them another 600 kilometres.

After 1943, the German Army increasingly relied on foreign volunteers to make up their numbers. Russian ***Hilfswilligen*** or Hiwis (helpers or volunteers) began to serve in the German Army towards the end of 1941.[16] Their overall numbers are hard to calculate, but seem to be in excess of 200 000 to 300 000 who served the Germans in total. Hiwis constituted one-quarter of the 6th Army's frontline strength (about 50 000 men) as it drove to Stalingrad. One particular incarnation for foreign volunteers was in Waffen-SS divisions. These SS combat units, supposedly made up of racially pure Germans, had to rely on volunteers even among Germans (as one could only be conscripted into the German Army, not the SS). By mid-1942, foreign SS units were being formed.

***Hilfswilligen***
Russians who elected to fight for the Germans on the Eastern Front

Waffen-SS divisions

1. What was the German plan to regain the initiative at Kursk?
2. What does this indecision among the German high commanders over the offensive at Kursk tell you about the problems they knew they were facing on the Eastern Front?
3. Identify the various reasons why the German offensive at Kursk failed.
4. Evaluate the importance of foreign volunteers to the German Army in Russia.

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

Animated map: the Battle of El Alamein

In September 1940, the war in North Africa began with the Italian invasion of British-held Egypt. Despite outnumbering the British, the Italians suffered from poor equipment and training. This allowed the British to defeat the offensive and push the Italians back into Tunisia. In January 1941, the port of Bardia and the fortified port of Tobruk were taken by the British. Up to this point, the Italians had lost nearly 150 000 troops captured. Mussolini asked for help from his German allies. This arrived between February and May 1941 in the form of the newly created **Afrika Korps** and its leader, General Erwin Rommel. Ignoring orders to exercise caution, Rommel immediately went on the offensive and retook Bardia and from April 1941 laid siege to Tobruk. He was unable to take Tobruk and was forced to retreat in November.

**Afrika Korps**
The name for the German Army in North Africa

Everett Collection/Bridgeman Images

**SOURCE 3.13** British soldiers at Tobruk, July 1942. The desert was an extremely difficult environment to fight in. It was punishingly hot during the day, but the nights were often below zero.

In 1942, after receiving more supplies and reinforcements, Rommel and his Italian allies renewed their attack, defeating the Allies at Gazala and capturing Tobruk. The Axis forces then drove the British 8th Army back over the Egyptian border. But 140 kilometres short of Alexandria, their offensive was stopped at the First Battle of El Alamein. At this point, the British commander was replaced and Lieutenant-General Bernard Montgomery was given control of the British forces. After a lengthy period of build-up and training, the Eighth Army, now outnumbering the Axis forces almost two to one in armour (just over 500 Axis tanks versus over 1000 Allied) and men, launched a major offensive culminating in the Second Battle of El Alamein, from 23 October to 11 November 1942. After two weeks of fierce fighting and with his armour and fuel depleted, Rommel, against Hitler's express 'no retreat' directive, ordered his forces to fall back. This began a general retreat of the Axis forces, with the Allies capturing Tripoli by mid-January 1943.

Animated map: the North African campaign

To make matters worse for the Axis, towards the end of the El Alamein battle, what was known as 'Operation Torch' began on 8 November. One hundred thousand British and American forces landed at Oran, Algiers and Casablanca, all territories held by the Axis ally Vichy France (who surrendered after two days of fighting). These landings demonstrated the superiority of the Allies in terms of logistical and support equipment, being able to land and supply their troops in these complex and difficult amphibious operations (and teaching them important lessons for future operations). Importantly, these landings also brought the Americans into the Mediterranean theatre of war for the first time, giving their untried troops and commanders valuable battle experience against the German forces. These Operation Torch forces joined in forcing the Germans and their Italian allies into headlong retreat until early 1943. The German counterattack at the Kasserine Pass in February 1943 only offered momentary respite. Eventually, on 9 March, Field Marshal Rommel was recalled by Hitler, leaving the Axis forces, now under General Hans-Jürgen von Arnim, gathered in Tunisia; on 13 May 1943, they surrendered. This cost the Axis close to 250 000 prisoners of war.

Second Battle of El Alamein



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The North African campaign was significant on a number of levels. Foremost were the material losses suffered by the Axis. The Italian and German forces lost nearly 50 000 dead during the entire campaign. In addition, they lost nearly 400 000 men as POWs, approximately 8000 aircraft, 2500 tanks and 70 000 trucks over the course of the entire campaign. These material losses were irreplaceable. Not only this, but supplying the retreating Axis forces in North Africa had proved an enormous headache: thousands of tonnes of shipping and nearly 400 transport aircraft (30 per cent of their available force in the theatre), including giant supply aircraft (six-engine Messerschmitt 323s), had all been lost in an attempt to keep the Afrika Korps supplied through the hostile Mediterranean.

Monty as commander

El Alamein gave the British public a military commander who could beat the Germans. North Africa had been a graveyard for British commanders; Generals Harold Alexander, Claude Auchinleck and Archibald Wavell had all tried and failed to defeat Rommel and consequently been replaced. The elevation of Lieutenant-General Montgomery as a victorious and celebrated commander gave the English people confidence in its military commanders; after the failure of so many others against the all-powerful Rommel and Afrika Korps, it provided a positive focus for Allied propaganda. Montgomery inspired confidence among the troops and the public and his presence did much to maintain British morale.

The North African campaign gave the British in particular and the Allies in general a tremendous morale boost. It proved that the Western Allies could defeat the Germans. In 1940, the German armies had swept all before them in the Western European campaign. Even in the Greek campaign of May 1941, the British and Commonwealth troops had been virtually routed as soon as they arrived by the onslaught of the Wehrmacht. The British commanders and their tactics had seemed to be completely outclassed. These defeats had continued. The British public still remembered General Arthur Percival surrendering the garrison at Singapore to the Japanese in February 1942. Later, in June, and after the heroic defence during 1941, Tobruk had fallen to the Germans.

More recently, in August 1942 a British raid on the French port city of Dieppe, designed to test the viability of a full-scale invasion, had proved a complete disaster. The Allied troops never got further than the beach, with the Canadian forces suffering a 70 per cent casualty rate.

In contrast, El Alamein was the beginning of the end for the Axis forces in Africa, and it was the beginning of a series of positive outcomes for the Allies. A week after the conclusion of the battle, the Red Army launched Operation Uranus on the Eastern Front, surrounding the German 6th Army at Stalingrad. As Prime Minister Churchill observed after the war, 'Before Alamein we never had a victory. After Alamein we never had a defeat'.[17]

Getty Images/Mirrorpix

**SOURCE 3.14** Two British tanks and a tank landing craft left burning on the beach after the failed Dieppe Raid, August 1942. The failure of this raid was overshadowed by the success at El Alamein.

© Imperial War Museum (NA 2866)

**SOURCE 3.15** German prisoners after the fall of Tunis. Altogether, the Axis lost 250 000 troops captured.

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The loss of Africa led to the Axis losing the Mediterranean. It destroyed all hope of the German dreams of a triumphal entry into Cairo and a possible drive from the Middle East into southern Russia. Sicily was invaded in July 1943 and Italy was attacked in September. These campaigns were a further drain on the dwindling Axis forces, at a time when the Germans were fighting a losing war of attrition in Russia. With the invasion of Italy and their withdrawal from the war, it created another front that needed to be defended.

The most important aspect of the North African campaign is the detrimental effect it had on the Italian war effort. The Italians lost a significant amount of men and equipment in their ill-fated attempt to establish their African empire. The bad news from North Africa came on the back of bad news from Italy's involvement in the Germans' expansionist project in Russia. Italian troops had been involved in the attack on Russia since July 1941 and by mid-1942 they numbered over 230 000 troops. In April 1943, after fighting defensive battles after the disaster at Stalingrad, the Italian Army was withdrawn, with the loss of over 120 000 killed and wounded. These various setbacks caused Mussolini to lose a great deal of support. Even before the invasion of Italy proper, Mussolini was removed by his colleagues (including his son-in-law) at a meeting of the Fascist Grand Council on 24 July 1943 and was placed under arrest. After a period of some confusion, during which Italy indicated it would continue to fight alongside Germany, Mussolini's successor, Marshal Badoglio, signed a peace agreement with the Allies on 3 September 1943.

The removal of Mussolini as head of the fascist government, however, did not mean the end of the Italian campaigns for the Axis or the Allied powers, nor of Mussolini himself. The Germans occupied Italy after the dismissal of Mussolini and then rescued the *Duce* from imprisonment. They then established the Italian Social Republic with Mussolini as its leader. The Social Republic was little more than a client state of the Nazi occupation force, although it may be argued that it added some legitimacy to the German occupation. Between 1943 and 1945, the Germans staged a series of strategic retreats north up the Italian peninsula as the combined American and British forces edged their way northward. In the puppet Social Republic, a virtual civil war raged between communist and anti-fascist partisans on the one side, and Mussolini loyalists and the Germans on the other. This 'war' continued until 25 April 1945, when Mussolini was captured by partisans and executed just two days before Hitler's suicide in Berlin.

1. Outline the North Africa campaign between November 1940 and November 1941.
2. How did the Axis offensive proceed in 1942 and how did the Allies respond?
3. What happened after the Second Battle of El Alamein?
4. Research the military careers after North Africa of General Bernard Montgomery and Field Marshal Erwin Rommel.
5. Why can the Allied victory at El Alamein be considered a turning point of the war?



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# Conclusion

For the Allies, 1942 and 1943 were extremely important years. At the start of 1942, the Germans began their spring offensive on the Eastern Front with the same success that they had started the year previously. However, the Red Army had slowly learnt from its errors the year before. Its use of 'defence in depth' – retreating before it became surrounded – drew the Germans deeper into Russia. This situation changed dramatically with the drive of the German 6th Army towards Stalingrad. The Soviet counterattack and German encirclement resulted in a momentous defeat for Hitler, as he lost an entire army. At the beginning of 1943, the Eastern Front was teetering for the Germans. The Germans' success in retaking Kharkov in March 1943 merely presented false hope. Far more realistic was the outcome of Kursk in July 1943, where their offensive was defeated by a combination of improved Red Army performance along with superior numbers and equipment. Nevertheless, by the end of the year the Red Army was still learning to win and had yet to defeat the Germans in an offensive of its own. Nineteen forty-two also witnessed the culmination of the Nazi plans for the Jews of Europe. The beginning of the Final Solution, the construction and operation of the extermination camps in occupied Poland signified the realisation of Hitler's terrible racial plans. The end of the campaign in North Africa was also achieved in this period. The Allied victory at El Alamein in November 1942 precipitated a string of defeats for the German forces in North Africa that ended with their surrender in May 1943. The involvement of the Americans in the Operation Torch landings gave the US Army invaluable experience and left the Germans in no doubt about the array of forces assembled against them. By the end of 1943, the Allies had established a 'second front' of sorts, having successfully invaded Italy in September, with the surrender of Italy adding to the Germans' woes.

The significant German setbacks after 1943 also had important implications for resistance in occupied Europe. By the middle of 1943, partisan resistance to the Germans and their allies had grown from a mere nuisance to a major factor. In many parts of occupied Europe, Germany was suffering losses at the hands of partisans that it could ill afford. From France to Russia, emboldened by the Nazis' struggles on the battlefield, partisans' activities began to intensify as their numbers and resources swelled. In 1943, significant partisan activity was found in Russia – there were 243 000 partisans operating in Belorussia alone – and in Yugoslavia, where 150 000 underground fighters were operating. Such significant numbers meant that the partisans began to draw significant Axis troops into dealing with them. In May and June 1943, the Germans used 127 000 troops in a failed operation to destroy partisan activity in Yugoslavia. From now on, the Germans faced significant threats not only on the battlefield.

Beating the Axis

# Chapter summary

- In 1942, the German offensive was led by Army Group Centre and directed at Soviet resources in southern Russia. It began with the same success as 1941.
- The German 6th Army (part of Army Group South) was surrounded by a Soviet counteroffensive at Stalingrad.
- In February 1943, the 6th Army surrendered, causing the Germans' first significant defeat.
- The RAF switched to a night bombing offensive against Germany, launching campaigns against the Ruhr, Hamburg and later Berlin.

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- After several delays, the Germans launched an offensive at Kursk in July 1943. The Red Army, with superior intelligence, armour and men, was able to repel the German offensive.
- In North Africa, the Allied victory at El Alamein began a period of victories for the Allies and began the Axis retreat in Africa.

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# CHAPTER REVIEW

## CHAPTER REVISION QUESTIONS

1. What were the strategic choices in Russia for the Germans at the beginning of 1942? What option did Hitler decide upon and why?
2. What factors enabled the offensive of German Army Group South to be successful in early 1942?
3. What factors led to the German defeat at Stalingrad in February 1943?
4. Why did the German offensive at Kursk fail in July 1943?
5. How important did foreign volunteers become to the German war effort?

## EXTENDED-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

6. Evaluate the significance of the Allied strategic bombing campaign to Allied victory.
7. Assess the significance of the conflict in North Africa as a turning point in the European war.
8. Evaluate the significance of the Battle of Stalingrad to the war on the Eastern Front.
9. Assess the view that 1943 can be considered the most significant turning point in the war.
10. To what extent did Hitler offer an accurate assessment of the reasons for German setbacks in 1943? Use the following source to illustrate your response.

> Hitler blamed recent reverses on the treasonous [Vichy] French in North Africa, on the even more treacherous Italians [surrendering in September 1943] and on the reactionary [conservative] generals in the Wehrmacht who lacked Nazi faith and failed to obey his orders.
>
> Antony Beevor, *The Second World War*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 2012, p. 543

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# 04

# Civilians at war

## STUDENTS WILL INVESTIGATE

- the experiences of civilians on the home fronts
- how civilians were organised and contributed to the war effort
- the nature of their hardships and the impact of the war on the home fronts.

Modern History syllabus

Children from London's East End outside their house, destroyed during the air raid the previous night, September 1940

# Introduction

For the major European nations in World War II – the Soviet Union, Germany and Britain – the performance of their home fronts became critical to their chances of victory. In this conflict, the theoretical concept of **total war** – where the strength of the entire nation was drawn into the war effort – became very close to a reality. In Britain, the experiences of aerial bombing and rationing in World War I were multiplied in World War II. In Russia, the hardships that helped bring their home front undone in 1917 were a fraction of what they encountered after June 1941. In Germany, the collapse of 1918 led the Nazis to be overly sensitive towards pushing their civilian population too far. As a result, a bizarre and barbaric situation arose where forced labourers from all over Europe were press-ganged into working for the Third Reich. However, the consideration the Nazi leadership gave its own home front was not shared by the Allies, who conducted one of the most merciless and sustained bombing campaigns against them ever seen.

**total war**
Concept that the nation's entire resources are focused on war

# The British home front

By September 1939, the British Government had done a great deal to prepare its home front for war. As conflict became increasingly likely in the late 1930s, British governments took measures to ensure that the country would be prepared. The British had developed an acute fear of bombing and did much to protect their civilian population from aerial attack. From 1937, Air Raid Precautions (ARP) wardens were organised across the country. These wardens were responsible for getting civilians into shelters during an air raid, ensuring blackouts were being adhered to and coordinating fire and rescue efforts after an attack. The following year, all Britons were issued gas masks (children being given a 'Mickey Mouse' style mask) and evacuations of women and children from urban centres were planned. Sandbags and air-raid precautions had been put in place and the Anderson backyard bomb shelter was developed in 1938. Designed to accommodate six people, these shelters were to be half-buried in the homeowner's backyard. Distributed from February 1939, 1.5 million Anderson backyard bomb shelters were issued before September 1939. RAF Balloon Command was formed in 1938 to offer protection to urban centres from enemy bombers and was able to deploy some 1500 barrage balloons by the outbreak of World War II.

Getty Images/Keystone

**SOURCE 4.1** Two families construct their Anderson bomb shelters in their backyards. Partly dug into the ground, the shelters were built for six people. The first was issued in February 1939. In March 1941, the Morrison shelter (a reinforced boxed cage) was introduced for people without gardens.

How did people prepare for the war at home?

## Government control and rationing

The British Government had already passed the *Emergency Powers (Defence) Act 1939* before the war actually began. This gave it sweeping powers over the home front that regulated almost every aspect of everyday life in the country. Part of this legislation prohibited the gathering of crowds – and indicating the British focus on the war effort, after only three competition rounds, the English Football League was suspended for the duration of the war.

British home front

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In September 1939, Britain only grew enough food to feed one person in every three and was lacking in other raw materials. In 1939, the British imported 22 million tons of food; by 1942, this had been cut by half. Similar to World War I, German U-boats threatened to starve the country into defeat, so rationing was introduced. Petrol was rationed in September 1939; this was followed in January 1940 by butter, sugar, bacon, paper and meat. Although bread and fresh vegetables were never rationed, these were in short supply. Despite the U-boat threat, Britain continued to receive food supplies from overseas, notably flour from Canada and meat from Australia and Argentina (which eventually supplied Britain with 40 per cent of its wartime meat intake). After June 1941, rationing was extended to clothes. Rations were set at about 3000 calories per day and, although the British people had only limited experience of rationing during World War I (on selected items and only in 1918), they took to it in World War II with enthusiasm.

What you need to know about rationing in the Second World War

People saved up their coupons to buy things such as lard (to make pastry). Radio shows such as *The Kitchen Front* would suggest recipes for those struggling to cope with rationing. The government encouraged people to use alternatives wherever possible – such as Spam instead of ham. Echoing the 'thrift' campaign of World War I, to make up for the shortfall of food, the government encouraged a 'grow your own' program, whereby every patch of soil was used to grow vegetables. Householders were told to use their gardens to grow vegetables, and many people kept rabbits and chickens. Public parks, bomb sites and railway embankments became makeshift farms. Propaganda posters featuring the 'squander bug' encouraged Britons to use less food and fuel and asserted that frugality was the way to win the war.

## The positives of rationing

Some aspects of rationing had unforeseen positive effects. The British were moved away from the traditionally popular white to wholegrain bread (called the 'national loaf'), which led to improvements in nutrition. In addition, although there was less food about, it was being more evenly distributed in society, meaning that the poor had never eaten so well. However, a negative side effect of rationing was a flourishing **black market** where people could buy things, secretly, off ration at high prices. A fine of £500 and a possible two years in prison was meant to serve as a deterrent, but people kept using the black market.

**black market**
Illegal trade in an item that is officially controlled

## Mobilising people

Home front 1939–1945

In May 1939, the Military Training Act was passed, enabling the government to call up all adult males aged 20 to 22 for six months' military service. The following month, the first ever conscription call-up in peacetime Britain was enacted. When war was declared on 3 September 1939, all men aged 18 to 40 were called up under the new National Service Act. In 1941, as casualties in the armed forces rose, this age limit was raised again to 51. In anticipation of these call-ups of men, the Women's Land Army was re-established in June 1939 to ensure that food supply would be stabilised. In September 1939, support for the war was extremely strong. Despite the belief that the public wanted to avoid another war, when it was declared the nation got behind the war effort and many volunteered for service before they could be called up.

In May 1940, the extending of the Emergency Powers Act gave the government the authority to conscript workers into essential industries. The government tried to avoid resorting to this, as it was felt that workers who were willing would generally work better. However, by 1943, 22 000 young men were conscripted to work in the mines. In March 1941, labour shortage became so severe that the Essential Works Order (EWO) introduced conscription in essential industries, identifying jobs essential to the war effort and preventing employers from sacking workers without government permission. However, these government measures were offset by the expansion of social and welfare



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facilities, improvements to working conditions, and ensuring a 'fair wage', thereby creating the foundation of the postwar welfare state. Nevertheless, there were those who rejected being conscripted. It was felt that those who did not want to serve should be given the right to put their case forward. A system of tribunals was set up to which conscientious objectors could apply for exemption. Nevertheless, public opinion and the press were against them, especially in 1940, when the nation appeared to be in mortal danger; a total of 60 000 objectors were sent to prison.

John Topham/Granger Historical Picture Archive/Alamy Stock Photo

**SOURCE 4.2** British schoolchildren take shelter in a slit trench during the Battle of Britain, 1940.

## Enemy aliens

At the start of the war, the British Government was wary of internal threats. There were 75 000 Germans, Italians and Austrians – including many Jewish refugees – living in Britain; not unnaturally, the government and people worried that some might be spies. These immigrants were divided into three categories: Class A (high risk), Class B (moderate risk) and Class C (low risk). In September 1939, all Class A aliens were rounded up and interned; by June 1940, nearly 27 000 were locked up, including 1500 British citizens. These arrests were not popular with the British public. Many of these foreigners had been living in Britain for years, while others who had recently arrived, such as Jewish refugees, were clearly no friends of the Third Reich. In July 1940, a ship carrying internees to Canada was sunk with large loss of life. More popular was the internment of Britons suspected of harbouring Nazi sympathies, including the British fascist leader Oswald Mosley.

## The British Ministry of Information

In 1939, the British Government created the Ministry of Information (MoI) to regulate all news and propaganda. It took time for the Ministry of Information to find its feet. Its initial propaganda efforts missed the mark and tended to annoy the public, coming across as pompous and condescending. The Ministry released three posters for home-front morale, containing an image of a Tudor crown with the slogans 'Keep calm and carry on', 'Your courage, your cheerfulness, your resolution will bring us victory' and 'Freedom is in peril – defend it with all your might'. Although nearly 2.5 million 'Keep calm and carry on' posters were printed in 1939, hardly any of them were displayed during the war; however, in recent years they have proved to be far more popular. Another poster that encouraged mothers not to bring their evacuated children back home had the opposite effect. These early campaigns were considered a resounding failure, as they were thought to reflect an upper-class civil servant mindset and misjudged the attitude of the common people.[1]

It took time to understand the mood of the people and to grasp the way information was expected to be communicated. It was discovered that withholding bad news had a detrimental effect, as people began to distrust news services. It also became apparent that rumours and stories spread quickly and that trust in news sources was essential. During 1940, a British traitor William Joyce (known as Lord Haw Haw) became widely known for broadcasting to the British people in an attempt to undermine their will to fight. Trust in the BBC as an honest news source was universal, even by the Germans. Censorship was certainly enacted in England, but this was limited to soldiers' letters, particularly graphic images in the press and material considered directly sensitive to the war effort. The communist newspaper *The Daily Worker* was one of few victims of censorship, being banned during 1941 for opposing the war. The Minister of Information had the right to control what the BBC broadcast but never enacted it. At its height, the MoI had a staff of 3000 people. ➜

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The job of spreading propaganda and war-mindedness was carried out by the British entertainment industry without the need for any official direction. During the war, a significant proportion of British films were propaganda in nature. Successful box-office movies such as *Target for Tonight* (1941), *Went the Day Well?* (1942), *The Next of Kin* (1942), *The Gentle Sex* (1943) and *Millions Like Us* (1943) either had themes of heroic war service or war-mindedness.

**QUESTIONS**

1. What do the initial experiences of the Ministry of Information tell us about attitudes to the war on the British home front?
2. Who was 'Lord Haw Haw' and what impact did he have on the British home front?

## 1940: Britain's dark days

After June 1940 and until early 1941, the British home front was under its most intense pressure of the war. The rapid collapse of Britain's continental allies shocked the British public, but this quickly led to the creation of a resolve to fight on to the bitter end. The appointment of Winston Churchill as Prime Minister on 10 May 1940 seems to epitomise this spirit of resilience. Churchill made a series of speeches that galvanised the British war effort: the 'Blood, toil, tears and sweat' speech on 13 May 1940, his first speech to Parliament as Prime Minister, the 'We shall fight on the beaches' speech of 4 June and the 'This was their finest hour' speech on 18 June. On 30 June 1940, the Channel Islands of Jersey and Guernsey were occupied by the Germans. The Channel Islands were the only part of British territory to be occupied by the Germans during the war. From that point until Germany's defeat in May 1945 (the islands were by-passed during D-Day), 75 000 islanders were subject to German military occupation.

### The British attitude in June 1940


David Low/Solo Syndication, via British Cartoon Archive

**SOURCE 4.3** A cartoon by David Low for the *Evening Standard*, 18 June 1940. The British soldier shakes his fist at the Luftwaffe bombers.

**QUESTIONS**

1. What does the caption 'Very well, alone' refer to?
2. Where is the soldier meant to be standing? Who is he waving his fist at?
3. What is implied by the churning waves in the cartoon?
4. Given the war situation in June 1940, what is the message of this cartoon?



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In late June 1940, German invasion appeared imminent. While the RAF battled the Luftwaffe in the skies, around England defences were hastily constructed and every available individual was pressed into service. Epitomising this desperate situation, on 14 May 1940 the Local Defence Volunteers (**Home Guard**) was formed from men too old for or physically incapable of frontline service. The call for volunteers for the Home Guard was met with huge enthusiasm, with 250 000 signing up in the first week and 1.5 million registered by the end of July. The fact that thousands of older men and women joined home guards inspired others to war service.

Daily Mirror/Mirrorpix via Getty Images

**SOURCE 4.4** Home Guard parade in Liverpool, 1940. The Home Guard was a mixture of World War I veterans and those too young or unfit for service. Initially without uniforms and short of weapons, they epitomised Churchill's call of 'never surrender'.

**Home Guard**
British Army home defence soldiers

## The bombing campaign against Britain

As the Luftwaffe began to lose the struggle against the RAF in 1940, Hitler decided to direct raids on civilian targets. The attacks on London and other areas, called **the Blitz**, began in September 1940 and ran until May 1941. This was the intensive bombing of British cities, hitting both civilian and industrial targets. More than 1 million London houses were destroyed or damaged and more than 40 000 civilians were killed altogether, almost half of them from the capital. The bombing was meant to dent the spirit of the British people, which it largely failed to do. The attacks were a terrible ordeal for the civilian population, but they were also used by the British for propaganda value. The '**Blitz spirit**' came to epitomise the resilience of the British civilians against the Nazi terror raids.

**the Blitz**
The German bombing campaign against Britain

**Blitz spirit**
The spirit of resistance in the United Kingdom against the German bombing campaign


Getty Images/William Vandivert/The LIFE Picture Collection

**SOURCE 4.5** A number 88 bus lies in a crater in Balham High Road, October 1940.

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The British home front rallied behind the war effort as the threat of German invasion became more real. Focusing their attention on the air battles above them, in May 1940 the British people initiated scrap metal drives to help 'build a Spitfire'. Children were given the job of collecting shrapnel and metal for recycling. 'Spitfire funds' were created that enabled the public to fundraise to purchase a Spitfire fighter aircraft. The aircraft were priced at an entirely theoretical £5000. During the Battle of Britain, 1400 funds were set up across the country with about £1 million a month being raised. By the end of the war, the funds had raised enough for about 2600 Spitfires to be built.

## The Blitz spirit

Certainly there was extreme pressure put on the British home front and the propaganda slogan to 'keep calm and carry on' has epitomised the view that the British population was united and steadfast in its resolve to fight the Germans until victory was won. However, since World War II this Blitz spirit – to carry on with life as usual despite all – has been challenged. It is now known that many people made the most of the conflict and the confusion. Crime rates rose markedly during the blackouts and with rationing starting to pinch, the black market thrived across Britain. Some Londoners took advantage of the blackout situation. In November 1940, a London magistrate commented that 'the things that are going on now in these public air-raid shelters are very dreadful. For a young girl to go into a public shelter now without her father and mother is simply asking for trouble'.[2] People did not always act with resilience to bombing raids. After a particularly heavy air raid against Coventry on 14 November 1940, the BBC reported that there was widespread panic, despair and shock among the survivors.

Stories of people remaining trapped beneath collapsed buildings created a sense of hysteria. The government reacted to these disturbing reports by instituting government-appointed liaison officers to oversee future reports after air raids. British industry suffered more labour strikes in 1942 than there had been in 1917. Unions had to be placated with more responsibilities and power for a whole range of new things in order to persuade them to more fully support the war effort. Historians Clive Ponting and Angus Calder have questioned the Blitz spirit. They argue that 60 000 conscientious objectors point to the fact that the war was not universally popular. They also claim that during the Blitz, a quarter of London's population fled and that when Churchill and the royal family toured bomb-damaged areas of London they were occasionally booed and heckled by the population. They also suggested that Britain did not become a 'classless' society and distinctions of privilege remained as they were.


Trinity Mirror/Mirrorpix/Alamy Stock Photo

**SOURCE 4.6** Londoners using an Underground station as a bomb shelter. A communal spirit developed as everybody endured the same fears, dangers and conditions.

After 1941, the Germans continued to attack England, but their raids never reached anywhere near the size of the British strategic bombing campaign against Germany. German raids against England were further reduced after June 1941, with many bomber units being sent to Russia. The remaining raids against Britain were more about revenge and propaganda and had little strategic value. From April 1942, the Germans launched the Baedeker Blitz in revenge for RAF raids on Germany. It was directed at non-military targets, such as historical centres and buildings, and was an abject failure. Again in response to the RAF's raids against German cities, in early 1944 the Germans launched Operation Steinbock



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against southern England. Designed to boost German home-front morale, this campaign achieved little material damage and cost the Germans about half their bomber fleet. It was the last German bombing offensive during the war.

## Evacuations

Evacuations of children and others from major cities had been under way for two days by the time war was declared on 3 September 1939. During the Phoney War phase of the war, the majority returned home, only to leave again when the Blitz began. During the war, over 3 million people, mainly women and children, were moved beyond the reach of the Luftwaffe bombers.

Evacuations were mainly well organised, with families in the countryside being paid to look after the children sent from the cities. Experiences of the children varied. Some enjoyed the change of lifestyle, living in the countryside or a seaside village. Many enjoyed the suspension of school or a reduction in school hours. Others missed their parents – many already separated from fathers or brothers serving – while some suffered ill-treatment and neglect in abusive homes. There seems to have been a great variance in experience between working-class and middle-class children. Many middle-class children, used to holidays or boarding school, fared better than working-class children who had never been outside of their neighbourhood or away from parental care. After the initial Blitz of 1940, many evacuees returned home only to be evacuated again in 1944 with the commencement of the V-1 and V-2 campaigns by the Germans. By then, many children were used to the experience and the evacuations ran even more efficiently than the first time.

## The arrival of US troops in England

The arrival of US troops in January 1942 had a huge cultural and social impact on Britain. They brought with them candy, Coca-Cola, cigarettes and nylon stockings, which made them popular with both women and children. By the end of the war, a total of 1.5 million US servicemen had passed through Britain. British soldiers were underpaid and poorly kitted out: they only had one uniform, battledress and hobnail boots. By contrast, American soldiers were well paid (five times more than the British Tommy), wore shirts with ties, enjoyed a quantity and quality of food unknown to their hosts and had unfettered access to goods and equipment. British troops regarded the Americans (called 'GIs' because their equipment had 'Government Issue' stamped on it) as being 'overpaid, oversexed and over here'; during the war, over 60 000 British women married American servicemen.[3] In mid-1942, the British authorities warned of 'trouble brewing' due to 'the lavish way in which the Americans fling their money about' and the effect this was having on morale.[4]

WS
American impact on the British home front

## Women in war

More so than World War I, women played a significant part in the British war effort. During World War I, only about 100 000 British women served in the uniformed services, with around 50 per cent of these in nursing and none involved in combat. In World War II, nearly half a million women joined the army, navy and air force, with over 7 million engaged in various types of war work. Before 1939, nearly 5 million women in the United Kingdom had paid employment. This meant that, as opposed to World War I, many women had valuable work skills before the war began. British women were conscripted from 1941. Initially, only childless widows and single women 20–30 years old were conscripted; later, the age range was expanded to include women aged 19 to 43.

Women who volunteered before the war mostly served in civil defence or the Women's Land Army. The main civil defence services were Air Raid Precautions, the fire service and Women's Voluntary Services (WVS). Initially, these recruits carried out clerical work, organising evacuations, shelters,

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clothing exchanges and mobile canteens, but their roles expanded to meet demand. Once the war started, female fire pump crews became commonplace. The WVS was the largest single women's organisation and had over 1 million members.

**Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS)**
Prewar organisation created to involve women in the war effort

The **Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS)** was formed in 1938. Its initial plan was to recruit 25 000 female volunteers for driving, clerical and general duties. By the end of the war, 190 000 women had served in this organisation. In 1939, members of this organisation were sent to France with the BEF. The vast majority of women in the ATS served in anti-aircraft command (but were officially not allowed to fire the guns) and on searchlights. The most common role of women in active service was that of a searchlight operator. All three armed services employed women on a vast scale. The Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) was reformed, while the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) was created in July 1939. Among other duties, they carried out aircraft observation and maintained barrage balloons.

By 1943, 180 000 women were members of the WAAF. Some women worked in more exciting areas; 15 per cent of the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) – pilots responsible for delivering new aircraft to squadrons – were females. Women were able to work with the Special Operations Executive (SOE), dropping into enemy territory and working as saboteurs, couriers and radio operators. About 25 per cent of this force was made up of women. The proportion of women in the British armed services peaked in December 1943 with 449 100, constituting 9 per cent of the total force.

WS
London life in wartime

WS
Propaganda posters from the British home front

Women played a significant role in war industries. By December 1943, one in three factory workers was female, building planes, tanks and guns and making munitions. Set up in June 1939, the Women's Land Army had over 80 000 'Land Girls' in 1943 working in the countryside. Most of these economic changes for women were not long-lasting. After the war, the number of women working in Britain did not alter from prewar levels, but in some sectors there were more women workers. In 1939, British women made up 10 per cent of the British engineering workforce; by 1950, they were 34 per cent.

Getty Images/Fg. Off. A Goodchild/IWM

**SOURCE 4.7** Members of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force in the RAF Fighter Command control room, 1940. These women played a vital role during the Battle of Britain.

Getty Images/Fox Photos

**SOURCE 4.8** Two female steelworkers take a break, November 1942.



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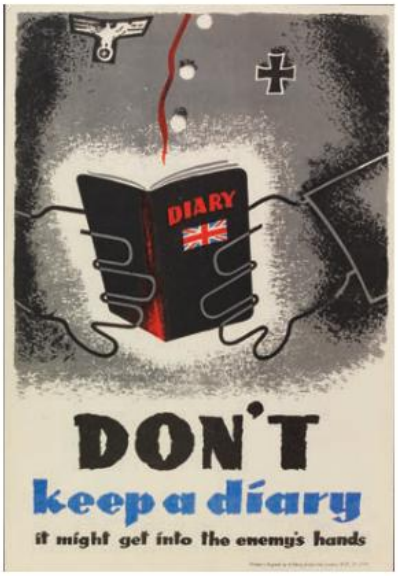
## British wartime propaganda posters


G&D Images/Alamy Stock Photo

**SOURCE 4.9** British propaganda poster advertising a local Spitfire fund, 1940.




© Victoria and Albert Museum, London

**SOURCE 4.10** 'Don't keep a diary – it might get into the enemy's hands' – British propaganda poster, 1942.


Australian War Memorial [ARTV02611]

**SOURCE 4.11** British propaganda poster produced by the Ministry of Food.

### QUESTIONS

1. Looking at Source 4.9, why would a 'Spitfire fighter fund' have such immediate importance to the British home front in 1940?
2. What fears on the British home front are being suggested in Source 4.10?
3. Who are the two leaders shown in Source 4.11?
4. What is the meaning of 'pot luck' and 'humble pie' in Source 4.11?
5. What impression of the British home front can you construct using these three images?

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## The British home front after 1943

Before the war ended, British civilians were subjected to one last terrifying aspect of warfare: attack by unmanned missiles. The V-1 was a pilotless flying bomb containing an 850-kilogram warhead. It was powered by a simple ramjet and was not guided, making it cheap to build. The first V-1 was launched at London on 13 June 1944. The population knew a V-1 was about to detonate as the noisy ramjet would stop. At their peak, the Germans launched more than 100 V-1s a day towards south-east England, with nearly 10 000 being launched before the end of the war. Allied pilots found that they could catch them in flight and shoot them down before they reached their targets. Far more formidable was the V-2, the world's first ballistic missile. Beginning in September 1944, over 3000 V-2s were launched by the Germans against Allied targets, first London and later Antwerp and Liège. The V-2 was a truly terrifying weapon. Although also not guided, it travelled at rocket speed, meaning there was no warning possible before it hit. The British home front coped well with these new threats and the well-oiled machine of the evacuation program was put in place. Nevertheless, civilian deaths amounted to 6184 due to V-1 attacks and 2754 due to V-2 attacks.

By 1945, Britain was effectively a total war economy. It had 5 million citizens under arms from a total working-age population of 21.5 million; almost a third of men from 14 to 64 were in uniform. Stringent rationing was in place and continued until 1954. However, the British economy was financially insolvent. Due to the war, it was in huge debt, with the country having lost a quarter of its wealth. Overall, World War II had cost the country twice as much as World War I.

Yet, for all this monetary cost, and despite the Blitz and ongoing bombing, the British people had only suffered half the total casualties of World War I. The damage the home front had suffered was worse (in 1945 it was estimated that 4 million dwellings had been damaged and over 65 000 civilians were killed), but there was a sense of optimism and joy at war's end, rather than mourning the losses. In addition, Britain prepared for a different postwar era. In the latter part of the war, several white papers were released that showed the plans to create a 'welfare state', with state-subsidised health and education systems in place shortly after the end of the war. This sense of a new future was evident when, despite having been a popular wartime leader, Churchill was comprehensively defeated by Labour leader Clement Attlee in the July 1945 election.

### British Government report from 1944

> The British citizen had five years of blackouts and four years of intermittent Blitz. The privacy of his home has been periodically invaded by soldiers or evacuees or war workers requiring billets. In five years of drastic labor mobilisation, nearly every man and woman under fifty without young children has been subject to direction to work, often far from home. The hours of work average fifty-three for men and fifty for overall; when work is done, every citizen who is not excused for reasons of family circumstances … has had to do forty-eight hours a month in the Home Guard or Civil Defence. Supplies of all kind had been progressively limited by shipping and manpower shortage; the queue is part of normal life. Taxation is probably the severest in the world, and is coupled with continuous pressure to save. The scarce supplies, both of goods and services, must be shared with hundreds of thousands of United States, Dominion, and Allied troops; in the preparation of Britain first as the base and then as the bridgehead, the civilian has inevitably suffered hardships spread over almost every aspect of life.

Quoted in Williamson Murray and Allan Millett, *A War to be Won: Fighting the Second World War*, Belknap Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2001, pp. 543–4

**QUESTIONS**

1. What kinds of hardships in relation to war work had the British home front had to endure?
2. What is the overall impression the source makes about life on the British home front during the war?



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## Conclusion

Britain had prepared its home front to a great extent before the war started. Born partially out of fear of aerial bombing, the British had extensively planned and prepared for air raids. Although there were prewar concerns over the people's appetite for war, the British showed tremendous will and resilience. Despite missteps, such as the early efforts of the Ministry of Information, or early setbacks in the war, the resolve of the British people never wavered. They maintained great confidence in their leadership and, for the most part, they were well led. Winston Churchill's popularity never dropped below 78 per cent during the entire war, an indication of the satisfaction the British people had more generally with the war effort.

1. What preparations had the British made to ready their home front for war?
2. Explain the rationing system in Britain and how effectively it worked with the public.
3. What was the 'thrift' campaign and how effective was it?
4. What sort of government controls were implemented with regard to conscription?
5. How effectively did the British manage the demands for war workers?
6. What was the job of the Ministry of Information and how effective was it at the beginning of the war?
7. How extensive was the opposition to conscription in Britain?
8. How did the British Government deal with perceived internal threats on the home front?
9. Evaluate the impact of Winston Churchill's appointment as Prime Minister in May 1940.
10. What organisation was created in May 1940? How extensive did it become and what did it symbolise?
11. What was the British experience with the German bombing campaign in 1940–41? Explain what is meant by the 'Blitz spirit'.
12. What were 'Spitfire funds' and what do these demonstrate about the British home front?
13. What was the nature of the German bombing campaign after 1942? How successful was this?
14. Outline the nature and extent of the British evacuation program.
15. What were the impacts of the arrival of US troops in Britain?
16. What were the experiences of British women in war work and in the armed services?
17. To what extent did the lives of British women change during the war?
18. What links were made between British Government policy and the vision for postwar Britain?

# The German home front

In 1939, the German Government did not have a lot of confidence in its own home front. After Germany's collapse in 1918, which was brought on by the breakdown in the food supply, the Nazis were determined to maintain living standards to prevent a rise in opposition to the war. To counter this, since 1933 the Nazis had been working on fostering a higher sense of patriotism, community spirit and endurance among the population. The Winter Relief campaign (an annual charity drive that ran for five months of the year) and weekly family ***Eintopf*** 'one pot' meals to save on food, had tried to instil a greater sense of frugality and community than existed in the Great War. In a sense, they succeeded; the German people did not collapse as they did in 1918, and in the end they suffered far worse and endured more than they had in the Great War.

***Eintopf***
Weekly 'one pot' meals encouraged by the Nazi authorities

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## Rationing and government controls

Rationing was introduced on 27 August 1939, the day after Germany had mobilised its armed forces. There was immediate community concern, as it was generally felt that food was already scarce. The ration system used involved issuing four weeks of ration cards. This created flexibility if supplies dried up, but also turned food into an obsession, as fluctuation and uncertainty prevailed. It was also a complex system. Unlike the British, who gave the same allocation to all, the Germans were divided into those considered 'normal consumers' (about 2570 calories per day), 'heavy workers' and 'very heavy workers', the last category getting the most rations (4652 calories per day). This created problems as people became aware of its unfairness. But on the whole, rations in Germany were quite generous. On 4 September 1939, the War Economy Decree introduced compulsory Sunday work and wage freezes, cut overtime rates and increased taxes. These measures were met with some resistance among German workers.

Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo/Alamy Stock Photo

**SOURCE 4.12** The ideal Nazi family at war: father in party uniform, mother wearing motherhood cross, adult sons in various armed services, teenage sons in the Hitler Youth, eldest daughter in the League of German Maidens. Only the three youngest children are not in uniform.

By the winter of 1941–42, shortages and privations started to have consequences, with fuel shortages, school closures and lack of heating becoming commonplace. Queues at shops that stocked food began to get longer and longer. On 6 April 1942, for the first time, rations were cut across all categories of citizens: 250 grams were taken off the weekly bread ration and 100 grams from the meat rations for all except manual labourers. This move was dreaded by the Nazi leadership, who feared a similar reaction to 1918. By the second half of 1942, absenteeism and other workplace infractions began to rise dramatically. Eventually, the Nazi leadership bowed to pressure and in October 1942, after six months, the full ration was restored. For the remainder of the war, rations did not significantly drop. In fact, the bread ration of October 1944 was higher than it was in July 1940. Rations only fell in Germany during the final few months of the war. This was achieved by the consistent plundering of the food supply of the occupied territories.

## Controlling the population

A population that was impacted greatly by the war and the Nazi authorities were the German Jews. When the war began, there were approximately 214 000 Jews left in Germany who were subjected to increasing restrictions. In September 1941, German Jews over the age of six were required to wear the yellow Jewish Star, in keeping with Jews in the occupied territories. The following month, the deportation of Germany's Jews began. These Jews were transported east and murdered upon their arrival at the death camps. In May 1943, Nazi German authorities declared the Reich to be *judenrein* ('free of Jews'). By this time, mass deportations had left fewer than 20 000 Jews in Germany.

While the regime did not want to push the population too hard, it was also quite prepared to use harsh measures to stamp out any signs of dissent. New laws were implemented to control information and to ensure that any sign of defeatism or dissent was dealt with swiftly and brutally. From 1939, it was a crime to listen to foreign radio broadcasts and spread news from them. The civil secret police, the Gestapo, these days recognised as being under-resourced and under-staffed, was only one cog in the Nazi system to keep the civilian population in check. Civil courts, police, SS criminal police, the **People's Court** – created specifically to deal with treason – plus the various organs of the Nazi

**People's Court**
Court created in Germany to deal purely with cases of treason



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Party, civil administration, health officials and block wardens, all did their part in ensuring that any sign of dissent was reported and punished.

The secret service of the SS, the ***Sicherheitsdienst*** **(SD)**, kept a close eye on the public mood with an extensive eavesdropping campaign. This involved informers who reported on overheard conversations on trams, in bars or in parks to sense the mood of the public. Denunciations became an important source of information for the security services. There were many 'little Hitlers' who felt compelled to report their neighbours and work colleagues. Civil courts were given instructions to deal with signs of defeatism and dissent. *Wehrkraftzersetzung* ('undermining the war effort') became a crime punishable by death. Civil prison numbers slowly increased. In 1939, there were some 100 000 Germans in civil prisons; by 1944, this was closer to 200 000. Over the course of the war, the number of death sentences handed out by German civil courts grew significantly.

***Sicherheitsdienst* (SD)**
Secret service of the SS

As the war began to turn against the Germans, Hitler made clear that nothing but total dedication to the war effort would be tolerated. After his attempt to punish a senior army officer was thwarted by German civil courts, in April 1942 he summoned the Reichstag for the final time to demand that his power should be absolute. This the Reichstag duly voted for. From this point on, the rule of law ended for all Germans; anyone could be subjected to arbitrary punishment. Besides the civil courts and prisons, the Nazis also had the concentration camp for extrajudicial punishments. The concentration camp population went from just over 20 000 inmates in 1939 to more than 750 000 by 1945.

**TABLE 4.1** Death sentences handed down in German civil courts during World War II*

| YEAR | DEATH SENTENCES |
|---|---|
| 1939 | 173 |
| 1940 | 306 |
| 1941 | 1292 |
| 1942 | 4457 |
| 1943 | 5336 |
| 1944 | 4264 |
| 1945 | 297 |

*The figures for 1942, 1944 and 1945 are estimates based on the number of executions carried out by one of the three established executioners at the time.

Adapted from Nikolaus Wachsmann, *Hitler's Prisons: Legal Terror in Nazi Germany*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn., 2004, p. 403

**A few examples of cases heard before the People's Court**

- June 1943: Three clergymen from Lübeck were sentenced to death for listening to the BBC and writing pamphlets against the Nazi regime.
- September 1943: A merchant from Hamburg was tried and sentenced to death for defeatist talk.
- September 1943: A concert pianist was tried and sentenced to death for saying that Hitler 'should be removed from power'.[5]
- October 1943: A 73-year-old pensioner from Berlin was tried and sentenced to death for chalking graffiti that said 'Hitler the mass murderer has to be murdered to end the war'.[6]

**QUESTIONS**

1 What do these sentences tell us about how the Nazis felt about signs of dissent on the German home front?

2 What is the link between the time frame of these cases and the course of the war?

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## German morale

SD report on the mood and attitude of the German people

German morale was severely tested during the war. The genuine euphoria seen after the victory over France in June 1940 was an expression of relief as much as admiration for Hitler. As the German offensive rolled through Russia towards the end of 1941, newspapers across Germany had hopefully reported that the end of the war was only weeks away. When this did not happen, morale on the home front plummeted. This became a serious problem after the German defeat at Stalingrad in January 1943. The impacts of the military reversals on morale were compounded by the Allied bombing, to which the German authorities appeared to have no effective answer. The efforts of Goebbels's Propaganda Ministry to focus blame on the Jews generally failed, but it did manage to sustain a level of faith in Hitler, despite the military setbacks. While Hitler mostly escaped criticism, Germans began to blame local party officials for the failures in food supply, the bombing and any other problem encountered. Higher-up Nazis were given the derogatory nickname 'Golden Pheasants', on account of their gold-braided uniforms and rumoured privileged lifestyles. If large sections of the Nazi Party became alienated from the population, as the intensity of the Allied bombing increased, the National Socialist Welfare Organisation (NSV) grew in importance, as it provided for those who had lost everything.

## German youth in the Third Reich

While many among Germany's youth were completely enthralled by Nazism and were prepared to die for the Führer, some were ambivalent or actively resisted. From the late 1930s, some German youth joined 'swing groups', so named because of their love for American jazz music. In 1939–40, swing youth groups, especially strong in cities such as Hamburg and Berlin – where Nazism was never as popular as elsewhere – organised dances attended by upwards of 5000 to 6000 youths.[7] In August 1941, the Gestapo were so worried about these groups that they carried out mass arrests, sending hundreds to concentration camps. Later in the war, more militant youth groups called Edelweiss Pirates were formed. Mainly located in Germany's bombed-out cities, they openly defied the Nazi authorities, spreading anti-Nazi propaganda and sheltering escaped Allied POWs, German deserters and forced labourers. Eventually, the authorities caught up with them. In November 1944, a public hanging of their leaders, including a 16-year-old boy, was carried out in Cologne. Another example of youth resistance in the Third Reich was the White Rose, which centred around brother and sister Hans and Sophie Scholl. The White Rose began to produce anti-Nazi leaflets around Munich University, outlining the crimes of the regime and calling for Hitler's overthrow. Discovered in February 1943, Hans and Sophie Scholl and a number of their associates were tried and beheaded.

World History Archive/Alamy Stock Photo

**SOURCE 4.13** Swing youth in Nazi Germany rejected the conformity of Nazi culture and expressed themselves through their music and fashion.



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## Labour and wartime work

War and its impact on life in Germany

Besides trying to minimise the stress placed on the German home front, the Nazis also maintained their ideological stamp on the German war effort. The Nazis did not like the idea of women working at all, preferring that they stayed at home raising the children and being dutiful wives. In the early war years, German women were actually removed from the workforce; by May 1941, there were 440 000 fewer women working than there had been in September 1939.[8] This began to change when it was realised that the war would not be short. In early 1942, half of the nation's draft consisted of women. By the end of the war, German women made up 51 per cent of the workforce overall and 65 per cent of rural workers. Towards the end of the war, the government raised the age that women could be conscripted to 50, and from August 1944 the hours worked for men rose to 60 per week, while for women it was 48 hours per week.

From 1940, women were also drawn into military service, initially in signals and administration work. As the war progressed, women began to get involved in more dangerous roles, such as operating anti-aircraft guns. Indicating the resistance of the authorities, German women were only given the status of soldiers in August 1944. While the Nazis were initially reluctant to use women in the war effort, they did expect children to get involved. The **Hitler Youth (HJ) and the League of German Maidens (BDM)** were both given increased tasks to help the war effort. For the boys, this involved replacing men who had been sent to the front, as firemen and postmen, distributing ration cards, as guides during blackouts, and collecting metals, kitchen waste and clothes. Young girls were expected to help out in kindergartens and old people's homes, distributing coal and food for homeless people, widows and refugees, and singing in choirs to provide entertainment to ill and injured people. As the war progressed, the role of youths increased. On 22 January 1943, the Nazis created the role of *Luftwaffenhelfer* ('air force assistant', or flak helper) to help operate anti-aircraft guns. The following month, all boys aged 15 and 16 were sworn in as flak helpers, operating search lights and assisting in the firing of flak guns. By August 1944, over 1 million boys and girls were involved in defending the Third Reich. In October 1944, the Nazi Party created the *Volkssturm*, the German version of the Home Guard. While many older men were conscripted into these formations, so were many members of the Hitler Youth destined to be sacrificed for the Nazi last stand.

**Hitler Youth (HJ) and the League of German Maidens (BDM)**
Youth organisations created for boys and girls in Nazi Germany

Over the course of the war, German workers experienced a 25 per cent drop in their real wages. Worse was for white collar workers, who suffered a 50 per cent drop in their real income. In the countryside, German farmers were placed under pressure to supply the cities with foodstuffs. The workforce inside Germany also changed significantly with the importation of slave labourers in unprecedented numbers. Beginning in 1939 with Polish POWs, people from all over the occupied territories were forcibly brought to Germany to work on farms, clear up after air raids and work in war-related industries. Some volunteered, but most were forced to work as slave labourers. Towards the end of the war, nearly 8 million foreigners were working in Germany. This constituted 6.5 million foreign workers (4.5 million alone were from the east) and 2 million POWs. These workers were managed with severe penalties; any found guilty of sabotage, absenteeism or of having sexual relations with Germans faced execution.

Bundesarchiv bild-183-J08403

**SOURCE 4.14** Medals being presented to three wounded members of the Hitler Youth for their help during an air raid, November 1943.

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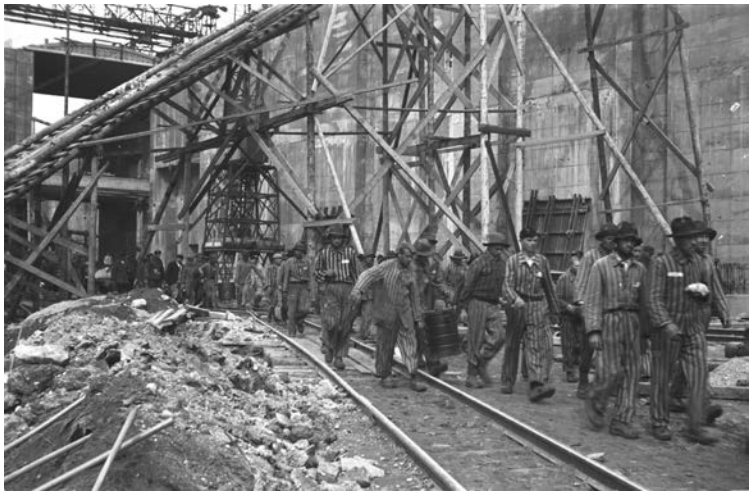

Bundesarchiv bild-185-23-21

**SOURCE 4.15** Slave labourers working in Bremen on the German U-boat bunker facility, 1944.

While they contributed a considerable amount to the war effort – making up one-quarter of the entire German workforce by 1945 – foreign workers were unable to make up the shortfall in skilled labourers. They also contributed to the anxiety on the home front, as Germans were aware of their significant numbers and the shortage of police. Fears developed as to what these workers would do in the event of the collapse of the Third Reich.

## The Allied bombing of Germany

The first bombing raid against Germany occurred on the second day of the war. These early raids were carried out by medium bombers and caused little damage. However, by 1942 the RAF was equipped with heavy bombers and was able to inflict significant damage on German cities. On 30 May 1942, the first 1000-bomber raid was launched against Cologne. From January 1943, the USAAF also targeted Germany. The RAF bombed at night, while the USAAF bombed during the day. The bombing dramatically affected the lives of German civilians, especially in the industrial and urban areas of Germany, such as Berlin, Hamburg, Dortmund, Essen, Duisburg, Düsseldorf and Cologne. Secondary targets included Braunschweig, Lübeck, Rostock, Bremen, Kiel, Hannover, Frankfurt, Mannheim, Stuttgart and Schweinfurt. By the end of the war, Munich had been raided 74 times; both Cologne and Hamburg had been raided 70 times. Essen was raided 270 times and had 36 000 tons of bombs dropped on it, while Berlin suffered 363 raids and 65 000 tons of bombs. By 1945, 1.7 million people – 40 per cent of Berlin's population – had fled.

***Kinderland-verschickung* (KLV)**
German evacuation organisation

Widespread evacuations in Germany only began in 1941. ***Kinderlandverschickung* (KLV)**, or 'relocation of children to the countryside', had existed as a government program since the 19th century for sick and underprivileged children, so in an administrative sense, the Germans had experience with evacuations. The German system was different from the British system as, rather than being billeted with a family in the countryside, some children were relocated to one of the over 2000 KLV camps run by the authorities. Initially, mothers and children up to three years old (later raised to six years) were evacuated; this was again expanded to children up to 10 years old. Evacuation of children aged 10–14 was the responsibility of the Hitler Youth.

Some children were relocated to areas outside of Germany, such as Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Denmark. By the start of 1941, 382 616 children and young people, including 180 000 from Berlin and Hamburg, had been sent to safer areas. Initially, only children of good 'German blood' were accepted. *Mischlinge* (half-Jewish children) or those coming from families considered not good Nazis were rejected. Precise figures do not exist, but it seems that between 2.8 million and 3 million children (including 1 million sent to camps) were evacuated during the war. In mid-1941, parents were advised that children would be away for six to nine months. However, many decided to return home, just as the intensity of the Allied bombing offensive increased.

In July 1943, the Allies launched Operation Gomorrah, targeting Hamburg. Starting on 25 July, the RAF raided night after night, with the USAAF carrying out bombings during the day. The RAF bombers created what became known as a 'firestorm'. During the raid on 27 July, 735 RAF bombers dropped high explosives to blow out doors and windows. This was followed by phosphorus incendiaries that caused all the fires to merge into one huge blaze about a square mile in size. The unusually hot and dry weather,



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coupled with the fact that the majority of the city's firefighters were already battling previous fires, saw temperatures reach over 1000 degrees, creating winds of almost 200 kilometres per hour. The fire began to draw in air at hurricane speeds, ripping up trees and igniting anything flammable. More bombs extended the fire another two miles in size, sucking air from underground cellars. People either died from carbon monoxide poisoning or were burnt to death in the terrible heat. These raids killed 45 000 people. The following month, Hamburg was raided again; this time, 60 per cent of its buildings were destroyed and another 60 000 to 100 000 people were killed. Further firestorm attacks were carried out against Kassel (November 1943), Darmstadt (September 1944) and Dresden (February 1945).

akg-images/Alamy Stock Photo

**SOURCE 4.16** A German soldier on leave scrawls a message on the wall of his home, trying to learn the location of his wife and family, Hamburg, 1943.



In February 1945, Dresden – which had largely been untouched – was targeted. The combined bombing of the USAAF during the day and the RAF at night led to the destruction of 70 per cent of the city's buildings and over 30 000 civilians killed. By this stage of the war, the RAF was running out of targets and bombed what were considered insignificant targets. This spread the terror of bombing to places that had largely managed to avoid bombings. The effects were usually more devastating, as these places were inexperienced in response to the bombing. While these air raids targeted urban centres, there was a knock-on effect in the countryside as evacuees fled to rural centres across Germany. People in the villages had to share their homes and resources. For many, it became evident that the Nazis were losing the war, and as a result, support for the Nazis weakened in the countryside. By the end of the war, around 600 000 German civilians were killed by Allied bombing raids and millions more had lost their homes and been dislocated. No other nation suffered as badly from bombing campaigns as Germany.

**TABLE 4.2** Results of the bombing campaign on German cities – percentages of areas destroyed of the 10 most populated cities in the Third Reich

| CITY | POPULATION IN 1939 | PERCENTAGE DESTROYED |
|---|---|---|
| Berlin | 4.3 mil | 33 |
| Hamburg | 1.7 mil | 75 |
| Munich | 826 000 | 42 |
| Cologne | 768 000 | 61 |
| Leipzig | 702 000 | 20 |
| Essen | 664 000 | 50 |
| Dresden | 625 000 | 59 |
| Breslau | 615 000 | n/a |
| Frankfurt | 553 000 | 52 |
| Düsseldorf | 540 000 | 64 |

Adapted from http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/worldwar2/theatres-of-war/western-europe/investigation/hamburg/sources/docs/6/ and Jeffry M Diefendorf, *In the Wake of War: The Reconstruction of German Cities after World War II*, OUP, New York, 1993, p. 127

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## Germans and total war

Goebbels's speech

By 1943, the German home front was yet to create a total war footing. Even after the war began, a high level of consumer goods production continued, with many industrial facilities and raw materials not being directed towards war production until 1942. The appointment of Albert Speer as Minister for Armaments and War Production in February 1942 had begun a long process to get more armaments out of German industry through central planning and coordination. He closed down smaller firms and redistributed skilled labour, and he forced companies with better practices to share their information. The result was trebled productivity by 1944.

**German wartime propaganda posters**


Peter Horree/Alamy Stock Photo

**SOURCE 4.17** German propaganda poster calling for total war, 1943. The caption translates as: 'All strength straining! Total war – quickest war!'


Hi-Story/Alamy Stock Photo

**SOURCE 4.18** German propaganda poster, which translates as: 'Behind the enemy powers: the Jew', 1942. As the war dragged on, the Nazi leadership vainly tried to sustain the blame for the war on the Jews.

### QUESTIONS

1. According to Source 4.17, who needs to be working together for total war?
2. Why would the message in Source 4.17 of the 'quickest war' have been appealing to the German home front?
3. Looking at Source 4.17, why might the population in Germany have been contemptuous about calls for 'total war' in 1943?
4. Who does Source 4.18 blame the war on?
5. What was the purpose of Source 4.18?



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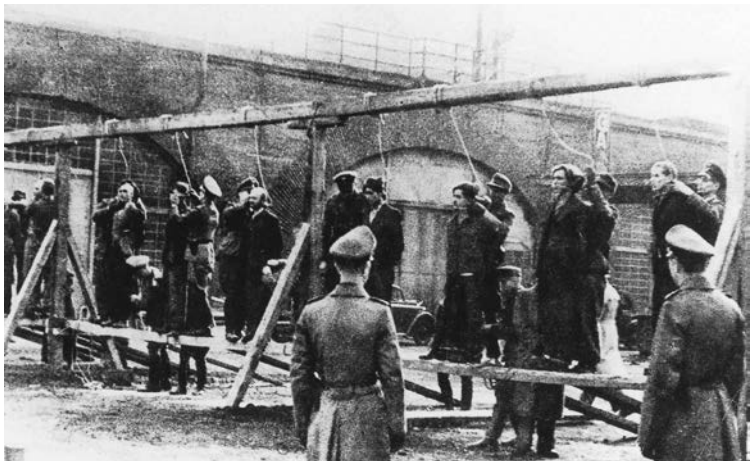
Towards the end of 1944, aspects of life in Germany slowly began to shut down. Unlike British football, which stopped in 1939, the final German Football Championship was played in June 1944, and the last league game was not played until 23 April 1945. In August 1944, all German theatres and places of entertainment were closed. Postal services were cut back, orchestras reduced, film production scaled back, and university courses not linked to war work were curtailed. Publishing houses closed and a shortage of newspaper and ink forced the Nazi government to limit newspapers. In 1933, 4700 newspapers were published across Germany; in 1944, no more than 1100 remained, many of which were little more than four pages long.

## The arrival of the Allies

As defeat became a distinct possibility, the German home front was filled with anxiety. This was partially due to the knowledge of what had been happening in Germany's name in occupied Europe. It is now accepted that returned soldiers and rumours led many to gain an understanding of the murder of the Jews and other aspects of Nazi race policy that were being perpetrated in Russia. In December 1943, an SD report from near Nuremberg identified the fear that existed on the German home front:

> One of the major factors in the current unrest among the people connected to the Church and among the villagers is based on reports from Russia on the execution and extermination of Jews. These reports often cause fear and anxiety in this sector. Many villagers are doubtful of our victory. In their opinion, if the Jews return to Germany, they will wreak a horrible revenge on us.
>
> Gilad Margalit, *Guilt, Suffering, and Memory: Germany Remembers Its Dead of World War II*, University of Indiana Press, Bloomington, 2010, p. 14

Anxiety also grew from not knowing what had happened to brothers, sons and fathers. As the Germans and Russians did not respect the Geneva Convention on the Eastern Front, there was no information given on whether missing soldiers were POWs, or were alive or dead. There was also a huge level of fear about this 'enemy within' – the enormous slave labour population – especially as it was well known that these workers had been mostly ill-treated by the Nazi authorities.



Bridgeman Images

**SOURCE 4.19** Exemplifying the Nazis' brutal treatment for any small infraction, a public hanging of forced labourers in Cologne, October 1944.

The last years of the war saw a sharp increase in terror against the German population. In the east, the arrival of the Red Army struck fear in the population and many decided to flee. Before the Red Army entered East Prussia, there were already 875 000 evacuees from other parts of Germany. These, along with the East Prussians themselves, began the long journey west as the Red Army entered German territory. Those who stayed behind were met by a vengeful Red Army. In October 1944, the Soviets briefly occupied the village of Nemmersdorf in East Prussia, where they committed brutal atrocities against the civilian population. The Nazis widely publicised these events as a means of scaring their population. In 1945, the roads of East Prussia, Poland and Eastern Germany were clogged with civilians escaping the Red Army. It is estimated that in spring 1945, two-fifths of the entire German population was on the move, either eastwards or westwards.

Some decided to flee by ship from ports in the Baltic Sea. On 30 January 1945, the German liner *Wilhelm Gustloff*, loaded with civilian evacuees, was torpedoed by a Russian submarine with the loss of nearly 10 000 lives. Nevertheless, nearly 1 million German civilians and soldiers made it back to Germany via the sea. In the west, most of the population stayed put, as they hoped for better treatment

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Getty Images/Fred Ramage/Keystone

**SOURCE 4.20** German refugees from East Prussia rest in a railway yard, January 1945.

from the British and American troops, which they usually got. However, in the west, the desire of some Nazi diehards to fight on to the end made surrender difficult, as the premature hanging of white flags led to summary executions by zealous SS or army units.

The German populations that suffered the most were those exposed to fighting as Wehrmacht units refused to surrender. Berlin suffered terribly in the final weeks of the war. The Russian attack on Berlin itself, beginning with the artillery bombardment on 20 April, provided an appalling final ordeal for the civilian population. Russian soldiers vented their anger on the female population of Berlin, with thousands being subjected to rape and violence.

## Information and entertainment

The Nazis retained a high level of censorship on the German home front throughout the war. As a result, rumours and scuttlebutt – the 'spoken newspaper' – became rampant on the German home front. In May 1941, after the flight of Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess to Scotland, stories circulated within Germany that a number of high-ranking Nazi officials had been executed and that the leader of the SS, Heinrich Himmler, and the chief of the German Labour Front, Dr Robert Ley, had both fled abroad.[9] The Nazis attempted to curb this behaviour by cracking down on 'malicious gossip' and the spreading of rumours. Rumours became far more significant as the tide of the war started to turn and authorities tried to hide bad news from the population. When the German 6th Army surrendered in February 1943, there was general shock in Germany, as the regime had held back on the truth about how dire the situation was. In the last part of the war, the German public was told lies about the effectiveness of the V-weapons and how they were turning the tide of the war. Film was a hugely important part of the wartime life of Germans and most cinema in the Third Reich was actually not political in nature. Movies such as the anti-Semitic *Jud Süss* (1940) and the pro-euthanasia *I Accuse* (1941) were political, but most films were either romances or comedies, as the Nazis were happy for Germans to use cinema as a form of escapism, to forget about the dangers they or their loved ones faced. The two greatest box-office hits during the war were *Request Concert* (1940) and *The Great Love* (1942), both being romantic films.

**QUESTIONS**

1 What was the 'spoken newspaper' and why was this feared by the authorities?

2 What purpose did cinema play in wartime Germany?

## Conclusion

The German population paid a tremendous price for the war. By the end of the war, 1.5 million German civilians had been killed, with 600 000 of these deaths due to the Allied bombing campaign. However, unlike 1918, the German home front, despite all, did not collapse but continued to fight on until total defeat. This can be attributed to a combination of reasons: firstly, the majority of Germans adhered to Hitler's aims to attack communism and aggressively expand Germany's borders to the east; secondly, the terror and policing system was effective at controlling the population; and thirdly, much of the population remembered the ignominy of the defeat in 1918 and was determined not to repeat it.



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## Richard Evans

Increasingly, the war came home to Germany, as Allied bombing fleets gained domination of the skies and brought devastation to Germany's cities. Until things began to go badly wrong in the war, the Nazis managed to pull the great mass of the German people along with them. German nationalism, belief in the greatness of Germany and resentment at the Peace Settlement of 1919 were present in every part of the population. They were behind the mass and undoubtedly genuine euphoria that greeted Germany's stunning military successes in 1939–40 and in a grimmer mood they sustained a large part of the German resistance to the Soviet invasion in 1944–5. Until the summer of 1944 cultural institutions and the mass media continued to offer a mixture of morale-boosting encouragement and soul-soothing escapism to the Germans at home, while food supplies and the basics of everyday life were sustained almost to the end. But the mass destruction of Germany's towns and cities that began in earnest in 1943 turned people against the Nazi regime even more than the realization after Stalingrad that the war was lost. The Nazi regime responded to disillusion at home and the decline of morale in the armed forces by intensifying the repression and terror that had always been a central part of its rule. The element of martyrdom and self-sacrifice in Nazi ideology was intensified too.

Richard Evans, *The Third Reich at War*, Allen Lane, London, 2008, p. 761

### QUESTIONS

1 What does Evans suggest sustained the German home front until late in the war?
2 What were the key points that caused the German home front to lose faith in victory?
3 How did the regime respond to waning morale and belief in victory?

1. How prepared was the German home front for the war?
2. How effective was the system of rationing that was implemented in Germany?
3. What happened to rations in Germany in April and October 1942?
4. Explain the nature of government control over the German people during the war.
5. What happened to the rule of law in Germany in April 1942?
6. What was the focus of propaganda in Germany during the war?
7. Explain the experiences of German youth during the war. What examples of resistance existed?
8. How did ideology affect the Nazi organisation of labour and work during the war?
9. As the war progressed, who were the Nazis forced to use in the war effort?
10. How did German workers' conditions suffer during the war?
11. Outline the impact of the Allied bombing on German civilians.
12. Identify the fears that German civilians had as defeat became certain.
13. What were the experiences of German civilians in eastern and western parts of Germany in 1945?
14. What was the result of the level of censorship on the German home front towards the end of the war?
15. In what ways did life on the German home front begin to collapse after 1944?

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# The Soviet home front

No nation paid a higher price for victory than the Soviet Union, and the suffering of its people on the home front has no parallel. While they were spared the destruction and displacement of an intense bombing campaign, the Soviet people endured the most extreme conditions of any home front as they bore the brunt of Nazi aggression for over three years. Those subjected to German occupation endured the most barbaric racist policies designed to wipe them out as a people. For those who remained inside Soviet-held territory, the commitment to the war effort demanded of them knew no bounds. The Soviets literally threw the entire country onto a war footing. The remarkable feats they achieved in manufacturing were only possible due to the ceaseless hard work and suffering of the Russian people. Millions of Russian citizens died of starvation and maltreatment, both at the hands of the Germans and their own government.

## The initial response of the Russian home front

When Operation Barbarossa was launched in 1941, it was widely believed in Germany and in the West that many people inside the Soviet Union were likely to give up and welcome the Germans. In the previous 25 years, the Russian peasant had been through enormous hardships. The 1917 revolution, the civil war, the implementation of collectivisation and the purges should have been enough to totally demoralise the Soviet people as predicted by Hitler. The various nationalities inside the Soviet Union, the people of Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus, the Baltic States and others had all been brutally oppressed by the communist system. Indicating the level of terror and oppression that existed inside the Soviet Union, in June 1941 the NKVD (Russian secret police) numbered almost half a million, while around 2.5 million people were imprisoned in Stalin's gulags, with a million more arrested by December 1941. On top of this, the Soviet leadership had been convinced that the German attack was impossible; therefore, from Stalin down, they had failed to properly prepare for the possibility of war in June 1941. However, while anger certainly existed in the Russian countryside towards the Communist Party, in the newly established industrial centres created by the Soviet economic plans, broad support for the communist state did exist among the millions of workers whose lives had been improved.

**NKVD**
Soviet state secret service

From the beginning of the German attack, the Soviet people showed that they intended to fight rather than submit. Despite 22 June 1941 being a Sunday, when news of the German attack filtered across Russia thousands of workers unexpectedly arrived at their factories ready to work. When the Soviet front line began to collapse, thousands of civilians built fortifications and defences in an effort to slow the German advance. By September 1941, it is believed that upwards of 2 million people were working on defence works in Belorussia alone. The Russian people were prepared to defend their homeland. Having large sections of the country under enemy occupation, the remaining part of the country was forced to redouble its efforts. It is estimated that 25 million Russians moved eastwards after June 1941 to work in war-related industries. Rather than filling the Russian people with empty slogans about defending communism, in a national broadcast on 3 July 1941, Stalin shrewdly asked that the entire Soviet people rise in 'defence of our native land'.[10]

WS
Stalin's speech

Getty Images/Serge Plantureux/Corbis

**SOURCE 4.21** Soviet citizens building a tank trap, 1941.



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## The Siege of Leningrad

Getty Images/Sovfoto/UIG

**SOURCE 4.22** Two women collect the remains of a dead horse for food, during the Siege of Leningrad, 1941.

Exemplifying the will to resist during the Siege of Leningrad was perhaps the greatest example of stoicism in the war. On 8 September 1941, Leningrad was surrounded by German forces. The Germans did not expect the city to hold out for very long, but it did, lasting 900 days until the encirclement was ended on 27 January 1944. Leningrad had been poorly prepared for a siege; the evacuation of women and children was only announced on 29 August 1941, the day before the rail link was cut. The first winter in Leningrad was the worst. With only a trickle of supplies coming across the frozen Lake Ladoga, thousands starved to death. From November 1941 to February 1942, the ration for the citizens was just 125 grams of bread – made up partially of sawdust and other inedible elements – per person per day. In December, the daily death toll stood between 5000 and 7000. Everything possible was used for food; pigeons, cats, rats and dogs were all eaten. The diary of 11-year-old Tatyana Savicheva, preserved in the Leningrad Museum, tragically details the death of her entire family and eventually herself between December 1941 and May 1942. The authorities had to deal with instances of cannibalism. By December 1942, the NKVD had arrested over 2000 people accused of eating human flesh.

Hunger and war

Making life even more difficult for the population, Leningrad was also subjected to air raids and artillery fire on the city. Of Leningrad's prewar population of 3.5 million, only 700 000 survived to be liberated in January 1944.

### Life and death in Leningrad during the siege

Vera Kostrovitskaya, a dance teacher, witnessed the gradual stripping of a corpse near the opera.

> With his back to the post, a man sits in the snow, wrapped in rags, wearing a knapsack … Probably he was on his way to Finland Station, got tired and sat down to rest. For two weeks I passed him every day as I went back and forth to the hospital [where she worked]. He sat first, without his knapsack; second, without his rags; third, in his underwear; fourth, naked; fifth, a skeleton with ripped out entrails. They took him away in May.
>
> Vera Kostrovitskaya, quoted in Anna Reid, *Leningrad: Tragedy of a City under Siege, 1941–44*, Bloomsbury, New York, 2011, p. 211

## Those under German occupation

The people in the western Soviet Union were exposed to the Germans and their racist policies for up to three years. The speed and success of the German offensive saw large sections of the western Soviet Union fall into their hands by the end of 1941. This included the major cities of Minsk, Kiev and Smolensk. What resentments some Russians had towards the communist system were quickly forgotten, as the brutal treatment meted out by the Third Reich was even worse.

German planners had envisaged that the Germans would seize all food in Russia, leaving nothing for the local population to survive. A May 1941 report from Hermann Göring's Economic Staff East

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indifferently recognised that, 'If we take what we need out of the country, there can be no doubt that tens of millions of people will die of starvation'.[11] The Germans only fed the Soviets working for them; all others had to fend for themselves. Consequently, the major cause of death among the population was starvation. Any dissent against the German authorities was met with swift retribution. Thousands of Soviets were shot or hanged as reprisals for the activities of local partisan groups.

Before Barbarossa began, the German High Command made clear that it planned to suspend the normal rules of war with regard to the occupied civilians. On 23 July 1941, the Wehrmacht leadership demanded that its soldiers 'spread the kind of terror which is the only suitable means of suppressing any inclination towards resistance in the population'.[12] As many as 100 Russian civilians could be murdered as a reprisal for the death of a single German soldier. Such killings were widespread in the occupied zone. In their first year in Russia, Army Group Centre claimed 80 000 **partisan** deaths for only 3000 Germans killed. In one anti-partisan operation in early 1942, it was reported that 3500 partisans were killed for six German dead. Such treatment drove many Russians towards resisting the Germans. By 1943–44, partisan bands operating inside German territory had grown to significant sizes. Of the estimated 20 to 25 million Soviet civilians killed during the war, a sizeable portion of these came from those who were under German occupation. Among the Soviet peoples, Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians, who were not considered as the hated 'Slavs', were treated reasonably well.

**partisans**
Irregular military force that fights behind the lines

Others were not so fortunate. The 40 million Ukrainians, whose hatred for Soviet oppression was so intense that many initially welcomed the Germans, were soon being subjected to day-to-day terror or possible deportation to Germany to work as slave labourers in mines and factories. Anyone who resisted was hanged as a deterrent to others.

## Those who collaborated

Most Soviet citizens dutifully worked for the motherland. Other Russians were lured into working for the Nazis. Between 600 000 and 1 400 000 Soviets called *Hilfswilligen* (Hiwis) joined the German forces as soldiers, logistical support, translators and even participated in the murder of the Jews. As the German 6th Army drove towards Stalingrad in late 1942, it was accompanied by up to 50 000 Hiwis. Later in the war, many men from the Soviet Union – especially the Baltic States – joined Waffen-SS units. By the end of the war, Estonia and Latvia alone had supplied more than 100 000 men to the Germans. In October 1944, after much resistance from Hitler, a Russian Liberation Army (ROA) was formed from Soviet POWs, as were two Russian Waffen-SS divisions. As territories became liberated, Stalin exacted revenge against the populations he considered to have been in league with the Germans. Any sign of collaboration condemned the whole community. In February 1944, the entire population of Chechnya was deported. By 1945, upwards of 1.5 million Soviet citizens had been sent to Siberia.

Bundesarchiv bild-183-J10852

**SOURCE 4.23** Soviet women on a train displaying posters with pro-German messages

### QUESTIONS

1 How extensive was Soviet collaboration with the Germans?

2 Explain why collaborators would have continued to fight for the Germans even when the war looked lost.



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## Organisation of labour and industry


The Print Collector/Alamy Stock Photo

**SOURCE 4.24** Young Russian girls working in an armaments factory. It was illegal to hire anyone younger than 14 years of age, but many had jobs.

The complete organisation of labour and industry on the Soviet home front was essential, and it needed to be. Fortunately, the communist government proved more adept at running its country in wartime than in peace. The German successes in their initial offensive had a devastating effect on the economic and agricultural potential of the Soviet Union. Industrially, Russia was prepared for war. The third five-year plan (1938–42) had a focus on military production; therefore, many workers were already in war-related industries. The industrialisation of Russia since 1928 had also led to a dramatic shift for the population, with more than 40 per cent of Russians now living in urban centres, facilitating easier moves into industrial work. Since June 1940, new labour laws had virtually militarised the factory workforce, preparing Russian workers for even stricter controls once the Germans attacked.

During the second year of the war, the Soviet home front was in grave danger of not being able to supply its military. The losses sustained in 1941 and early 1942 meant that Russian grain supply fell by 60 million tons by 1942 and the number of pigs went down from 22.5 million to 6.1 million. In 1942, Soviet coalmines were only producing 23 per cent of the supplies available to the Germans and only 28 per cent of the Germans' steel production. It also lost a significant amount of manpower. Overall, the Soviet industrial workforce was reduced from 8.3 million in 1940 to just 5.5 million in 1942. At the same time, the German workforce numbered 11.5 million.[13]

As a result of these manpower shortages, women became critical to the Russian home front. In 1940, women made up 38 per cent of the industrial workforce; by 1943, they were 52 per cent. They also made up one-third of construction workers. In the countryside, the role of women on the Russian home front became paramount. By 1944, with three-quarters of the men gone from collective farms, women were entirely responsible for Soviet food production. In 1941, women made up half the workforce in the countryside; in 1944, it was fourth-fifths.

After 1942, the Soviet home front began to produce more tanks, artillery and aircraft than the Germans. This was due to a combination of central planning, brutal practices and simplified production techniques. Soviet factories were organised into large working halls, a primitive form of mass production. When possible, using untrained workers facilitated dramatic improvements in armaments production. The privations the Soviet citizens had suffered already, along with the level of government control that existed in the Soviet Union, made organising Russia for total war an easier job. The Communist Party was able to mobilise the Russian people so effectively because the German invaders offered them nothing as an alternative.

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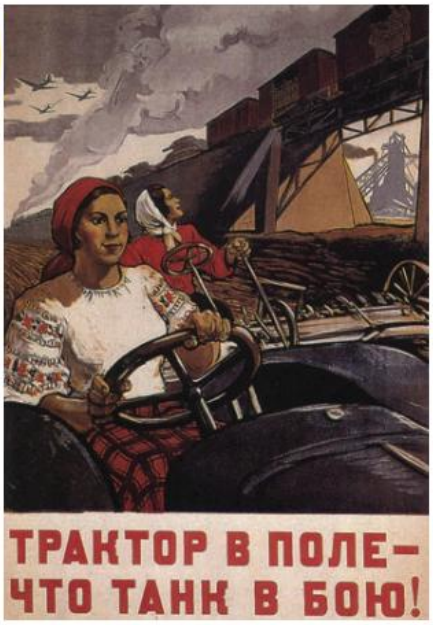
## Soviet propaganda posters




age fotostock/© Fine Art Images

**SOURCE 4.25** Soviet poster from 1942. The caption reads: 'A tractor in the field is worth a tank in battle!'


Shawshots/Alamy Stock Photo

**SOURCE 4.26** Soviet propaganda poster from 1942, declaring: 'We will cut off all roads to the evil enemy, he will not escape from this!'

### QUESTIONS

1. In Source 4.25, who is depicted on the tractors and on the trains in the background? Where are the trains heading towards?
2. Looking at the image and caption, what is the meaning of Source 4.25?
3. Looking at Source 4.26, what is the message in the image? Why would the Soviets have been eager to highlight the involvement of the United Kingdom and the United States in the war?

During the second half of 1941 and early 1942, an enormous amount of industrial equipment – even whole factories – was relocated eastward, away from the Nazi advance. Hundreds of thousands of workers followed, to the Volga River Basin, the Urals, Siberia, Kazakhstan or Central Asia. In September 1941, with the Germans less than 250 kilometres away, the Yakovlev aircraft factory workers and machines were put on trains and trucks and sent to western Siberia. They arrived to sub-zero temperatures, but they struggled on and the factory started producing aircraft again after only six days. As a result, Soviet workers and factories were spared a strategic bombing campaign as they were beyond the reach of the Luftwaffe. Unlike the British, the Soviets never were subjected to a sustained strategic bombing campaign, nor were they attacked with the German V-weapons in the latter stages of the war.

By February 1942, the entire able-bodied population was mobilised for the war effort. This meant that time off was limited to one day a month and compulsory overtime was introduced; 55-hour working weeks became the norm. Workers slept beside their machines. In particular industries, such as railway and munitions, that were under military law, absences from work could lead to a stint in a **gulag**. The extent to which these measures were required is unclear; many Soviets were patriotic and hated the Nazi occupation, while many others had lost loved ones or had relatives in the Red Army.

**gulag**
Soviet slave labour camp, usually located in Siberia



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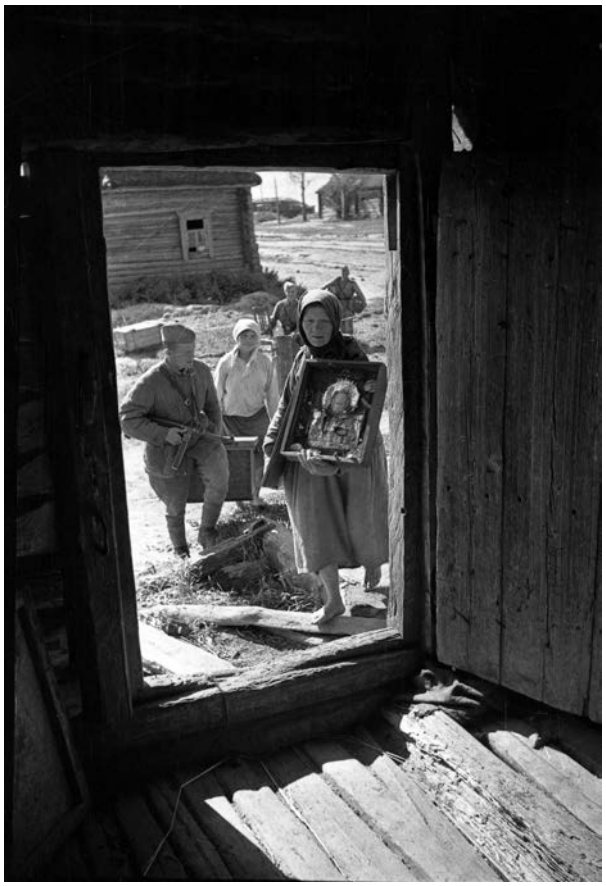
The Soviet workforce was young, inexperienced and featured a lot of women. In many factories, the average age was less than 25 years; in June 1943, all factory workers in Leningrad were under 23 years of age. The number of those under the age of 18 rose from 6 per cent in 1940, to 15 per cent in 1942. Many were younger still, even though it was illegal to hire anyone less than 14 years of age. Put simply, the Soviets had to mobilise their entire society to enable them to create the weapons needed to defeat the Germans.

## Rationing

Rationing was introduced in stages between July and September 1941. Similar to the Germans, the Russians had categories for manual and white-collar workers. Rations remained hardly enough to sustain life. The normal calorie allowance (780 calories for dependants and 1176 for employees) was dangerously low. While workers in heavy industries got a higher allocation – supposedly 3600 calories a day, but by 1943, this was rarely more than 2660 calories per day – rations hardly reached the required level. This was a deliberate policy to get all available dependants working, whether they were under or over age. Peasants in Russia did not qualify for rations, as they were expected to exist on what they could grow.

The brutality of this system saw many who were too weak to work die from malnutrition. Over the course of the war, death by hunger-related tuberculosis in the Soviet Union remained high, causing up to 20 per cent of non-child deaths. Huge pressure was applied to farmers to supply food to the cities and the industrial workforce. The authorities also implemented desperate measures to ensure that rations went to those who were still contributing to the war effort. On 16 August 1941, the Soviet High Command ordered that the families of captured soldiers were no longer entitled to rations.

Some Russians exploited the black market and many made a good living selling their produce this way. Unlike elsewhere, where involvement in the black market was against the law, in Russia the authorities turned a blind eye, as long as various quotas were being met. In Moscow in 1944, a black-market loaf of bread cost the same as a week's wages. Yet, despite the losses of farmland and the still perilous war situation, on the whole, food supply remained largely stable. It was by any standard an enormous system; by December 1944, there were 67.7 million people on rations. By the end of war, the central distribution of bread reached 62 million people.[14]



Getty Images/Mark Redkin/FotoSoyuz

**SOURCE 4.27** After the Soviet recapturing of Smolensk in September 1943, Soviet soldiers help Russian refugees return to their homes. The woman carries the family religious icon back into the home, showing the return of 'religious freedom' in wartime Russia.

## Censorship and repression

Immediately after Barbarossa started, with the magnitude of their defeats evident, the Communist Party's authority was in serious doubt. To ensure its legitimacy, it was determined to maintain its tight control over news and information. Shortly after June 1941, an order was issued that all private radios had to be handed over. The only regular source of information became the *Sovinformburo* (Soviet

The motherland in danger

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Information Bureau). This organisation minimised defeats, exaggerated successes and maintained a strict level of censorship throughout the entire war. The suffering of Leningrad in December 1941 was not reported in Russia until the following year. The Battle of Stalingrad only became news when Soviet victory was assured. At no time during the war was the Soviet public given an idea of the true losses they suffered. Foreign journalists were able to give their readers a far clearer picture of the Eastern Front than any Russian citizen was allowed.

In Russia, the gulag remained for those who bucked the system. Crimes such as cheating on ration cards or absenteeism from work were met with severe retribution. Food theft became common and carried the death penalty. Most of those arrested became slave labourers. In 1942, labour camps held 4.3 million prisoners. Considering that the death rate in these camps was as high as 27 per cent in 1942, it is clear that a large number of prisoners cycled through them over the course of the war.

In other respects, some restrictions in society were removed. Religion was once again tolerated and churches were reopened, with the ban being officially lifted in September 1943. In July 1942, new military awards were instituted, named after great generals from the Tsarist period, Mikhail Kutuzov and Alexander Suvorov. After 1943, as the German defeats became more frequent, the pressure on the Russian home front did not cease. Since the Red Army had no organised home leave, and Russia's postal system was primitive, many had no idea if their family members in the Red Army were still alive. Soviet citizens who returned to homes liberated from the Germans found utter devastation, loss of loved ones and the desolation of villages and resources. However, for the wider Soviet war effort, liberation had an upside as food could now be grown again.

## Richard Overy

The real heroes of the Soviet Union's economic revival were the Soviet people themselves, managers, workers and farmers. The war made quite exceptional demands on the civilian population. The great majority of men between 18 and 50 were conscripted into the armed forces during the war. One million Soviet women joined them in uniform. Unlike women in Germany and Britain, thousands of Russian women filled combat roles as pilots (highest scoring female fighter pilot had 12 victories), snipers, machine gunners, tank crew members, partisans and medical personnel.

This left a workforce at home that was made up of women, old men and teenagers. By 1943 women made up just over half the industrial labour force. On the collective farms their share was almost three-quarters. By 1944 able-bodied males made up only 14 per cent of the workers on state farms. There was nothing new about female labour in the Soviet Union – women made up two-fifths of the labour force in 1940 – but what was new were the appalling conditions in which all workers laboured in wartime Russia. Planning mass production and mass mobilisation were the pillars of Soviet survival and subsequent revival. The Soviet Union was turned into Stalin's 'single war camp'. 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.

Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won*, Pimlico, London, 1996, pp. 187, 190

### QUESTIONS

1 Who does Overy think played the most vital role on the Soviet home front?

2 What was total war like for the Soviet population?



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1. What was the reaction of the Soviet people to the German invasion?
2. How prepared for hardships were the Soviet people in 1941?
3. What was the situation like for the citizens of Leningrad once the German siege began?
4. Explain the situation for Soviet citizens who were under German occupation.
5. How prepared for war was Soviet industry?
6. How successful was the communist government at organising the Russian industry for war?
7. How were the Russians able to out-produce the Germans by 1942?
8. What was the underlying purpose of the rationing system in Russia?
9. How well did the Soviets control information inside the Soviet Union?
10. What punishments existed for those who did not get behind the war effort?
11. When and how did the Soviet official attitude change towards religion during the war?
12. After Russia starting winning the war, how much did life change for Soviet citizens?
13. What was the total cost for the war on the Soviet home front?

# Conclusion

Total civilian losses on the Russian home front are put at over 13.5 million. This is broken down as 7.4 million deaths due to combat, bombing and so on, 4.1 million deaths due to famine and disease in the occupied territories, and 2.1 million due to deaths as forced labourers in Germany. At least 70 000 Soviet villages and 1710 towns were destroyed. In the rest of the Soviet Union, roughly half the dwellings were damaged during the war. The endurance shown by the Soviet people almost beggars belief. They suffered horribly under German occupation, were subjected to violent reprisals and were treated as less than humans. Soviet citizens who remained under communist control fared little better as the Soviets struggled to produce enough materials to defeat the German invasion. Working incredible hours, surviving on inadequate rations, the Soviet citizen was subjected to a brutal regime designed to stave off defeat.

# Chapter summary

- The home fronts of Great Britain, Germany and the Soviet Union all underwent very different experiences.
- The preparations made by the British Government were to a large extent successful.
- The British public responded well under the German bombing campaign and the threat of invasion.
- The German home front had also been prepared for conflict, but was not as well organised as the British home front.
- The German home front underwent significant stresses due to the Allied bombing campaign.
- The Soviet people suffered the worst conditions of any home front.
- Soviet people suffered under draconian working conditions imposed by the Communist Party.
- Those Soviet civilians who were under German occupation faced death on a daily basis.
- As the war progressed, certain controls were relaxed in Soviet society, churches were reopened and religion was tolerated.

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## Endnotes

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# CHAPTER REVIEW

## CHAPTER REVISION QUESTIONS

1. Assess the impact of the war on British, German and Soviet home fronts.
2. Considering living and working conditions, rationing and government control, which home front suffered the worst during the war?
3. On which home front did women and children endure the most? Establish your argument using specific examples.
4. Evaluate the importance of the Communist Party to the Russian home front.
5. What were some of the errors the Germans made in the organisation of their home front?

## EXTENDED-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

6. How did the war impact on civilians in Great Britain compared to those in Germany and the Soviet Union? Use Source 4.28 to support your response.
7. Evaluate the social and economic effects of the war on civilians in Britain and either Germany or the Soviet Union.

Getty Images/Fox Photos/Hulton Archive

**SOURCE 4.28** British internees with their luggage arriving at an internment camp, April 1940.

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# 05

# The Holocaust

## STUDENTS WILL INVESTIGATE

- the development of Nazi anti-Semitic policy between 1939 and 1941
- the decision and organisation for the 'Final Solution'
- the escalation of the Holocaust in the occupied territories.

Modern History syllabus

Newly arrived at Auschwitz, Hungarian Jewish women and children who have already been selected for death await the gas chamber, summer 1944.

# Introduction

The Holocaust in the occupied territories represents one of the horrific elements of World War II. It was the culmination of one of the key aims of the Nazis: the destruction of European Jewry. Nazi anti-Semitism had long been evident since Hitler's rise in the 1920s to when the Nazis took power in Germany in January 1933. However, it was only when World War II started and Germany occupied Poland (and, later Western and Southern Europe and large parts of the Soviet Union) that the Holocaust began to take shape. If the Holocaust is wholly linked to the war, it is also wholly linked to the Nazi expansionist policies, as it entirely took place in the occupied territories.

**Timeline**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1933 | **April** | Nazi-organised one-day boycott of Jewish stores |
| 1933–34 | | Jews are banned from working as civil servants, soldiers, university teachers, journalists and artists |
| 1935 | **November** | The Nuremberg Laws; race laws that banned Jews from being German citizens and banned marriage between Jews and non-Jewish Germans |
| 1938 | **August** | All Jews are required to adopt an additional name: 'Sara' for omen and 'Israel' for men |
| | **8–9 November** | *Kristallnacht*, nationwide violence against the Jews, destroys thousands of shops and synagogues, kills hundreds; 30 000 Jewish men are arrested |
| | **15 November** | All Jewish children are expelled from public schools |
| 1939 | **January** | Hitler threatens that if the Jews cause another world war it will lead to their 'destruction' |
| 1939–40 | | In occupied Poland, ghettos are established in major centres Warsaw, Cracow and Lodz. Polish Jews are forced to wear the yellow star |
| 1941 | **June** | After Russia is invaded, the Germans create *Einsatzgruppen* murder squads to shoot Soviet Jews en masse |
| | **15 September** | German Jews are forced to wear the yellow star |
| | **December** | The first gassings (using gassing trucks) are carried out in the first extermination camp, Chelmno |
| 1942 | **20 January** | Wannsee Conference authorises the mass extermination of the Jews of Europe |
| | | Extermination camps are established at Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Majdanek. Jews from around Europe are deported to these |
| 1943 | **October** | After killing hundreds of thousands of Jews, the extermination camps at Sobibor and Treblinka are closed |
| 1945 | **January** | The last extermination camp, at Auschwitz, is liberated by the Red Army |

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# Nazi anti-Jewish policy, 1933–39

The implementation of Nazi anti-Semitic policies can be divided into stages. The prewar (1933–39) period can be identified as a stage characterised by expulsion from society, emigration and eventually dehumanisation. When the Nazis took power in January 1933, there were approximately 523 000 Jews in Germany, representing less than 1 per cent of the country's total population. Anti-Semitism – the hatred of Jews, who the Nazis defined as a race – had been evident throughout Europe for centuries and was not especially strong in Germany. Certainly there were many in Germany who felt a dislike for the Jews, but arguably this was no stronger than what existed in Russia, Poland or France. Sensing this, the method taken by the Nazis was to implement anti-Semitic policies in fits and bursts that were designed to exclude German Jews from normal life.

Indicating that the Nazis were testing the strength of anti-Semitism in the German community, two months after coming to power, on 1 April 1933, the Nazis organised a one-day boycott of all Jewish shops. This boycott was a resounding failure, as many Germans simply ignored the SA pickets and shopped anyway. In the following months, the Nazis began to ban Jews from certain professions, as shown in Table 5.1.

**TABLE 5.1** Removing certain professions from Jews

| DATE | LEGISLATION |
|---|---|
| 7 April 1933 | Removal of Jews from the civil service; Jews can no longer become lawyers |
| 22 September 1933 | Jewish artists and all Jews active in the cultural sector are banned |
| 4 October 1933 | Jews are banned from being newspaper editors |

By 1935, signs began appearing on the edges of towns and villages across Germany saying 'Jews are not welcome here'. At this stage, about 35 000 Jews had emigrated from Germany, mainly to neighbouring European countries.


akg-images

**SOURCE 5.1** Sign in a German village, which translates as: 'Jews are not welcome here'. Such signs became commonplace after 1935.



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# Exclusion from society and emigration

To define who qualified as Jewish, the Nazis passed the Nuremberg Laws in September 1935. These laws defined the meaning of a 'Jew' and identified 'grades' of Jewishness. Jews regarded as not full Jews were designated as ***Mischlinge***. Jews also lost the right to vote and to hold public office. The Nazis also prohibited further marriages between Jews and Germans. From early 1938, Nazi anti-Semitic policy shifted towards dehumanisation and violence as the process of excluding Jews entirely from German economic life began (see Table 5.2).

***Mischlinge***
Those categorised as 'half' or 'quarter' Jews


Nuremberg Race Laws

**TABLE 5.2** Dehumanising Jews and excluding them from economic life

| DATE | REGULATION |
|---|---|
| 5 January 1938 | Jews are forbidden from changing their names |
| 26 April 1938 | All Jewish property over 5000 Reichsmarks must be registered |
| 15 June 1938 | All Jews with a police record (even driving fines) are arrested and sent to concentration camps |
| 17 August 1938 | Jews must use the middle name of 'Israel' for men and 'Sara' for women |
| 5 October 1938 | Jewish passports are invalid unless they have a 'J' stamped on them |
| 28 October 1938 | About 15000 Eastern European Jews who had arrived in Germany after 1918 are designated as 'stateless' and are forced across the Polish border |


Göring reading the preamble

In response to measures taken on 28 October 1938 (see Table 5.2), a young student living in Paris, Herschel Grynszpan, whose family was among those deported, fatally wounded a junior officer at the German embassy in Paris. The embassy official's death on 9 November started a wave of violence across Germany directed at the Jewish population. Called *Kristallnacht* ('Night of Broken Glass'), this resulted in the destruction of over 1000 synagogues and 7000 Jewish businesses and was portrayed by the Nazis as a spontaneous attack by the public. However, it is now clear that this was orchestrated by the Nazis.


Hitler's speech to the Reichstag

These attacks caused millions of Reichsmarks in damage, and killed about 1000 Jews, although many more died due to maltreatment and violence in the days that followed. In addition, about 30000 Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps. After *Kristallnacht*, more Jews attempted to leave Germany and Austria. One program established was called the *Kindertransport*, which saw 10000 unaccompanied Jewish children allowed to leave Germany. The first of these arrived in Great Britain in December 1938. Almost all of these children never saw their parents and families again. By the beginning of the war, about 257000 Jews remained in Greater Germany; many of these were elderly.

Hitler's speech, January 1939

1. What does it mean to say the Nazis began to exclude Jews from German society?
2. Identify the 'expulsion from society' elements and the 'dehumanising' elements of Nazi race policy before 1939.
3. Besides the Nazis, who else was prepared to enact anti-Semitic legislation?
4. What do the Nuremberg Laws indicate the Nazis believed the Jews to be?
5. What were the Nazis trying to achieve with their anti-Semitic policies up to 1939?

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# Nazi anti-Jewish policy in Poland

Once the war began, Nazi anti-Semitic policy went through a series of increasingly brutal changes, moving from ghettoisation, to mass killings and industrial murder. The first nation subjected to Nazi anti-Semitic policy during the war was Poland. After Poland's defeat, the Nazis had a Jewish population numbering 3.5 million under their control. From the first days of the occupation, Polish Jews were subjected to attacks and discrimination, such as being driven from food lines, seized for forced labour and persecuted for their traditional clothing and hairstyles. Some of these attacks were carried out by Polish citizens. Even before the fighting was over, ***Einsatzgruppen*** killing squads executed around 10 000 Polish citizens; among these were around 3000 Jews considered potential threats to German rule. As Poland no longer existed, the Germans annexed part of the western territory, while the remainder became a dumping ground for Poles and Jews forced to leave the new German territory. They were sent to the territory known as the 'General Government'. Controlled by Nazi governor Hans Frank, the General Government served as a dumping ground for 'racially undesirable' people.

***Einsatzgruppen***
Mobile killing units created from German SS and police personnel

On 21 September 1939, the Germans created the ***Judenrat*** (Jewish Council). These were Jewish municipal administrations headed by Jewish leaders and were designed to ensure that Nazi orders and regulations were implemented. The first example of this was formalising what had been an ad hoc policy in some areas of Poland. On 23 November 1939, all Polish Jews above the age of 10 were required to wear a white armband with a blue Star of David. By the beginning of the attack on Russia in June 1941, this had been replaced by the more familiar yellow star badge worn on clothing. In addition, Jewish shops were to be marked, restrictions were placed on train travel, and radios were confiscated from both Jews and Poles from 1 December 1939.

***Judenrat***
Jewish community administration established by the Nazis to ensure that their orders and regulations were implemented

Getty Images/Imagno

**SOURCE 5.2** A Jewish man is humiliated by having his beard cut. German soldiers instigated such actions in front of Polish civilians.

## The process of ghettoisation

On 12 October 1940, the Jewish Day of Atonement, Adam Czerniakow, the head of the Warsaw *Judenrat*, was informed of the Nazi decree to establish Jewish ghettos in Poland. Ghettos were a recreation of a medieval practice, where an area of an urban centre walled off the Jewish population from the rest of the city. The movement of the Jews was to be restricted and they were forced to live in an area too small for their numbers. Major **ghettos** were set up in cities such as Warsaw and

**ghetto**
An area of a city that is walled off and occupied by a minority group



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Lodz. On the eve of World War II, the Jewish population in Warsaw numbered 337 000, or about 29 per cent of the total population of the city. By March 1941, the Warsaw ghetto held half a million Jews crammed into 3.5 square kilometres (7.2 people per room); about 30 per cent of the population of Warsaw was packed into only 2.4 per cent of the city's area. In the second largest ghetto, at Lodz, about 250 000 Jews were contained in roughly the same way. By April 1941, the ghetto system had been enforced throughout Poland.

While the vast majority of Polish Jews were forced into these ghettos, some were also forced to work for the Nazis. Attached to the Lodz ghetto alone, the Nazi government and private companies established 96 plants and factories to produce goods for the German war effort. The daily food rations allocated to the Jews of Warsaw consisted of only 181 calories, about a quarter of the rations Poles were granted, and much less than what was allocated to Germans. This totally inadequate level of food reduced the inhabitants to a slow death through starvation. During 1941, Jewish deaths rose from 898 a month in January to a peak in August of 5560. Once the Final Solution was initiated in January 1942, these ghettos were systematically emptied as the Jews were transported to their deaths.

Getty Images/ullstein bild

**SOURCE 5.3** The Warsaw ghetto in March 1941.

Getty Images/Galerie Bilderwelt

**SOURCE 5.4** Jewish children with their mother starving on the street in a ghetto.

# Nazi anti-Semitic policy extends to Western Europe

The German victories in Western Europe in mid-1940 brought more Jewish people under their control: in Norway (1400), Denmark (5600), the Netherlands (126 000), Luxembourg (1700), Belgium (64 000) and France (283 000). In April 1941, a further 75 000 Yugoslavian and 77 000 Greek Jews also came under German jurisdiction. Initially, these Jews had some professions closed to them and their property was slowly confiscated and from September 1941 they were forced to wear the yellow star. But for the time being their lives were safe. What was troubling was the collaboration of some non-Germans in these anti-Jewish measures. In keeping with anti-Semitic sentiments in France, the Vichy government enacted its own anti-Semitic legislation independent of the German authorities; in September 1940, it required Jews to wear the yellow star, banned them from working for the government, the military, and as doctors, lawyers and teachers. Even more obligingly, in March 1941 it set up a Ministry of Jewish Affairs.

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# The beginning of the slaughter: the German attack on Russia

The German invasion of Russia in June 1941 facilitated the next phase in Nazi race policy. As the German Army rapidly advanced through the Soviet satellite states and Russia itself, *Einsatzgruppen* killing squads, first used in Poland, were sent to repeat their inhuman task against the Jews of the east on a huge scale. Each group consisted of about 1000 men, and each was led by a high-ranking SS leader. Table 5.3 shows their areas of operation.

**TABLE 5.3** *Einsatzgruppen* areas of operation

| UNIT | AREA OF OPERATION |
|---|---|
| *Einsatzgruppe A* | Baltic States |
| *Einsatzgruppe B* | Belarus |
| *Einsatzgruppe C* | Ukraine |
| *Einsatzgruppe D* | Southern Ukraine |

Getty Images/Universal History Archive/UIG

**SOURCE 5.5** Jews being shot in Vinnitsa, Ukraine. Mass executions were carried out in ravines, sandpits, quarries and abandoned Russian anti-tank ditches.

**pogrom**
A violent community-driven riot aimed at the massacre or persecution of an ethnic or religious group, usually directed against Jews

On 2 July 1941, Reinhard Heydrich had issued written instructions to the *Einsatzgruppen* commanders explaining that 'Leading communist officials, Jews in the service of the party or the state' were to be executed.[1] In addition, he also suggested that **pogroms** were to be 'encouraged'. A few weeks later, Heydrich issued further orders that 'all Jews' among Russian POWs were to be executed by the SS. What had already been happening was that individual commanders on their own initiative had been killing all Jews, including men, women and children, who came into their hands.

By mid-August 1941, all the *Einsatzgruppen* had interpreted their task as the extermination of all Jews. Karl Jäger was the leader of a sub-unit of *Einsatzgruppe A*, by far the worst *Einsatzgruppe* of them all. In July 1941, his unit had killed 4293 Jews, of whom only 135 were women. In September 1941, by contrast, the same unit had killed 56 459 Jews: 15 104 men, 26 243 women and 15 112 children. By 25 November, Jäger reported the following number of deaths: 1064 communists, 56 partisans,



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653 mentally ill, 44 Poles, 28 Russian prisoners, five Gypsies, one Armenian and 136 421 Jews. As the German Army captured major Soviet cities, large numbers of Jews fell into the hands of the Germans. Perhaps the most notorious killing took place outside Kiev (the USSR's third-largest city). After its capture on 19 September 1941, 33 771 Jews were shot over a three-day period at the Babi Yar ravine on the outskirts of Kiev. Elsewhere, as in Poland, in areas of the USSR occupied by German forces, Jews who were not immediately executed were herded into ghettos in cities such as Minsk and Rovno and left to die in atrocious conditions.

Bundesarchiv bild-1576-006

**SOURCE 5.6** Jews in the Minsk ghetto, created in July 1941. It was one of the largest in Belorussia and housed 100 000 people at its peak. Most of the inhabitants perished in the Holocaust, and the ghetto was liquidated in October 1943.

## Role of collaborators in the occupied territories

These brutal killings in the east were made easier by the willing assistance of some of the local population, especially in the Baltic States and the Ukraine, who vented their anger against the Jews. Jews had always been treated as scapegoats for community anger. The arrival of the Germans and their insistence that Jews were behind communism created a situation where some locals were quite prepared to vent their hatred of communist rule on their Jewish neighbours. Especially in the Baltic States (Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia), local police and paramilitary groups were active participants at execution sites, rounding up the Jews and doing the actual shooting. With the approval of the Germans, in the Lithuanian city of Kaunas, between 25 and 29 June 1941, locals murdered 3800 Jews from the city, including over 50 who were beaten to death with clubs in the street while spectators watched.[2] The numbers of Jews killed in the course of the *Einsatzgruppen* operations in the USSR can only be estimated. Between June 1941 and April 1942, some 750 000 Jews were probably murdered. Up to a further 1.5 million may have been killed in the second sweep of 1942–43.

WS
Witnessing an execution

### The involvement of non-Germans in the Holocaust

**TABLE 5.4** The number of participants in the Holocaust, per 10 000 of the population

| NATIONAL GROUP | NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS |
|---|---|
| Western Europe | 0.5/10 000 |
| Ukrainians | 3/10 000 |
| Poles | 4/10 000 |
| Germans | 6/10 000 |
| Balts | 20/10 000 |

Peter J Potichnyj and Howard Aster (eds), *Ukrainian-Jewish Relations in Historical Perspective*, Ukrainian Studies Centre Macquarie University, North Ryde, 1988, p. 381

1. According to Table 5.4, which national group was most involved in the murder of the Jews of Europe?
2. What does this suggest about the level of anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe?
3. How much help would such a high number of collaborators have given the Germans?

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# The Final Solution

In early 1942, over 7.5 million Jews were still under Nazi control. The inability of the Germans to defeat the Soviet Union in 1941 as well as the US entry into the war provided an excuse for the Germans to escalate their murderous policies towards the Jews. The situation faced by the Nazis by early 1942 can be summarised as follows:

- The possibilities for further Jewish emigration had almost completely disappeared after the entry of the United States into the war in December 1941.
- The conditions in the ghettos were getting increasingly appalling and might lead to the spread of epidemics.
- Once Hitler had resolved to kill all Russian Jews, it was but a small step to decide to kill all of the Jews under Nazi control.
- Historian Christopher Browning has argued that Hitler, confident that victory over the USSR was at hand, was no longer concerned with world opinion.

## Intentionalist versus structuralist arguments about the Holocaust

The German decision to embark on the extermination of Europe's Jews has been interpreted by historians in two main ways. Similar to views on Nazi foreign policy, intentionalists argue that Hitler always had in mind a murderous policy towards the Jews of Europe. On the other hand, structuralists argue that the decision to exterminate the Jews was made in the heat of the moment and that the fact that the war was prolonged for longer than expected was the more important factor.

### LUCY S DAWIDOWICZ

> Through a maze of time Hitler's decision of November 1918 [to enter politics] led to Operation Barbarossa. There never had been any ideological deviation or wavering determination. In the end only the question of opportunity mattered. [By the time Hitler wrote the second volume of *Mein Kampf* in 1925 he] openly espoused his programme of annihilation [against the Jews]' [in words which] were to become the blueprint of his policies when he came to power. [Furthermore] the destruction of the Jews was at [the] centre [of Hitler's plans and ideology]. On January 30, 1939, Hitler made his declaration of war against the Jews, promising 'the destruction of the Jewish race in Europe'.
>
> Lucy S Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933–1945*, Bantam Books, New York, 1986, pp. 158, 161

### MARTIN BROSZAT

> There had been no comprehensive general extermination order [given by Hitler] at all. [Instead] the programme of extermination of the Jews gradually developed intuitionally and in practice out of individual actions down to early 1942 and gained determinative character after the erection of the extermination camps in Poland (between December 1941 and July 1942). [Broszat argues that the Germans' unexpected failure to defeat the Soviet Union and the inability of the regime to deal with the vast numbers of Jews under its control led to extermination being initiated as a 'local initiative'.] The destruction of the Jews arose, so it seems, not only out of a previously existent will to exterminate, but also as the 'way out' of a cul-de-sac [dead end] in which [the regime] had manoeuvred itself. Once begun and institutionalised, the practice of liquidation nevertheless gained dominant weight and led finally de facto to a comprehensive 'programme'.
>
> Martin Broszat, 'Hitler and the Genesis of the Final Solution: An Assessment of David Irving', *Yad Vashem Studies*, 13, 1979, pp. 73–125

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## QUESTIONS

1. When essentially does Dawidowicz argue that Hitler arrived at the decision to murder the Jews of Europe?
2. What evidence does she put forward to support her claim?
3. According to Broszat, how did the program of extermination of the Jews develop?
4. If not centrally planned, what encouraged the Nazi extermination of the Jews, according to Broszat?
5. Which view do you support? Write a paragraph outlining your argument and back this up with evidence. Try to use other examples of evidence that you are familiar with.

When it began the deportation of German Jews in October 1941, the RSHA found itself facing a number of practical problems. Therefore, careful coordination of various agencies – police, finance, labour and railway departments – in Germany and in the occupied countries was required if hundreds of thousands of Jews were to be transported to Poland. Accordingly, Heydrich invited senior officials from several agencies to the Berlin suburb of Wannsee to discuss matters. The Wannsee Conference, initially planned for December 1941, was finally held on 20 January 1942. It was intended to resolve the logistical arrangements for a program aimed at a 'complete solution of the Jewish question'.[3]

**RSHA**
'Reich Main Security Office', the main office of the SS

WS
Development of the Holocaust

The meeting was chaired by Heydrich and lasted only 90 minutes. Adolf Eichmann, the SS leader in charge of 'Jewish affairs and evacuations', prepared the minutes in which he estimated that 11 million Jews in the whole of Europe would be exterminated. According to Eichmann, Heydrich had expected considerable stumbling blocks and difficulties. Instead, he found an atmosphere of agreement on the part of the participants. The various bureaucrats, who represented the civil, health and legal arms of the Third Reich, and many of whom were among the educated élite in Germany, enthusiastically contributed to the Final Solution. One failure of the conference (and further conferences on this matter) was the inability to agree on the status and treatment of the *Mischlinge* (the 'half' and 'quarter' Jews), with the result that *Mischlinge* and Jews in mixed marriages were not deported. The significance of the Wannsee Conference was not that it was the starting point of the Final Solution; that was already under way. It was, however the moment when it was endorsed by a broad segment of the German Government, and not just the SS. The conference ensured that the extermination program was turned into what was almost an industrial process for the efficient destruction of human beings.

## REINHARD HEYDRICH (1904–42)


World History Archive/Alamy Stock Photo

Reinhard Heydrich was Head of the SS Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) and deputy to Heinrich Himmler. He played a leading role in implementation of the Nazi race policy. Heydrich was born into a musical family and he played the violin. He joined the German Navy in 1922, where he served under Admiral Canaris, later the head of Germany's intelligence organisation. In 1931, he was forced to leave the navy after failing to fulfil a marriage promise to the daughter of a shipyard director, and he joined the Nazi Party in the same year. In 1932, he was responsible for establishing the SD, the SS intelligence department, and in April 1934 he took control of the Gestapo. As head of the Gestapo, he instigated brutal anti-Semitic policies against Germany's Jews. In September 1939, the Reich Security Main Office was established and Heydrich was placed in charge. He organised the herding of Polish Jews into ghettos and the deportation of those living in Germany, Austria and the annexed parts of Poland.

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After the invasion of Russia, Heydrich created SS mobile killing squads called *Einsatzgruppen* to murder all Jews in the service of the communist state. In July 1941, he was charged by Göring to find a 'solution to the Jewish question'.[4] This initiated the extermination program, which began with the construction of death camps and was formalised at the Wannsee Conference held in January 1942, which was chaired by Heydrich. To enforce German policy there, he was appointed Deputy Head Reich's Protector of Bohemia and Moravia (the former Czechoslovakia). Czech agents were parachuted in from England to assassinate him and on 27 May 1942, while he was driving to his office in Prague in an open-top car, they launched their attempt. One agent tried to shoot him, but the gun jammed; then the other threw a bomb that exploded next to his car, wounding him. Without penicillin available, Heydrich died of blood poisoning a week later. In retribution, over 13 000 people were arrested, deported and imprisoned. The Czech villages of Lidice and Ležáky (incorrectly linked to the agents) were razed to the ground, with the male populations being shot and the women and children being sent to concentration camps.

## ADOLF EICHMANN (1906–62)

Getty Images/Fine Art Images/Heritage Images

Adolf Eichmann was a senior SS leader who played a vital role in the deportation of Europe's Jews, which facilitated the smooth running of the Holocaust. When Eichmann was eight years old, his family moved to Linz, in Austria, childhood home to Adolf Hitler. Eichmann trained as a mechanical engineer but did not finish his studies, and in 1932 he drifted into politics and joined the Austrian branch of the SS and Nazi Party. In 1933, Eichmann returned to Germany and in 1934, he was transferred to the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD, Security Service) and assigned to the Jewish Affairs office. Eichmann began to work on encouraging Jewish migration out of Germany and even travelled to British Mandatory Palestine in 1937. After the Anschluss with Austria in 1938, he was posted to Vienna to organise Jewish emigration through the Central Office for Jewish Emigration in Vienna. By the time he left Vienna in May 1939, of nearly 200 000 Jews in Austria, about 100 000 had left.

After the start of the war, he was posted to Prague and began to organise the expulsion of Czech Jews from the newly annexed Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. In October 1939, Eichmann was transferred to Berlin to command the Central Office for Jewish Emigration for the entire Reich and organised his first mass deportation when 3500 Jews from Moravia and Vienna were transferred to German-occupied Poland. In March 1941, Eichmann became director of section IV B 4 (Jewish Affairs, or *Judenreferat*) in the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA). From this position in the RSHA, Eichmann played his crucial role in the deportation of over 1.5 million Jews from all over Europe to killing centres and killing sites in occupied Poland and in parts of the occupied Soviet Union.

In 1941, he was placed in charge of the SS Central Office's Race and Resettlement Office, which began to administer the mass extermination of the Jewish people. Since Eichmann was to be in charge of transporting Jews from all over Europe to the killing centres, RSHA chief Reinhard Heydrich asked Eichmann to prepare a presentation for the Wannsee Conference in January 1942. From 1942, Eichmann and his department organised the deportation of Jews from Slovakia, the Netherlands, France and Belgium. In 1943 and 1944, it was the turn of the Jews of Greece, northern Italy, and lastly, Hungary, where Eichmann personally involved himself directly in the deportation process. In this last terrible killing spree, from late April until early July 1944, only weeks after Germany had occupied Hungary, Eichmann had organised some 440 000 Hungarian Jews to be deported to their deaths. At the end of the war, he escaped recognition and fled to Argentina in June 1950. In 1960, he was kidnapped by Israeli agents and brought back and placed on trial in Israel. He was found guilty and hanged on 1 June 1962.



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# Operation Reinhard: the beginning of the Holocaust

The mass gassing of the 2 million Jews in the General Government in Poland is usually known as 'Operation Reinhard', named after Reinhard Heydrich. To facilitate the operation, three purpose-built extermination camps were constructed, at Belzec (operational from March 1942), at Sobibor (operational from April 1942) and at Treblinka (operational from July 1942). Three existing concentration camps were expanded and had extermination camps added to them. These were located at Chelmo (operational from December 1941), at Auschwitz-Birkenau (operational from March 1942) and at Majdanek (operational from October 1942). All of these extermination camps were in Poland. The poison gas 'Zyklon B' was used to kill people at Auschwitz-Birkenau and Majdanek, while Chelmo continued to use its three gas vans. Carbon monoxide gas from engine exhausts would be pumped into gas chambers at Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka. On 19 July 1942, Himmler ordered that all Jews in Poland were to be moved to 'transit' camps in preparation for resettlement by the end of the year. This meant that Jewish forced labourers were no longer protected by having a job. In addition to the extermination of the Jews, the Nazis also used some prisoners for inhuman medical experiments. In May 1943, Dr Josef Mengele arrived at Auschwitz and began to harvest tissue samples and body parts. Eyes were of particular interest to him, as were twins, and he collected sets of twins for experiments. Many of his test subjects died because of the experimentation or were murdered in order to facilitate post-mortem examination. Mengele kept his laboratory going until he fled Auschwitz with the approach of the Soviets in 1945.

Aktion T4


**SOURCE 5.7** The main concentration camps and the six extermination camps in occupied Poland and Germany.

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In occupied Western Europe, German officials and local collaborators deported Jews via transit camps, such as Drancy in Paris, Westerbork in the Netherlands and Mechelen (Malines) in Belgium. In France, the deportations began in July 1942 when the Vichy French authorities rounded up 12 884 Jews, including 4051 children that the Gestapo had not asked for. Eventually, 83 000 Jews were deported from France, mostly to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Of these French Jews, only 2500 survived. The Germans deported over 100 000 Jews from the Netherlands, almost all via Westerbork. They were sent to Auschwitz (about 60 000) and Sobibor (over 34 000), to be murdered shortly after their arrival. Between August 1942 and July 1944, 28 trains transported more than 25 000 Jews from Belgium to Auschwitz-Birkenau via Mechelen. The Germans deported Jews from around occupied Europe. Between March and August 1943, SS and police officials deported more than 40 000 Jews from Salonika, in northern Greece, to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where most of them were killed in the gas chambers upon arrival. After the Germans occupied northern Italy in September 1943, they deported about 8000 Jews, most of them to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Based on an agreement with their Croatian Axis partner, German officials took custody of around 7000 Croatian Jews and sent them to Auschwitz-Birkenau. In all, Bulgaria deported more than 11 000 Jews to German-controlled territory, where the Germans sent them on to Treblinka to be murdered.

## Jewish resistance to the Holocaust

Despite being disarmed and without support, there were numerous examples of Jewish resistance to Nazi race policy in the occupied territories. Underground resistance movements developed in many camps and ghettos in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe. After managing to arm themselves with weapons that had been smuggled in, Jews in a number of ghettos resisted with force when the Germans began the deportations. In April 1943, the last survivors in the Warsaw ghetto, aware of the fate that awaited them, initiated an uprising. Over a month of fighting, they managed to kill or wound more than 100 SS soldiers before they were brutally suppressed and the ghetto was destroyed. In Bialystok, the Jewish underground staged an uprising just before the final destruction of the ghetto in September 1943. Most of the Jewish resistance fighters, primarily young men and women, died during the fighting.

World History Archive/Alamy Stock Photo

**SOURCE 5.8** Members of the Jewish resistance in the Warsaw ghetto uprising surrender to SS soldiers, March 1943. Short of weapons and supplies, about 13 000 Jews died during the uprising. The remaining 50 000 Jews in the ghetto were sent to extermination camps.

Even in the most difficult circumstances, such as in extermination camps, Jews managed to effect resistance to the Nazis' genocidal policies. In August 1943, about 1000 Jewish prisoners took part in a revolt at the Treblinka extermination camp. Here they managed to seize weapons and set fire to the camp, with about 200 escaping. Prisoners at Sobibor killed 11 SS guards and set the camp on fire in October 1943. About 300 escaped, pushing down the barbed wire fence and running across the minefield. Two-thirds of these prisoners succeeding in joining partisan bands, going underground or making it to the Russian lines. In October 1944, Jewish prisoners attached to the *Sonderkommando* – Jews kept alive and ➜



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forced to clean up after the gassings – rebelled, killing a few guards and blowing up the crematorium before they were wiped out. There were a number of other camp uprisings over the course of the war. In several dozen camps, prisoners organised escapes and managed to join partisan units. Although most of these partisan groups operated in the Soviet Union, Jews also took part in resistance activities in France (playing a significant role in the French resistance), Belgium and the Netherlands. It is estimated that there were more than 30 000 Jewish members of various partisan groups.

**QUESTIONS**

1. Identify examples of resistance by Jews in ghettos.
2. Identify examples of resistance by Jews in extermination camps.
3. What other examples of resistance in the occupied territories were Jews involved in?

## Himmler's order of 19 July 1942

This order identified the deadline of 31 December 1942 as the final date for the Jewish population to be deported from the General Government area.

I herewith direct the resettlement of the entire Jewish population from the General Government be carried out and concluded by December 31, 1942. On December 31, 1942 no persons of Jewish origin may be present in the General Government, except for those now staying in the assembly camps in Warsaw, Cracow, Czenstochau, Radom, or Lublin [all ghettos]. All other work projects utilising Jewish labour must have been completed by then or, if this is not possible, must be moved to the assembly camp.

These measures are essential for accomplishing the required ethnic segregation of races and peoples in accordance with the pending New Order of Europe, but also with a view to the security and integrity of the German Reich and its spheres of interest. Any violation of this rule endangers peace and order in the entire territory that is of interest to Germany.

For all these reasons a complete cleaning-up process is necessary and must be carried through. Anticipated failure to meet deadlines must be reported to me in time so that I can remedy the situation as soon as possible. All requests by other administrative agencies for changes or exemptions must be submitted to me personally.

Himmler's order of 19 July 1942

**QUESTIONS**

1. What does Himmler's order make clear some Jews were being forced to do in the General Government area?
2. After 31 December 1942, where did Jews need to be to remain in the General Government area?
3. What are the reasons Himmler states for this measure?
4. Why were the Jews being moved to the ghettos, and for what purpose?
5. If some Jews had been employed in various war-related industries, what impact might their deportation have had on the German war effort?

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Bundesarchiv bild-183-B10921

**SOURCE 5.9** French police organising Jewish deportations in France, August 1941.

## Transportation

The transportation experience for the Jewish deportees was horrific. Families were usually separated and as many as 150 people crammed into closed freight cars without food, water or toilet facilities. Sometimes hundreds died en route: suffocated, dehydrated or trampled to death. Anyone trying to escape from the trains was shot. On a typical day, transports carrying as many as 25 000 Jews made their way to the death camps.

Once the transports arrived, the camp authorities aimed to kill all but a few of the deportees within two hours. Efforts were made to deceive the Jews up to the last moment. At Treblinka, the authorities created a fake train station to maintain the notion that the place was merely a transit camp. Large signs indicated such nonexistent amenities as a restaurant and ticket office. The deportees, save a few selected to work, were usually given a welcoming speech, reassuring them that they had arrived at a transit camp, from which they would be sent to the Ukraine. Males and females were then separated and herded into barracks to undress. Women and girls had their hair shorn, supposedly to stop the spread of head lice. In reality, the hair was used for several purposes, including making socks for U-boat crews. Then, the victims (usually the men first) were forced to run down the 'tube', urged on by guards wielding whips and clubs, to the building signed 'Baths and Inhalation Rooms' (the entrance to the 'bathhouse' at Treblinka was flanked by pots of geraniums.) The victims were then pushed into tiled chambers with fake shower nozzles.

The Korherr Report

At Treblinka, after the initial three small gas chambers proved insufficient, larger ones were constructed that could murder 3000 people in three hours, or 12 000–15 000 people in a 14-hour day. Once the gas chambers were full, the heavy door was closed and a diesel engine pumped in carbon monoxide gas. After 30 minutes, the engine was switched off, the doors opened, and the Jewish ***Sonderkommando*** ('death brigade') had the job of knocking out the gold teeth of the dead before clearing the chambers. Initially, the bodies were dumped in enormous burial ditches. However, the burial process soon proved inadequate. Eventually, the camp authorities found that cremation was a much more efficient method of disposing of the dead. At Treblinka, bodies were placed on steel girders over enormous open fires that were kept burning continuously.

***Sonderkommando***
Jews used in the killing process, who themselves were murdered after a few months

### Auschwitz

Auschwitz-Birkenau was the longest running and is the most infamous death camp. It was the largest of all the Nazi camps and the one that killed the most people – somewhere between 1.1 and 1.5 million people. Around 90 per cent of these were Jewish; approximately one in six Jews killed in the Holocaust died at the camp. Those deported to Auschwitz included 150 000 Poles, 23 000 Romani and Sinti (Gypsies) and 15 000 Soviet POWs. Whereas the Operation Reinhard camps were designed to kill the Jews of Poland, Auschwitz primarily became the centre for killing the Jews of Europe.

Roma and Sinti

At Auschwitz-Birkenau, as transports arrived at the platform, an SS doctor, with a simple wave of the hand, decided who was fit and unfit. The fit were sentenced to hard labour in the Auschwitz labour camp. The unfit – the old, sick, children and mothers with young children – were condemned to immediate death in the gas chambers. On average, only about 30 per cent of each transport was seen



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as fit for work. At its peak, the Auschwitz labour camp had about 150 000 inmates.

The killing apparatus at Birkenau changed somewhat over time. In the summer of 1942, a new complex with four killing centres was built, each containing under one roof all the facilities for the extermination process, from undressing through gassing to cremation. The four centres contained a total of six gas chambers and 14 ovens for cremating up to 8000 corpses a day. On reaching Birkenau, the victims were usually addressed in a friendly way and asked to undress quickly so they could take a shower. After undressing, they were herded into a gas chamber, the steel doors were closed and gas pellets emptied into the chamber through vents in the ceiling.

Getty Images/Galerie Bilderwelt

**SOURCE 5.10** Jews undergoing selection on the ramp at Auschwitz-Birkenau, 1944. Visible in the background is the entrance to the camp. Veteran inmates are helping the newcomers.

## Himmler explains the Holocaust

In October 1943, in Posen in occupied Poland, Heinrich Himmler made two speeches to the higher leadership of the SS in which he spoke privately but openly about the Holocaust for the first time. In the first speech, on 4 October, Himmler acknowledged that what the Germans were doing to the Jews was a crime when he said that the Holocaust 'is a glorious chapter that has not and will not be spoken of'.[5] His second speech, on 6 October, justified the killing of women and children. Delivered to an audience of Reichsleiters, Gauleiters and other senior party members, including Alfred Rosenberg and Albert Speer, Himmler's speech on 6 October revisited themes from his earlier address.

> I ask of you that that which I say to you in this circle be really only heard and not ever discussed. We were faced with the question: what about the women and children? – I decided to find a clear solution to this problem too. I did not consider myself justified to exterminate the men – in other words, to kill them or have them killed and allow the avengers of our sons and grandsons in the form of their children to grow up. The difficult decision had to be made to have this people disappear from the earth. For the organisation which had to execute this task, it was the most difficult which we had ever had. […] I felt obliged to you, as the most superior dignitary, as the most superior dignitary of the party, this political order, this political instrument of the Führer, to also speak about this question quite openly and to say how it has been. The Jewish question in the countries that we occupy will be solved by the end of this year. Only remainders of odd Jews that managed to find hiding places will be left over.

Himmler speech, 6 October 1943, in Bradley Smith and Agnes Peterson (eds.), *Heinrich Himmler: Geheimreden 1933 bis 1945*, Propyläen Verlag, Frankfurt, 1974, p. 162

### QUESTIONS

1. How does Himmler justify the murder of Jewish women and children?
2. When did Himmler envisage the Jewish question would be solved?
3. What does this extract tell us about Nazi motivation and justification for their actions?
4. As a document, how reliable is this as a source on Nazi motivation?

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## After Operation Reinhard

By the end of 1942, Himmler's goal of exterminating all Polish Jews had been largely achieved; next in line were the Jews from the rest of Europe. In December 1942, Belzec closed its gas chambers and the pace of killing at the other death camps slowed. The new gas chambers at Auschwitz were now considered adequate to kill the rest of Europe's Jews, and August 1943 marked the effective end of Operation Reinhard. By the end of November 1943, all the Operation Reinhard camps had been dismantled and the remaining work Jews shot. The only ones left alive were those working for the German war effort. On Himmler's orders, painstaking efforts were taken to obliterate every trace of the camps: the buildings were razed, the ground ploughed and pine trees planted. By the autumn of 1943, some 500 000 Jews are thought to have died at Belzec, 150 000–200 000 at Sobibor and 900 000–1 200 000 at Treblinka. In a 15-month period (1942 to mid-1943), over 2 million Jews had been murdered. After this period, Jews were predominantly used for slave labour in German war industries, kept in terrible conditions at various satellite labour camps attached to concentration camps. Two exceptions to this were the Italian Jews, whose deportations started only after the overthrow of Mussolini in September 1943, and the Hungarian Jewish population, which was deported after the Germans occupied the country in March 1944. This led to the last terrible killing spree: between May and July 1944, 400 000 Hungarian Jews were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau to be murdered.

### Those who tried to save lives

While survival rates of Jews in Eastern Europe were quite poor, in Western Europe in the occupied territories many individuals, at great risk to their own safety, hid Jews from certain death. While 83 000 French Jews were deported, 200 000 survived, being hidden by their fellow French citizens. In Italy, 8000 Jews were deported, but 35 000 remained in Italy until the end of the war. In Belgium, 24 000 Jews were sent to their deaths, but double this figure were protected.

This was not a uniform pattern, and in other parts of Europe the ratios of the protected to the deported were much worse. In the Netherlands, roughly 106 000 Jews were deported to 20 000 protected. One of the more famous examples was Anne Frank. In July 1942, Anne and her family went into hiding, remaining there until they were denounced and discovered in August 1944. The family was sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Anne and her sister Margot were later taken to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, where both died in early 1945. In Yugoslavia, 60 000 Jews were deported and 12 000 were protected. In Greece, 65 000 were taken to their deaths, with only 12 000 remaining. In Denmark, almost the entire Jewish community of 7550 was saved when the Nazi representative Werner Best tipped off the Jewish community about their impending deportation on 1 October 1943. This allowed their Danish helpers to aid their flight across the sea to Sweden. In other parts of Europe, Jews were afforded protection by their leaders. In Bulgaria, King Boris refused German requests to deport his country's 50 000 Jews, ensuring their survival. The Finns refused to deport their 2000 Jews.

**QUESTIONS**

1. Summarise the examples of resistance against the deportation of the Jews in the occupied territories.
2. Using the above information and Table 5.5 (see page 143), identify in which Western and Eastern European countries Jews had the best and worst chances of survival.



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# The final stage

Beginning in September 1944, as the Soviet armies began to reach Polish territory, the final terrible stage of Nazi anti-Semitic policy was enacted with the death marches. Surviving Jewish slave labourers were evacuated from Auschwitz-Birkenau and other camps and force-marched westwards. Taking place towards the end of 1944 or early 1945, these marches were conducted in appalling winter conditions. The prisoners were treated brutally and were shot by their guards if they were unable to continue; as many as 100 000 died along the way. Some of the prisoners were sent to central Germany to work on huge underground industrial concerns, such as the Dora-Mittelbau factory where V-2 rockets were being manufactured. However, many had no destination and were marched in circular routes until they eventually arrived at one of the Nazis' remaining concentration camps. Here, exhausted, and in overcrowded and disease-ridden conditions, they died in their thousands, often after the arrival of the liberating Allied troops.



**SOURCE 5.11** Jewish children discovered when the Red Army liberated the Auschwitz concentration camp, 27 January 1945. Some of these children had been forced to work; others were survivors of the medical experiments conducted on some prisoners.

**TABLE 5.5** The death toll of the Holocaust by country

| COUNTRY | APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF JEWS KILLED | PERCENTAGE OF COUNTRY'S JEWS KILLED |
|---|---|---|
| Austria | 50 000 | 36 |
| Belgium | 25 000 | 35 |
| Belorussia | 245 000 | 65 |
| Bohemia/Moravia | 80 000 | 89 |
| Bulgaria | 11 400 | 14 |
| Denmark | 60 | 1.3 |
| Estonia | 1 500 | 35 |
| France | 90 000 | 26 |
| Germany | 130 000 | 55 |
| Great Britain | 130 | -- |
| Greece | 65 000 | 80 |
| Hungary | 450 000 | 70 |
| Italy | 7 500 | 20 |
| Latvia | 70 000 | 77 |
| Lithuania | 220 000 | 94 |
| Luxembourg | 1 950 | 50 |
| The Netherlands | 106 000 | 75 |
| Norway | 870 | 55 |
| Poland | 2 900 000 | 88 |
| Russia | 107 000 | 11 |
| Romania | 270 000 | 33 |
| Slovakia | 71 000 | 80 |
| Ukraine | 900 000 | 60 |
| Yugoslavia | 60 000 | 80 |
| **Total** | **5862 410** | |

Judith Tydor Baumel and Walter Laqueur, *The Holocaust Encyclopaedia*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2001, pp. 54,145. Reproduced with permission of the Licensor through PLSclear

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## Historians and the Holocaust in occupied territories

### DAN STONE

> Throughout Western Europe, the model of a regime that was anti-Semitic but not actively murderous was more or less followed elsewhere, though only in Norway and France does one see collaborationist regimes that eagerly set about dealing with the Jews. Whilst the various types of regimes in Nazi-occupied Western Europe identified and rounded up Jews, they were not killing them themselves. Nor would they have been without the occupation. Nevertheless, when French and Dutch fascists argued for the cleansing of their countries of Jews, it is clear that collaboration in genocide was widespread. In the Netherlands, despite considerable antipathy towards the German occupiers, the Dutch police were important to the deportation of the Jews, 75% of whom (from a total of 140 000) were murdered. This may have been because of a 'conformist authoritarian social stance' among the police rather than any real ideological support for Nazism, but the outcome was the same.
>
> Dan Stone, *Histories of the Holocaust*, OUP, New York, 2010, p. 42

**QUESTIONS**

1. Which two Western European countries were most active in assisting the Holocaust?
2. What were the outcomes for their Jewish populations?
3. Why was assisting in the Holocaust in a way 'easy' for Western European countries?

### JONATHAN C FRIEDMAN

> Although anti-Jewish legislation and administrative measures were very homogenous [consistent] in the Netherlands, Belgium and France, and Western Europe as a whole was treated as a single target area by the RSHA [SS Central Office], the process and the outcome of anti-Jewish persecution differed significantly in the focal countries. While 25 percent of the Jews living in France in 1940 were eventually deported and mostly murdered, the rate of victimization was considerably higher in Belgium (43 percent) and especially in the Netherlands (76 percent). Two factors essentially account for these differences: the structure of the respective occupation regimes, and the action strategy of the perpetrators and their helpers connected to it.
>
> In France, a shifting pattern of collaboration and non-compliance by French authorities characterised the implementation of the Holocaust. In the first phase of the German occupation, stretching from mid-1940 until mid-1942, the Vichy government was eager to defend or even regain administrative jurisdiction, and was ready to extradite to the Germans foreign nationals or 'stateless' individuals among the Jews living on French soil. When, in July and August 1942, the deportations of tens of thousands of Jews triggered fierce protest by the Catholic clergy, itself a crucial pillar of the Vichy regime, the Vichy government asked for the temporary suspension of the deportation plan, which Himmler granted in September 1942. The turning tide of the war in 1942/43 only bolstered Vichy reluctance. When Petain, the [Vichy] head of state, in August 1943 refused to sign a law allowing for mass denaturalisation of Jews and their subsequent deportation, the Final Solution finally faltered.
>
> Jonathan C Friedman, *The Routledge History of the Holocaust*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2012, pp. 229–30

➜



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## ➜ YITZHAK ARAD

> The Holocaust in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union was in many aspects different from other areas of Europe under German occupation: The ideological/propaganda aspect of the attack on the Soviet Union stressed its objectives as waging war and destroying Jewish Bolshevism. In no other episode of German aggression against other countries in Europe were Jews mentioned as an excuse for the aggression. The Soviet Jews were the first to be physically and totally annihilated. As a rule, they were shot in locations close to their homes and not deported to death camps and gas chambers to which most of Europe's Jews were brought. This method of mass murder required the direct and active participation of large numbers of Germans and local collaborators. The German army and the military administration were directly involved in anti-Jewish policies and acts of annihilation. Tens of thousands of local collaborators – civilians and police – participated, and in many cases they were the major or even the sole force in the extermination actions. The local populations, contrary to other places in Europe, witnessed and were aware of the annihilation of their Jewish neighbours, which was carried out almost openly before them. The percentage of Soviet Jews who survived the German occupation was the lowest in comparison with the other occupied countries. In addition to the large number of Jewish victims, one of the results of the Holocaust in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union was the total destruction and disappearance of thousands of small Jewish communities in townships ...
>
> Yitzhak Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, 2009, pp. 530–1

### QUESTIONS

1. How was the Holocaust fundamentally different in Eastern Europe as opposed to Western Europe?
2. Why was the Holocaust different for collaborators and bystanders in Eastern Europe?
3. What was the impact of the Holocaust on Eastern European Jews and their communities?

**TABLE 5.6** What happened to the main perpetrators

| | ROLE | FATE | DATE OF DEATH |
|---|---|---|---|
| Heinrich Himmler | Reichsfuhrer-SS | Captured and committed suicide | 23 May 1945 |
| Reinhard Heydrich | Chaired the Wannsee Conference | Assassinated by Czech agents | 4 June 1942 |
| Adolf Eichmann | In charge of Jewish resettlement | Escaped to Argentina, captured and tried in Israel, sentenced to death | 31 May 1962 |
| Oswald Pohl | In charge of the SS Main Economic and Administrative Office | Tried and executed | 8 June 1951 |
| Hans Frank | Leader of General Government area of occupied Poland | Tried and executed at Nuremberg | 16 October 1946 |
| Alfred Rosenberg | German governor of 'Occupied Territories East' | Tried and executed at Nuremberg | 16 October 1946 |
| Albert Forster | Gauleiter of Danzig-West Prussia | Tried and executed in Poland | 28 February 1952 |
| Arthur Greiser | Gauleiter of the Wartegau | Tried and executed in Poland | 21 July 1946 |

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| | ROLE | FATE | DATE OF DEATH |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Einsatzgruppen* commanders** | | | |
| Dr Franz Walter Stahlecker | Commander of *Einsatzgruppe A* | Killed by Soviet partisans | 23 March 1942 |
| Arthur Nebe | Commander of *Einsatzgruppe B* | Involved in 20 July 1944 attempted assassination of Hitler, executed by Nazis | 21 March 1945 |
| Dr Otto Rasch | Commander of *Einsatzgruppe C* | Arrested but ill health prevented him being tried | 1 November 1948 |
| Otto Ohlendorf | Commander of *Einsatzgruppe D* | Tried and executed | 7 June 1951 |
| **Death camp commanders and personnel** | | | |
| Rudolf Höss | Commandant of Auschwitz Death Camp (May 1940 – November 1943) | Tried and executed in Poland | 16 April 1947 |
| Arthur Liebehenschel | Commandant of Auschwitz Death Camp (November 1943 – May 1944) | Tried and executed in Poland | 24 January 1948 |
| Richard Baer | Commandant of Auschwitz Death Camp (May 1944 – January 1945) | Fled at the end of the war; arrested in 1960, died before trial | 17 June 1963 |
| Christian Wirth | Commandant of Belzec Death Camp (1941–42) | Killed by Yugoslav partisans | 16 May 1944 |
| Herbert Lange | Commandant of Chelmno Death Camp (1941–42) | Killed in the Battle of Berlin | 20 April 1945 |
| Hermann Florstedt | Commandant of Majdanek Death Camp (1942–43) | Arrested and executed by SS for corruption | 15 April 1945 |
| Franz Reichleitner | Commandant of Sobibor Death Camp | Killed by Italian partisans | 3 January 1944 |
| Franz Stangl | Commandant of Treblinka Death Camp | Escaped to Brazil; brought back to Germany, tried and given life in 1967; died in prison | 28 June 1971 |
| Josef Mengele | Chief Camp Physician for Auschwitz II | Escaped to South America | 7 February 1979 |

# Conclusion

At the end of the war, there was general shock at the uncovering of the German extermination plan against the Jews. The Soviet liberation of Auschwitz as the only surviving extermination camp – all the others had been destroyed – allowed the Allies to piece together the picture of the mechanics of death created by the Germans. However, fully aware of the enormity of their crime, many involved in the Nazi extermination process went underground at the end of the war. Some were able to assume new identities, while others were assisted and escaped to South America. A few were too well-known to disappear and were tried before the various Nuremberg trials or were returned to the countries where their crimes were perpetrated, such as Poland, for trial. A number of these individuals in subsequent trials were treated rather leniently, receiving death sentences, later commuted to prison terms, then released by 1951. As late as 1961, a number of individuals who had initially been able to go underground were discovered and tried before the German courts. Table 5.6 shows the fates of those mainly responsible.



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# Chapter summary

- As soon as the Nazis took power, they began to persecute the Jewish population of Germany.
- The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 removed citizens' rights and banned marriages between Jews and Germans.
- In 1938, a nationwide pogrom called *Kristallnacht* destroyed Jewish property and killed hundreds of Jews.
- The German invasion of Poland in 1939 brought 2 million Jews under Nazi control. The Germans established ghettos in major Polish cities.
- After the invasion of Russia began, the Nazis developed a policy of systematically shooting Jews from the Soviet Union.
- At the Wannsee Conference in January 1942, the Nazi hierarchy decided on a mass extermination plan on an industrial scale.
- Under Operation Reinhard, several death camps were established and the systematic murder of the Jews began.
- After November 1943, a number of death camps were closed. Auschwitz, the last remaining extermination camp, was captured by the Red Army in January 1945.
- By the end of the war, nearly 6 million Jews had been murdered by the Nazis.

## Further resources


- Browning, Christopher R, 'Nazi Ghettoization Policy in Poland: 1939–41', *Central European History*, Volume 19, Issue 4, December 1986, pp. 343–68
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- Neville, Peter, *The Holocaust*, CUP, Cambridge, 1999
- Steinberg, Jonathan, *All or Nothing: The Axis and the Holocaust 1941–1943*, Routledge, London, 2002


## Endnotes

1 United States National Archives and Records Service, *Einsatzgruppen Trial, Nuremberg, Germany, 1947–1948*, US Government Printing, Washington, 1978, p. 10.

2 Michael MacQueen, 'Nazi Policy towards the Jews in the Reichskommissariat Ostland, June–December 1941: From White Terror to Holocaust in Lithuania', in Zvi Gitelman, *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1998, p. 97.

3 Omer Bartov, *Holocaust: Origins, Implementation, Aftermath*, Routledge, London, 2000, p. 131.

4 House of the Wannsee Conference, *The Wannsee Conference and the Genocide of the European Jews*, Gedenk- und Bildungsstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz Berlin, 2007, p. 84.

5 Heinrich Himmler, Posen speech, 4 October 1943, International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, 14 November 1945 – 1 October 1946, Volume 29, The Tribunal Nuremberg, 19947-9, p. 123.

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# CHAPTER REVIEW

## CHAPTER REVISION QUESTIONS

1. What initial strategy did the Nazis adopt towards Polish Jews?
2. Who were the *Einsatzgruppen* and what role did they play in Poland?
3. What were all Polish Jews forced to wear as of November 1939?
4. What are ghettos and when did they become part of Nazi anti-Semitic policy?
5. What were the conditions like in ghettos in Poland?
6. Where were Jews encountered in significant numbers in Western Europe? Initially, how were these Jews treated by the Nazis?
7. How were the *Einsatzgruppen* units organised for the invasion of Russia? Initially, what orders were they given?
8. How did the *Einsatzgruppen* killing change after August 1941?
9. How did some local civilians react towards the local Jews when the Nazi forces arrived?
10. What was the situation faced by the Nazis in relation to the Jews in late 1941?
11. What was the purpose of the Wannsee Conference in January 1942?
12. What were created to facilitate Operation Reinhard?
13. How was the Holocaust organised and carried out?
14. How and when were Jews from across Europe transported to the death camps?
15. What were the conditions for the Jews during their transportation?
16. Explain the killing process carried out at the extermination camps.
17. How many Jews were killed at the various death camps and over what period of time?
18. What were the experiences of the Jewish survivors during the final phase of the war?
19. What was the impact of Nazi racial policies on civilians during the European war?
20. To what extent did the experiences of the Holocaust vary across the occupied territories?

## EXTENDED-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

21. Assess the impact of the Nazi racial policies on civilians during the European war.
22. 'Nazi race policy fundamentally changed after January 1942.' To what extent is this statement accurate?
23. To what extent does German foreign policy explain the nature of the Holocaust? Refer to the following source in your response.

> "Anti-Semitism was also rooted in the Nazis' long-term ambition of national expansion and domination."
>
> Roderick Stackelberg, *The Routledge Companion to Nazi Germany*, Routledge, London, 2007, p. 154



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06

# End of the conflict

Red Army officer holding a bust of Hitler after the fall of Berlin, May 1945

Yevgeny Khaldei/Everett Collection/Bridgeman Images

## STUDENTS WILL INVESTIGATE

- the D-day landings and their contribution to Allied victory
- the Russian victories on the Eastern Front, 1944–45
- the reasons for Nazi defeat
- the nature and importance of the Nuremberg war crimes trials.

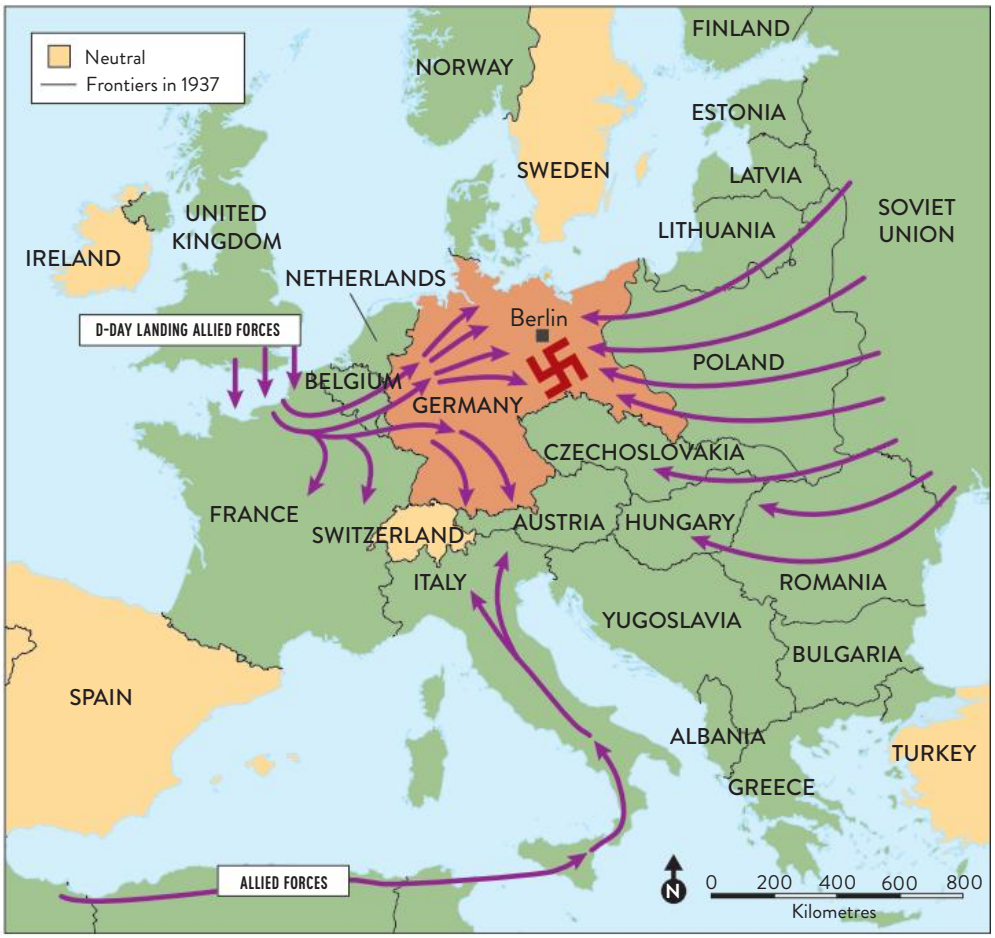
Modern History syllabus

# Introduction

The beginning of 1944 heralded some ominous signs for the Axis forces. The loss of North Africa in May 1943 was compounded by the invasion of Italy in September. On the Eastern Front, over the course of 1943, the Soviets had proved that they could defeat German offensives at Stalingrad and Kursk, but had yet to prove they could beat them in attack. At the start of 1944, the Germans could only muster 166 divisions in Russia, their lowest number of available divisions since February 1942. However, in early 1944 the war was far from over. In Italy, the initially slow progress made by the Allies along the Italian peninsula showed that the campaign would be long and time-consuming. In Russia, the Germans' creation of the Panther–Wotan defensive line gave hope that a defensive war could still be won against the Red Army. This hope was buoyed by the fact that it was in 1944 that Germany was to reach its peak in war production. In that year, Germany produced more tanks, aircraft and artillery than it ever had before.

Animated map: the Italian campaign

However, 1944 was to prove crucial to the outcome of the war. By late June 1944 – after the Allied invasion of Normandy and dramatic success of the Soviet summer offensive – it had become clear on both the Eastern Front and the Western Front that the Third Reich was doomed. The final year of the war was marked by increasing levels of terror on the German home front and desperate but hopeless fighting on the front line. The war ended with the comprehensive defeat of Germany and the complete destruction of the Third Reich. The general anger with how the world had been plunged into war, as well as the full exposés of the terrible crimes of the Third Reich, led to the Allies instigating the International Military Tribunal (IMT) at Nuremberg as a means of holding the guilty to account.




**SOURCE 6.1** The defeat of Nazi Germany.



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**Timeline**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1944 | **27 January** | Siege of Leningrad ends |
| | **4 June** | Allied troops liberate Rome |
| | **6 June** | D-Day landing of the Allies at Normandy |
| | **22 June–19 August** | Red Army launches Operation Bagration to liberate Belarus |
| | **20 July** | Assassination attempt on Hitler at his headquarters |
| | **25 August** | Paris is liberated |
| | **September** | German war production reaches its peak |
| | **12 September** | Finland concludes an armistice with the Soviet Union, leaving the Axis partnership |
| | **17–25 September** | Allies launch Operation Market Garden to try to capture the Ruhr; it is a total failure |
| | **November** | Auschwitz ceases to function as a death camp |
| | **16 December** | Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes Forest, the last German offensive in the west |
| | **December** | Budapest is surrounded |
| 1945 | **16 January** | Hitler returns to Berlin for the last time |
| | **17 January** | Warsaw is liberated from the Germans |
| | **27 January** | Auschwitz is captured by the Red Army, liberating the surviving prisoners |
| | **4–11 February** | Yalta Conference takes place in the Crimea; decisions on the postwar plan for Germany |
| | **13–15 February** | Massive Allied air raid on Dresden, conducted by the USAAF and the RAF |
| | **7 March** | US Army units cross the Rhine River at Remagen |
| | **12 April** | President Roosevelt dies; Vice-President Harry S Truman replaces him |
| | **16 April** | Soviet offensive against Berlin begins |
| | **30 April** | Hitler commits suicide in his Berlin bunker; two days later, Berlin surrenders |
| | **8 May** | Wehrmacht High Command signs the instrument of unconditional surrender, ending the war in Europe (VE Day) |

# D-Day and the liberation of France

The D-Day landing (the landing component was codenamed Operation Neptune and the Battle of Normandy was codenamed Overlord) was the Allied invasion of north-west Europe in June 1944. It provided the starting point for the Allies to liberate Western Europe from four years of German occupation. It also provided the Russians with the long-demanded 'second front' to help take the pressure off the Red Army battling the might of the Wehrmacht in the east. From this point on,

Operation Overlord

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with the Italian Front in the picture, the Germans were effectively fighting a three-front war. The D-Day landing began an offensive in the west that eventually ended with the invasion of Germany from the west.

## D-Day planning and forces

The invasion of France had been in the planning stages for years; important lessons about sea-borne invasion had been learnt, and preparations and resources available for D-Day far exceeded any previous Allied operation. Allied planning had focused on where best to pierce the Atlantic Wall system of German coastal defences. Stretching from northern Norway to the Franco-Spanish frontier, it consisted of some formidable defensive positions, including earthworks, concrete bunkers and gun emplacements. However, not all of these defences had been well-devised. Enormous resources had been spent on creating bunkers and gun emplacements on the German-held Channel Islands; these the Allies simply bypassed.

The German forces in France were under the command of Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt. At his disposal were Panzer Group West under General Leo Geyr von Schweppenburg and Army Group B under Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. The German forces available varied greatly between units. Their infantry divisions and Luftwaffe ground forces were depleted but usually consisted of experienced troops, while various 'static' defence formations (manning Atlantic Wall forts) were far less capable. The Germans also used ***Osttruppen***, troops from the Soviet Union who had been press-ganged into German service. One-sixth of the German 7th Army (part of Army Group B) was made up of these troops. More potent were the nine panzer divisions and one panzergrenadier division in France, consisting of over 1400 tanks and self-propelled guns. Five of these panzer divisions were thinly spread along the German defences. The remaining four were held in a reserve that could only be ordered into battle with Hitler's personal approval.

***Osttruppen***
Eastern Europeans serving in the German armed forces

The Germans did not know whether the Allies intended to land at a port or at a beach, but believed that a port was the preferred option. They presumed that the most likely landing point was Calais; it had a port and was at the narrowest point of the English Channel. However, as a consequence of this uncertainty the Germans had to spread their meagre resources to defend the entire French coastline. The German leadership was also in disagreement over the best way to defend their position. Both Rundstedt and Schweppenburg wanted to allow the Allies to move inland, where a German armoured counteroffensive would then destroy them. On the other hand, Rommel's experience of Allied tactical air power in North Africa made him believe that once on French territory the Allies would be so well supported that they would never be removed.

The Allies had selected the Normandy coast as the main landing point. This was preferred because its beaches were close to English ports, it was in easy range of Allied aircraft, and it was close to the potentially useful port of Cherbourg. British General Bernard Montgomery was put in charge of land operations, while Lieutenant Generals Omar N Bradley (US First Army) and Sir Miles Dempsey (British Second Army) took charge of the actual assault troops. The overall commander was US General Dwight Eisenhower.

The resources available to the Allies were enormous. The Allies intended to land over 150 000 troops on the beaches on the first day. In addition to this, three whole divisions of paratroopers were to be dropped to protect the flanks of the landing troops, create strongpoints and hold up German attempts to rush reinforcements to the beaches. Allied air supremacy took the form of 4029 aircraft assigned to operations in Normandy, with another 5514 aircraft allocated to bombing and defence. The Allied tactical air force was particularly formidable. Republic P-47 Thunderbolts and Hawker Typhoons armed with bombs and rockets were ready to destroy German armour. This contrasted with the 570 Luftwaffe planes available in France and the Low Countries. The invasion fleet alone numbered nearly 5000 vessels. Without the possibility of landing at a harbour, two purpose-built Mulberry



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portable harbours were built and floated across the English Channel. More than 50 decommissioned vessels (called 'gooseberries' or 'corncobs') were sunk off the Normandy beaches to form breakwaters to allow smoother transfers of men and equipment to the shore. To make certain that the Allied vehicles did not run out of petrol, 130-kilometre-long pipelines, known as PLUTO, were run across the English Channel to France to enable a constant fuel supply. Eventually, 17 such pipelines supplied the Allies as they pushed the Germans out of France. To fool the Germans into thinking that the invasion target was Calais, the Allies created a phantom fighting force in south-east England. They broadcast fictitious radio transmissions, built dummy aircraft and landing craft – painted canvases pulled over steel frames – and inflatable tanks to fool German aerial reconnaissance. The Germans were effectively deceived about both the landing spot and the timing; Field Marshal Rommel was on leave when the Allies landed.

## 6 June 1944

After a nervous 24-hour delay due to poor weather, beginning at 04:55 hours on 6 June 1944, American troops assaulted what was codenamed 'Utah' beach. The second American assault took place at 'Omaha' beach. These were followed by the Anglo-Canadian assaults on 'Gold' and then 'Juno' beaches, before the British landed at 'Sword' beach at 07:25 hours. The landings were a success; they had cost the lives of 2500 Allied troops on the first day. The Americans fared the worst at Omaha, but eventually the German defences were breached and the Allies began to move inland.

World History Archive/Alamy Stock Photo

**SOURCE 6.2** Landing ships delivering supplies on Omaha beach. The array of Allied equipment is on display: landing craft, supply ships, barrage balloons, armoured and transport vehicles in the hundreds.

The German ability to launch an effective response to the invasion was thwarted by Hitler. Hours before the Allies landed, noting Allied movements towards Caen, Rundstedt attempted to move two divisions of German armour to reinforce the German defences there. However, as they were reserves, the armoured units could only be moved with Hitler's personal approval. The day of the landings he slept until midday and did not give his approval until mid-afternoon, by which time it was too late. The Germans found it extremely difficult to move their forces because of the presence of Allied fighter-bombers. Compounding their problems were the activities of the French resistance, which coordinated its actions to hinder the arrival of the German reserves.

Animated map: the D-Day landings

## Falaise Pocket

By the end of the fifth day (11 June), the Allies had landed a total of 326 547 troops, 54 186 vehicles and 104 428 tons of supplies. Even though they had significant material advantages – 20 to one in tanks, 25 to one in aircraft – the Allies had difficulty dislodging the German defenders. As a result, they relied on air strikes to hammer the Germans into submission. The British did not take Caen as quickly as anticipated (it was taken on 6 August), and Cherbourg was not captured until 30 June and could not be used as a port until several weeks later due to damage. A plan was devised to try to trap the German defenders in a great pocket. Thus, as some of US General George Patton's troops struck

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out towards the Seine River, some units were ordered to wheel to the north, where they were to link up with the Anglo-Canadians and Polish units attacking south, eventually encircling the Germans in what became known as the 'Falaise Pocket'. This coordination in the Allied command was contrasted by the Germans. After trying to countermand a Hitler 'no retreat' order, Field Marshal von Rundstedt was removed from command of the west on 1 July 1944. Two weeks later, the other senior German commander, Field Marshal Rommel, was severely injured when his staff car was attacked by Allied fighter-bombers.

Getty Images/ullstein bild

**SOURCE 6.3** German infantry during the Battle of Normandy take shelter from Allied aircraft.

Getty Images/Galerie Bilderwelt

**SOURCE 6.4** The second phase of the D-Day landing. Canadian troops under the protection of a Sherman tank move through the town of Falaise, Normandy, 17 August 1944.

Getty Images/Photo12/UIG

**SOURCE 6.5** German Panther tank knocked out by Allied air strike, Normandy.

Before the Falaise Pocket was closed on 21 August, 40 000 Germans escaped, a further 10 000 were killed and 50 000 captured. The German Army in Normandy ceased to exist. Meanwhile, Patton's troops had continued to charge eastwards, and on 20 August had crossed the Seine at Mantes-Gassicourt. After Falaise, things kept getting worse for the Germans. Between 21 and 29 August, the Allies estimated that the Wehrmacht lost a further 14 000 vehicles and 665 tanks. Indicating the multitude of their difficulties, some of these were due to enemy action but most were abandoned due to lack of fuel.

## The liberation of France

The Allies continued to overstretch the German defenders. On 15 August 1944, in Operation Dragoon, they landed 150 000 troops on the southern coast of France to seize more ports and apply more pressure on the Germans. The threat of being caught in a giant pincer movement created a rapid German retreat. Despite Hitler's orders that it should be destroyed, on 25 August 1944 Paris was liberated by the Allies. After this, the Germans were pushed back across the former battlefields of the

WS
The experience of D-day



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Great War. By September 1944, the Allies reached the German frontier and its Siegfried defensive line. A huge Allied airborne and ground offensive named Operation Market Garden was launched in September 1944, designed to capture a number of bridges in the Netherlands and push the Allied forces into Germany by the end of the year. Landing over 40 000 men via parachute or glider, it represented the largest airborne operation of the war. While the Allied paratroopers captured a number of the bridges, they encountered more German resistance than anticipated and were beaten back. However, this German victory was short lived. On 21 October, two weeks after the failure of Operation Market Garden, Aachen became the first German city to fall to the Allies.

1. Where did the Germans think the Allies would launch their invasion?
2. What advantages did the Allies have over the German forces in France in June 1944?
3. What strategic options did the Germans have to prevent the Allied landings?
4. Why were the D-Day landings successful?
5. What were the major issues for the German Army Group Centre in terms of men, equipment and leadership in June 1944?

# Russian counteroffensives, 1944

After Kursk in July 1943, overwhelmed by superior numbers and equipment, the Germans began a fighting retreat, giving up much of what they had captured since June 1941. The battles of Kharkov (August 1943), Smolensk (August to October 1943) and Kiev (November 1943) were all significant Russian victories even though they all cost the Soviets more in troops and equipment than the Germans. At the Battle of Kharkov, the Soviets lost 85 000 troops, compared to the Germans' 11 000. At Smolensk, the Red Army lost in the vicinity of 450 000 troops, while the Germans lost between 100 000 and 200 000 men. In spite of the higher number of Soviet losses, German morale on the Eastern Front had deteriorated significantly by early 1944.[1]

On 3 November 1943, Hitler (Führer Directive 51) ordered that all attention be turned towards the threat of the Allied invasion of France. Thereafter, further resources to the desperately in need Eastern Front were temporarily halted, Hitler determining that 'In the East, the vastness of the space will, as a last resort, permit a loss of territory even on a major scale, without suffering a mortal blow to Germany's chance for survival'.[2] The German retreat had shortened their supply and communication lines, but they still had to defend a front line that stretched for nearly 1500 kilometres. The Wehrmacht retreated to the formidable-sounding Panther–Wotan defensive line; while much hope was placed on this defensive position, not much effort had been put into constructing it. In addition to this, the German infantrymen of 1944 were not the equal of those of 1941. To make up the huge losses they had suffered since 1943, the Germans had increasingly turned to recruiting *Volksdeutsche* 'ethnic' Germans from Hungary, Bulgaria and elsewhere, who happened to have German blood but tended to be less committed to the Nazi cause. German commanders also changed on the Eastern Front. In March 1944, Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, who had devised the German attack in the west in May 1940, was fired and never reemployed. In his place commanders rose up who either exhibited extreme brutality towards their own troops, such as Field Marshal Ferdinand Schörner (called 'bloody Ferdinand' for hanging deserters from trees and lampposts to deter others), or were known for their ability to shore up the front with limited resources, such as Field Marshal Walter Model and General Gotthard Heinrici.

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On Christmas Eve 1943, the first of a succession of Russian offensives fell on the German defences. The Dnieper–Carpathian Offensive (24 December 1943 – 17 April 1944) involved 2.5 million Soviet troops with the aim of liberating the eastern Ukraine and cutting off the German troops on the Crimean Peninsula. In the north, after a 900-day siege that cost the lives of over 1 million civilians, the Soviets launched the Leningrad–Novgorod Offensive (14 January – 1 March 1944), which finally relieved Leningrad on 27 January 1944. The Vyborg–Petrozavodsk Offensive (9 June – 9 August 1944) was aimed at the Finnish forces north of Leningrad. Its strategic objective was to force Finland out of the war, which it succeeded in doing on 19 September 1944.

## The significance of the Russian campaign

Table 6.1 shows overall Soviet and German tank production and losses on the Eastern Front during 1941–45. Looking at the table, while the Soviets had a significant advantage in tank numbers in 1941, the majority of these tanks were obsolete and poorly deployed. However, Soviet tank production, even in 1941, was superior to the Germans' by two to one. This meant that once the Russians began to build tanks that were equivalent to those produced by the Germans, such as the T-34, the production facilities already existed to create them in greater numbers. From 1942 onwards, Soviet tank production far outstripped that of the Germans.

**TABLE 6.1** Soviet and German tank production and losses on the Eastern Front, 1941–45

| TANK STRENGTH | 1941 | 1942 | 1943 | 1944 | 1945 | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Soviet tank strength | 22600 | 7700 | 20600 | 21100 | 25400 | 97400 |
| German tank strength | 5262 | 4896 | 5648 | 5266 | 6284 | 27356 |
| **TANK PRODUCTION** | **1941** | **1942** | **1943** | **1944** | **1945** | **TOTAL** |
| Soviet tank production | 6274 | 24639 | 19959 | 16975 | 4384 | 72231 |
| German tank production | 3256 | 4278 | 5966 | 9161 | 1098 | 23759 |
| **TANK LOSSES** | **1941** | **1942** | **1943** | **1944** | **1945** | **TOTAL** |
| Soviet tank losses | 20500 | 15000 | 22400 | 16900 | 8700 | 83500 |
| German tank losses | 2758 | 2648 | 6362 | 6434 | 7382 | 25584 |

* German tank strength represents Germany's entire strength, not just the Eastern Front. For example, in July 1944, the Germans had 1500 tanks in France as well as several hundred in Italy and the Balkans. The Soviets had about 3000 tanks stationed in the Far East during the entire war.

David Glantz, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, 1995, pp. 293–302

### QUESTIONS

1. When war on the Eastern Front began, who had the advantage in tanks?
2. When was Soviet tank strength at its lowest? How did this compare to German tank strength at the same stage?
3. When did Soviet and German tank production peak?
4. When did Soviet and German tank losses reach their peak?



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# The Soviet summer offensive, Operation Bagration

Coordinated to coincide with the Western Allies' landings in Normandy, the Red Army launched its most impressive and far-reaching summer offensive, codenamed Operation Bagration. This offensive began on 22 June 1944, the third anniversary of the start of Operation Barbarossa. Whereas earlier in the war Stalin dominated policy and forced ineffective generals into adopting disastrous plans, by 1944 he had largely ceded control of the military operations to his generals. Operation Bagration was created by General Konstantin Rokossovsky.[3] His plan was for the Red Army to completely destroy the German forces in Belarus, which would clear the path for the most direct route into Poland and Germany.

## The forces available to the Russians and Germans

The Soviets launched Bagration with 1.7 million troops, 2715 tanks and 1355 assault guns, around six times the German force. Soviet armour now included the up-gunned T34/85 tank (armed with an 85-millimetre cannon), which had narrowed the technological gap with the Germans. The Soviets had significant numerical superiority in the air. The Red Air Force had 5327 aircraft available for Bagration, outnumbering the Germans by over seven to one. These included 1744 Il-2 Sturmovik ground-attack aircraft, which would destroy what German armour could be found. The Soviets could also call on a staggering 10 563 artillery pieces, 2306 Katyusha rocket-launchers and 11 514 mortars.

The Soviets were also aided by a number of factors. Firstly, the Red Army would be attacking into an area containing a partisan force numbering 270 000 men and women. These irregular but well-organised troops made a significant contribution in gathering intelligence and preventing German reserves from reaching the front. Secondly, the Soviets intended to exploit their initial breakthrough with the large numbers of trucks supplied by the United States under the Lend-Lease agreement. These would be crucial in allowing the Soviets to maintain their offensive with supplies of fuel, food and ammunition. It would also allow the Soviets to enact Deep Battle strategy, which meant not only the destruction of the front line of the Germans but also their rear organisation and supply, making difficult the re-establishing of their defensive lines.

Holding the German line was Army Group Centre. This army group was mainly made up of infantry units, consisting of about 400 000 combat troops in total. However, one-third of these troops were newly organised ***Volksdeutsche*** troops. In addition, there were simply too few of them to man the front. Each mile of the front line was held by 150 soldiers, supported by a few artillery pieces or self-propelled guns. This density of defence was about half what was required. This did not allow the Germans to implement the sort of defence in depth or use of reserves that the Soviets had demonstrated so effectively at Kursk the year before.

***Volksdeutsche***
Ethnic Germans often press-ganged into the German Army

The need for the Germans to choose where to place their armoured reserves illustrates their fundamental problem: that they were still not producing enough tanks and other weapons to meet the demand. On 1 June 1944, the Germans had 4740 tanks and assault guns on the entire Eastern Front, of which Army Group Centre had only 553 (mainly less versatile assault guns).

The Germans completely failed to anticipate the location of the Soviet offensive. The OKW had expected the Soviets to strike further south, into the Ukraine, and so placed their armoured reserves there. This failure of intelligence was due in part to the success of the Soviets in hiding their true plans. Highlighting the new-found capabilities of their military, the Red Army had developed a tactic called ***maskirovka***, essentially meaning 'camouflage'. The Soviets had devised this system to completely fool the Germans as to where they would attack. In the weeks leading up to the offensive, the Soviets only moved their vehicles into position at night and concealed them during the day. Soviet aircraft flew over their own front, checking that their camouflage was not giving away their secret. Radio chatter in other sectors was increased to give the Germans the impression that the attack would happen elsewhere.

***maskirovka***
Soviet term meaning to camouflage a troop build-up

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Getty Images/Sovfoto/UIG

**SOURCE 6.6** Abandoned vehicles of Army Group Centre at a road near Titowka/Bobruisk, Belarus, 28 June 1944. Most of these vehicles were hit by Soviet tactical air strikes.

INTERFOTO/Alamy Stock Photo

**SOURCE 6.7** Sixty thousand German POWs from Army Group Centre were marched through Moscow, 17 July 1944. Immediately after these troops marched through, street cleaners 'purged' the street.

With complete surprise achieved, the Soviet offensive started strongly. After the first few days of the offensive, the Luftwaffe was almost completely absent, allowing the Soviet Air Force to control the battlefield. Despite the hopeless imbalance between the German and Soviet forces, Hitler insisted that all ground was held and any retreat needed his personal approval. He did this by designating pointless towns and hamlets as fortresses or ***festungs*** that had to be held to the 'last man and last bullet'.[4]

Such a strategy did occupy some of the Soviet forces, but very rarely could the Germans hold out for long (due to inability to resupply), while it condemned all the *festung* troops to imprisonment or death. On 28 June, Hitler sacked the commander of Army Group Centre, Field Marshal Ernst Busch, and replaced him with Field Marshal Model. Model did no better, and by mid-August the Russians had cleared all the Germans from Belarus and had gained a foothold in eastern Poland.

## The aftermath of Bagration

By the time this offensive ended on 19 August 1944, Army Group Centre had effectively been destroyed. The loss of Army Group Centre was quite simply Hitler's worst defeat. The Germans lost more troops in the first two weeks of Operation Bagration than they lost in the whole Stalingrad campaign. Seventeen German divisions were obliterated and about 50 others badly mauled, representing a total loss of 25–30 divisions. In human terms, the German Army suffered between 300 000 and 350 000 casualties, of whom about 150 000 were taken prisoner. Soviet casualties were also heavy, totalling 178 507 men killed. In strategic terms, by the end of Operation Bagration the Red Army had recaptured nearly all the Soviet territory that had been lost since 1941 and stood poised on the Vistula River in Poland for the final push to Berlin. Unlike Stalingrad or Kursk, Bagration was also a triumph of the Red Army on the offensive. They had defeated German offensives; now they had staged a highly effective offensive of their own and achieved a huge strategic victory.

***festung***
A fortified position, to be held at all costs

### The von Stauffenberg plot

Bagration was also significant in other ways. While the offensive was under way on 20 July 1944, a small group of German Army officers attached to the conservative resistance led by Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg tried to kill Hitler by detonating a bomb at his headquarters. They then attempted to seize control of the government and have elements of the Nazi Party and SS arrested. They planned to open negotiations with the Allies and try to end the war. Unfortunately, the bomb only injured



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Hitler and the plotters were quickly rounded up, with many lukewarm conspirators changing sides when they realised that Hitler had survived. After perfunctory trials starting on 8 August 1944, the conspirators were executed by strangulation, while many also had their families arrested and sent to concentration camps. In the wake of this, Hitler became even more paranoid and defeats were now blamed on treachery and disloyalty.

Getty Images/ullstein bild

**SOURCE 6.8** Hitler shows the bomb damage to Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, hours after the failed assassination attempt, 20 July 1944.

### The loss of Axis partners

The remaining allies of the Germans began to see that this was the beginning of the end for the Third Reich. Days after the end of Bagration, on 23 August 1944, Romania decided to abandon the Nazi cause, change sides and fight with the Soviets. A few weeks later, on 9 September, a coup d'état in Bulgaria saw it change sides and join the Allies. With the loss of their Finnish allies on 19 September, and the attempt of the Hungarians to sign an armistice with the Soviets on 11 October, Germany now fought on almost completely alone.

## Bagration and Normandy

The links between Bagration and Normandy are many. The coordination of the Allied operations, striking at Germany almost simultaneously, presented the Wehrmacht with an almost impossible task of holding two offensive fronts from one end of its empire to the other. The contrast was in the fighting; certainly the Germans had focused their attention on the defence of France and had significant armour units awaiting the Allied landings. This meant that Allied progress was slower than expected, but they did eventually break out of Normandy and begin the liberation of France. On the other hand, Bagration was a wonderful example of the Red Army using concealment, as they completely fooled the Germans as to where they intended to strike. This made the already significant imbalance between the Red Army and the Wehrmacht in terms of men and equipment seem even worse. The scales of these two battles were significantly different; however, if the Germans did not have to defend Normandy, Bagration probably would have been far less successful or comprehensive.

WS
The importance of the Eastern Front

**TABLE 6.2** Significance of the Russian campaign

| |
|---|
| Drew substantial German resources in men and equipment |
| Allowed the Soviet Union to make a significant impact in the defeat of Nazi Germany |
| Created the need for the German war effort to shift to a total war footing |
| Significantly impacted on Hitler's leadership and reputation as a military commander |
| Proved Nazi racist ideas of superiority over Eastern peoples to be false |
| Germans failed to realise their key war aim of lebensraum in the east |

1. In your own words, write definitions of *maskirovka* and 'Deep Battle'.
2. In what ways had the Soviets improved the Red Army by June 1944?
3. Explain why the Germans were so comprehensively defeated in Operation Bagration.

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# The final defeat, 1944–45

The final year of the Third Reich was marked by increasing levels of terror on the home front and on the fighting front. The SS and the Nazi Party began to assert increasing levels of control on all aspects of the war effort as they desperately tried to stave off defeat. Within the military, on 6 February 1944 the OKW created National Socialist Leadership Officers (NSFO). These were political officers, similar to commissars, who were placed in various units to try to instil Nazi fanaticism into German soldiers. Further control by the SS and the Nazi Party was instituted after the 20 July 1944 assassination attempt. On 21 July, SS Chief Heinrich Himmler was made the commander of the reserve army, putting the SS leader in charge of all Wehrmacht reserve units. To round off the control the SS now had over traditionally military areas, in October 1944 the SS took over from the Wehrmacht responsibility for POW camps.

**National Socialist Leadership Officers (NSFO)**
Political officers attached to Wehrmacht formations

Germany's final measures in World War II

## Wonder weapons: the Nazis' last hope

In the last year of the war, the Nazi leadership put enormous faith in various 'wonder weapons'. On 19 April 1944, the Messerschmitt Me 262 fighter became the world's first operational jet fighter. It was a remarkable weapon, but its development was hampered by Hitler's belief that it should be a bomber, while its numbers (fewer than 1500 were built) were never great enough to trouble the Allied air forces. In addition to this, the Germans placed enormous faith in the V-1 and V-2 'revenge weapons'. However, the damage these caused did not affect the Allied war effort, although the German people were told that they were having a severe impact on the Allies.

Bundesarchiv bild-146-1975-117-26

**SOURCE 6.9** A V-1 flying bomb being prepared for launch.

## Terror and scraping the manpower barrel

After the 20 July 1944 assassination attempt, German military justice became more severe. Punishments in the army became more frequent, with executions for cowardice and failing to carry out orders increasing markedly. In the first year of the war, the Wehrmacht courts were imposing 29 death sentences a month; by November 1944, this had reached 526 a month.[5] In the whole war, about 30 000 German troops were sentenced to death (about 22 000 death sentences were carried out) for cowardice, failing to follow orders and desertion, many of these after July 1944. (For the whole of World War I, this figure was 48.)

Drumhead court martials were instituted to deliver justice on the spot to anyone accused of desertion or not displaying the 'will to fight'.[6] These powers were increased by Hitler himself on 9 March 1945 with the establishment of flying court martials – mobile courts that would travel the rear areas looking for deserting troops and try, sentence and execute in a matter of minutes. Some commanders became notorious for their pitiless justice. Field Marshal Ferdinand Schörner and others ensured that those convicted of desertion or cowardice under their commands would serve



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as examples to others by having the accused hanged from a lamppost with a placard around their necks. In November 1944, the Wehrmacht High Command approved the measure that the families of soldiers accused of desertion could be arrested and sent to a concentration camp as punishment. Such measures were difficult to implement but proved effective as a threat. Trying to reinforce its loyalty to Hitler's cause, after July 1944 the OKW changed saluting from the traditional military to the Nazi salute.

In this period, Germany scraped together its last reserves of manpower to fight. By mid-1944, men with medical conditions were being accepted into the army. 'Stomach' battalions were organised with men who had various gastric issues. In autumn 1944, ***Volksgrenadier*** divisions were created. 'Volk' was meant to appeal to nationalist sentiment, and 'grenadier' to German military tradition. Relying on reassigned rear-echelon personnel and younger recruits, by the war's end 78 of these divisions had been created. More desperately, at the same time the *Volkssturm* ('home guard') was founded.

Getty Images/ullstein bild

**SOURCE 6.10** Two German soldiers accused of desertion are summarily executed. Such executions were widespread in the final months of the war.

***Volksgrenadier***
People's grenadier divisions formed by the Germans

The *Volkssturm* was essentially the conscription of men over fighting age or young boys. These units were organised and controlled by the Nazi Party, rather than by the army. As a result, they were poorly trained, organised and armed for combat. When the Allies arrived in Germany, many *Volkssturm* units were deployed on battlefields with little or no coordination with local army units. The desperation of the Nazis was no more clearly evident than in the creation of the 'Russian Liberation Army', using Russian volunteers from prisoner-of-war camps. It was formed in November 1944 and eventually consisted of 100 000 men.

Getty Images/Popperfoto

**SOURCE 6.11** German soldiers, some as young as 12, were called into their nation's defence.

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## The Ardennes Offensive: Hitler's last gamble

The last German offensive in the west was launched through the Ardennes Forest on 16 December 1944. With only 250 000 troops available and about 1100 armoured vehicles, the Battle of the Bulge, as it became known, was overly ambitious; it aimed to drive the Allies all the way back to Antwerp, thereby splitting them in two halves, north and south. The offensive had some initial success, as the Allied air forces that controlled the skies and terrorised German tank crews were unable to intervene due to the poor weather. This allowed German armoured units to initially advance unhindered from the air. On the ground, the Waffen-SS proved particularly brutal and carried out a number of massacres against American POWs and Belgian civilians, the worst being at Malmedy, where after being captured, 84 US troops were murdered in cold blood. Eventually, the Allied front recovered. Despite being surrounded in the Belgian town of Bastogne, the Americans, including the 101st Airborne Division, refused to surrender. In reply to the German commander's demand to give up, the American commander simply replied 'Nuts!' By late January 1945, the Germans had run out of reserves and supplies, and when the weather cleared the Allied fighter-bombers wreaked havoc with the German armour once again. This final major offensive for Hitler in the west was ultimately considered a waste, as the resources used would have been better spent supporting the crumbling Eastern Front.

The Battle of the Bulge

# The final phase

In this last period of the war, Hitler abandoned his people. On 19 March 1945, Hitler issued his 'Nero Decree', which ordered that all infrastructure, including power, water and food supply, be destroyed to prevent it falling into enemy hands, thereby condemning the German people to starvation and death. As the situation worsened, Nazi Gauleiters (provincial governors) were expected to lead from the front and die fighting in their realms. However, only two of them actually did – 41 others ran away.

After the Battle of the Bulge, the Western Allies renewed their offensive into Germany. On 7 March, by a stroke of luck, US Army units managed to capture a bridge across the Rhine at Remagen. This enabled them to launch an offensive across the Rhine, with the British driving from the north and the Americans from the south. On 1 April 1945, the entire industrial Ruhr region, along with over 350 000 German troops and Field Marshal Model, were encircled. They surrendered on 21 April 1945.

## Soviet offensives in 1945

On 12 January 1945, the Soviets launched their Vistula–Oder Offensive. Starting from a front north and south of Warsaw in Poland, with a five-to-one advantage in soldiers, the Soviets swept into Germany. In desperation, on 28 January 1945 Hitler appointed Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler, a man with no fighting experience, as the commander of Army Group Vistula, the formation organised to stop the Soviets reaching Berlin. Unsurprisingly, Himmler proved totally inept and was replaced on 20 March 1945. In just over two weeks, the Soviets had advanced nearly 500 kilometres and were on the Oder River, barely 80 kilometres from Berlin.



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## *Volkssturm*

Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo/Alamy Stock Photo

**SOURCE 6.12** ***Volkssturm* armed with *Panzerfausts* (anti-tank rockets) marching in Berlin, 1944.**

A *Volkssturm* commander recalls Berlin in April 1945:

> I had 400 men in my battalion, and we were ordered to go into the line in our civilian clothes. I told the local Party leader that I could not accept the responsibility of leading men into battle without uniforms. Just before commitment [to battle] we were given 180 Danish rifles, but no ammunition. We also had four machine-guns and 100 *Panzerfausts* [anti-tank rockets]. None of these men had received any training in firing a machine-gun, and they were all afraid of the anti-tank weapons [the *Panzerfausts*]. Although my men were quite ready to help their country, they refused to go into battle without uniforms and without training. What could a *Volkssturm* man do with a rifle without ammunition? The men went home; that was the only thing we could do.
>
> Quoted in Tony Le Tissier, *The 1945 Battle for Berlin*, Johnathan Cape, London, 1988, p. 22

### QUESTIONS

1. How well equipped does the *Volkssturm* appear in Source 6.12?
2. Based on the extract, how well prepared were these *Volkssturm* in April 1945?
3. Based on both of these sources, how well prepared were the *Volkssturm* to face the Red Army?
4. What impression of organisation within the *Volkssturm* does the extract indicate existed?
5. What seems to have been the main reason why the men did not want to fight? Why was this significant?
6. What does the organisation of the *Volkssturm* itself tell us about the nature of the German war effort by October 1944?

Hitler had predicted that the Red Army would attack towards Czechoslovakia, but instead the Soviet offensive against Berlin began on 16 April 1945. The German defenders hastily dug in along the Oder River and managed to hold out for almost two days until the Soviets broke through due to their superior weight of numbers. In the confusion after the breakthrough, the German commander of the largest unit, the 56th Panzer Corps, was accused of desertion and condemned to death. Upon hearing this, he promptly headed to Berlin to defend himself against the charge. When he arrived at Hitler's bunker, to his horror, he was made overall commander of the Berlin defensive zone.

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Getty Images/TASS

**SOURCE 6.13** A Soviet IS2 (Josef Stalin) heavy tank at the Brandenburg Gate in central Berlin, May 1945

# The end

After overcoming the German defence at the Oder River, the Red Army, with over a million men, closed in on Berlin from the north, east and south. Besides the units that fell back from the Oder front, the Germans had fewer than 100 000 troops for Berlin's defence. These consisted of numerous units of poor combat value, such as *Volkssturm* and members of the Hitler Youth pressed into front-line service. However, there were also Waffen-SS units that were determined to fight to the death. On 20 April 1945, Hitler's 56th birthday, the Soviets began to shell the Berlin city centre. As there had been no evacuation of the population before the battle commenced, this shelling led to thousands of civilian casualties. On 21 April, Hitler, commanding the battle from the bunker with an increasing air of unreality, ordered nonexistent units from north of the city to attack the Soviet spearheads. The following day, when he learnt that this attack never occurred, he fell into a rage, famously depicted in the German film *Downfall* (2004). Hitler's very last hope was that the German 12th Army, which had been facing the Americans, was turned around to fight its way to Berlin. The Germans were aware of the agreement the Allies had made about where they intended to stop their respective advances and knew the Americans would not advance past the Elbe River; therefore, the Germans were able to stop fighting the Americans and try to save Berlin.

On 25 April 1945, news arrived that the American and Russian troops had met at Torgau, about 150 kilometres south of Berlin, thereby cutting the Third Reich in two. When it became clear that the Russians and Americans were not about to start fighting each other and that the Americans were leaving Berlin to the Red Army, many of Berlin's defenders lost their last hope. On the afternoon of 30 April 1945, with fighting closing in on the Führer bunker, Hitler committed suicide. He split the role of Führer between President (appointing Admiral Karl Dönitz) and Chancellor (Joseph Goebbels), undoing the position he created for himself in 1934. Goebbels and his wife committed suicide on 1 May, after murdering their six children. The following day, the last pockets of German defenders surrendered.

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On 8 May, at Rheims, the German military leadership, represented by General Alfred Jodl, signed unconditional surrender terms with the Allies. After the Russians complained, the ceremony was repeated in Berlin, this time with Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel signing the instrument for surrender.

Impact of the campaigns on the Germans

1. In what ways did the Nazi Party extend its control over the German military in the last phase of the war?
2. What methods did German military justice use to force German soldiers to continue to fight?
3. Who composed *Volksgrenadier* and *Volkssturm* units and what do these units reveal about German manpower issues at this time?
4. What were the German goals for the Ardennes Offensive in December 1944?
5. Why did the Germans have some initial success with the Ardennes Offensive and why did it eventually fail?
6. What important events occurred on 7 March, 19 March and 1 April 1945 and how did they each signal the final defeat of Germany?
7. What factors contributed to the success of the Soviet advance through Poland towards Berlin in 1945?
8. List the significant events in the final phase of the war until the end of the conflict in Europe on 8 May 1945.

# Reasons for Allied victory

Accounting for the Allied victory and the defeat of the Axis, and Nazi Germany in particular, cannot be reduced to a single factor. A balanced explanation needs to examine a range of considerations, including 'strategic' errors, leadership and economics.

## Strategic errors and operational overreach

The Axis made a number of key mistakes. Primary among these was launching the war with the Soviet Union before having defeated Britain. The beliefs that Britain did not pose a further threat to Germany and that a Russian defeat would only take a number of weeks were terrible underestimations on behalf of the German leadership. These all contributed to the same problem: that the Axis forces in Europe were overstretched. From 1942 onwards, the Germans were fighting an air war with Britain, a campaign in North Africa (from 1944, replaced by a campaign in Italy and France) and a fight for their very existence in Russia. This was simply too much of a burden for Germany. Declaring war on the United States was also a rash decision, made by Hitler in the hope of being able to help the Japanese in the conflict, which was a strategic impossibility. In terms of Germany, a mistake would be the Axis partners it chose. In a strategic sense, Italy and Japan offered Germany nothing. They all had different goals in different parts of the world; Germany had no interest in North Africa or in Asia.

## Leadership

In contrast, the Allied strategy and coordination in their actions greatly helped their war effort. Despite having decades of animosity between them, the United States, Britain and the USSR formed an effective wartime partnership. The various wartime conferences created a grand strategy that was mostly adhered to and effectively coordinated action. The 'Germany First' grand strategy effectively identified and focused attention on the greatest threat to the British and Russians. In addition, the commitment to 'unconditional surrender' increased trust between the Allies – removing the option of a negotiated peace with the Nazis – and boosted Allied morale. The British and US strategic bombing campaign, while it did not directly lead to Germany's suing for peace, did place enormous stress on the German home front and greatly contributed to impeding German war production and destroying faith in the National Socialist leadership.

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PhotoQuest/Getty Images

**SOURCE 6.14** Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin, the 'Big Three', met on several occasions during the war. These conferences, most notably in Tehran and Yalta, coordinated Allied strategy and framed the postwar order.

Allied leadership was also superior over the course of the war. Politically, President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill and General Secretary Stalin performed well as wartime leaders. Certainly, they were capable of missteps, especially in the early part of the war, but overall they established good working relations with their other allies and led their people effectively.

### Military leadership

Among all the Allies, effective military leaders came to the fore over the course of the war. In the Battle of Britain, Keith Park and Hugh Dowding did a remarkable job defending Britain despite the overwhelming odds. In North Africa, General Montgomery established a reputation as an astute field commander. He created trust in his leadership for the British troops and people, but more importantly, demonstrated that he could beat the Germans. For the Americans, despite having never commanded men in the field at the time of the Operation Torch landings in North Africa in 1943, General Eisenhower proved an excellent supreme commander and coordinated the D-Day operation. His subordinates US Generals Patton and Bradley provided a contrast of eccentricity and intelligent leadership. On the Eastern Front, after enduring the German onslaught of 1941, the Red Army reinvented and reorganised itself under General Shaposhnikov. Generals such as Zhukov, Rokossovsky and Konev rose to the fore, and although the Red Army continued to suffer grievous losses, it did turn into a proficient fighting force that eventually conquered the Wehrmacht.

In the early stages of the war, the German military leadership demonstrated considerable initiative in the application of blitzkrieg. These early tactical innovations were clearly advantageous in the invasion of Poland, Western Europe and up to December 1941, when the German advances stalled within sight of Moscow. The advantage of blitzkrieg, however, could not be transferred to defensive warfare. German military leadership was also plagued by the interference of Hitler. After the setbacks of 1941, Hitler never again trusted his generals and took increasing control of events on the Eastern Front, and later in Italy and France. He interfered directly in the 6th Army's approach to Stalingrad and thereafter did not allow German commanders in the field freedom of action. For the Germans, as the war went on and defeats mounted, the German generals were used as scapegoats for Hitler's mistakes. Those that remained in command were ideologically zealous but relatively talentless in the field. Towards the latter stages of the war, Hitler's insistence on 'defend to the last man and bullet' drained German resources and condemned hundreds of thousands of German troops to being encircled and captured.

## Economics

As the war continued, the Allies were able to bring their enormous economic weight to bear. This was not evident or obvious in the middle years of the war. Before the German invasion of Russia, the Axis overshadowed the economic resources of Britain and its Empire. After the German invasion of Russia, the balance improved slightly until the Germans occupied the rich iron, coal and steel regions of the USSR, depriving Soviet industry of two-thirds of its coal and steel. This could have been fatal to Russia



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and the Allies' war effort, and translated into a huge material advantage for the Germans. In 1942, the Germans produced four times as much steel as the Russians.

However, the American entry into the war did not alone transform this situation. It also took better organisation and planning, driven by a strict economic order, with an emphasis on mass production rather than quality. In the Soviet case, this meant that, despite suffering such grievous losses of their raw materials base, in 1943, 8 million tons of steel and 90 million tons of coal were translated into 48 000 heavy artillery pieces and 24 000 tanks. In the same period, Germany turned 30 million tons of steel and 340 million tons of coal into only 17 000 tanks and 27 000 heavy guns. Essentially, the Germans failed to take advantage of their material wealth when they had it. Despite their arms build-up, industrially the German home front was not entirely prepared when war began in 1939. While there was central political leadership in Germany, there was no central planning. This meant that, by 1941, when Germany's rich industrial resources were being supplemented by supplies from its conquered territories, German industry was barely turning out more equipment than it had in peacetime. In 1939, Germany produced 9000 aircraft; in 1941, it produced only 11 000. In June 1941, there were not many more tanks available for the attack on Russia than there had been for the attack on France the year before.

Germany's arms industry suffered from a system that was poorly coordinated, divisive and obstructive. A complex system existed of multiple party agencies and ministries, all involving themselves with no material benefit, coupled with manufacturers who were more concerned with profits. The result was that, despite having a far larger industrial base than Britain, Germany produced less than the British did until 1944.

The benefits of American resources to the Allies were in finished productions but also in materials. About half of the staggering $42 billion in Lend-Lease aid to the Allies took the form of finished munitions; most of the rest took the form of petroleum and other industrial essential raw materials and machine tools.

The home fronts were also an important element of economic mobilisation. Here the Soviets were arguably the most successful, accomplishing an almost total mobilisation of their society and economy for the war effort. In Britain, prewar planning laid the foundation for effective wartime mobilisation of the home front. In contrast, Nazi Germany was less prepared for a long and sustained war. Preoccupied with fears of repeating the types of impositions placed on its citizens during World War I, the Nazi regime resisted the need to fully mobilise society for the war effort until a much later stage than Britain and the Soviet Union.

By 1942, the industrial might of the Allies was well and truly beginning to work towards victory. The Soviet recovery of 1942 saw them begin to unleash their economic potential. In the West, the United States utilised its industrial centres, which were free of enemy attacks, to create arms for its allies. During World War II, despite fighting in both Europe and Asia, the United States created only 90 divisions (to fight both the Germans and Japanese), meaning that the war experience for the vast amount of young American men was on the factory floor. Table 6.3 shows production of aircraft, tanks and artillery to the end of the war. Take note of the significant leap after 1942 of the Allies' production as opposed to Germany's production.

Getty Images/Bettmann

**SOURCE 6.15** US Corsair fighters on the production line.

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## Military production in World War II

**TABLE 6.3** Aircraft, tank and artillery production in World War II

| AIRCRAFT PRODUCTION | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1939 | 1940 | 1941 | 1942 | 1943 | 1944 | 1945 |
| Britain | 7940 | 15049 | 20094 | 23672 | 26263 | 26461 | 12070 |
| USA | 5856 | 12084 | 26277 | 47826 | 85998 | 96318 | 49761 |
| USSR | 10382 | 10565 | 15735 | 25436 | 34900 | 40300 | 20900 |
| Germany | 8295 | 10247 | 11776 | 15409 | 24807 | 39807 | 7540 |
| **TANK PRODUCTION** | | | | | | | |
| | 1939 | 1940 | 1941 | 1942 | 1943 | 1944 | 1945 |
| Britain | 969 | 1399 | 4841 | 8611 | 7476 | 5000 | 2100 |
| USA | - | c. 400 | 4052 | 24997 | 29497 | 17565 | 11968 |
| USSR | 2950 | 2794 | 6590 | 24446 | 24089 | 28963 | 15400 |
| Germany | c. 1300 | 2200 | 5200 | 9200 | 17300 | 22100 | 4400 |
| **ARTILLERY PRODUCTION** | | | | | | | |
| | 1939 | 1940 | 1941 | 1942 | 1943 | 1944 | 1945 |
| Britain | 1400 | 1900 | 5300 | 6600 | 12200 | 12400 | - |
| USA | - | c. 1800 | 29615 | 72658 | 67544 | 33558 | 19699 |
| USSR | 17348 | 15300 | 42300 | 127000 | 130300 | 122400 | 31000 |
| Germany* | c. 2000 | 5000 | 7000 | 12000 | 27000 | 41000 | - |

* German tally includes self-propelled guns

Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won*, Pimlico, London, 1995, p. 331

### QUESTIONS

1. Out of Britain, Russia, the United States and Germany, which country produced the fewest aircraft between 1940 and 1943?
2. When does German aircraft production peak? How does this compare to the Allies' production in the same year?
3. What happened to Russian and German tank production between 1941 and 1942?
4. What is German tank production compared to Allied production in 1944?
5. Compare German and Russian production figures (aircraft, tanks and artillery) across the entire war. What should have been clear to the Germans in relation to Russia's industrial potential?



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## The disbursement of the German forces in World War II

Table 6.4 shows the distribution of the Wehrmacht divisions over various fronts during the course of the war. Most of the figures show the strength of the Wehrmacht in January, June and December of each year, with the exception of times of peak involvement. For example, April 1941 includes the 28 divisions sent to Greece and Yugoslavia; July 1941 includes the beginning of Barbarossa. The size of a division could vary greatly, but usually they had around 10 000 men.

**TABLE 6.4** Distribution of Wehrmacht divisions over various fronts, 1940–45

| MONTH | GERMANY | EASTERN | WESTERN | NORWAY | FINLAND | SOUTH-EASTERN | AFRICA | ITALY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1940** | | | | | | | | |
| January | 31 | 10 | 101 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| June | 11 | 7 | 142 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| December | 78 | 32 | 72 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| **1941** | | | | | | | | |
| April | 62 | 46 | 53 | 7 | 1 | 28 | 1 | 0 |
| July | 4 | 145 | 40 | 7 | 4 | 7 | 2 | 0 |
| December | 6 | 146 | 42 | 7 | 6 | 9 | 3 | 0 |
| **1942** | | | | | | | | |
| January | 8 | 155 | 36 | 7 | 5 | 7 | 3 | 0 |
| June | 2 | 180 | 27 | 11 | 7 | 5 | 3 | 0 |
| December | 11 | 184 | 45 | 11 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 0 |
| **1943** | | | | | | | | |
| February | 1 | 195 | 49 | 12 | 7 | 9 | 8 | 0 |
| July | 6 | 188 | 52 | 13 | 7 | 15 | 0 | 6 |
| December | 6 | 176 | 52 | 13 | 7 | 22 | 0 | 20 |
| **1944** | | | | | | | | |
| January | 7 | 166 | 54 | 13 | 7 | 25 | 0 | 21 |
| June | 7 | 150 | 66 | 12 | 8 | 24 | 0 | 27 |
| December | 2 | 135 | 76 | 17 | 0 | 22 | 0 | 25 |
| **1945** | | | | | | | | |
| January | 3 | 146 | 79 | 15 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 28 |
| April | 0 | 163 | 67 | 11 | 0 | 12 | 0 | 23 |

*Key*

Germany: are reserve units inside Germany itself, not involved in fighting.

Western: Western Europe, including France and the Netherlands.

South-Eastern: Yugoslavia and Greece.

This table only includes Wehrmacht divisions and does not include Waffen-SS divisions, or other Axis divisions.

Georg Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, 17 Volumes, Biblio-Verlag, Bissendorf, 2011

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QUESTIONS

1. How many divisions did the Germans use in their attack on Western Europe in June 1940?
2. How many divisions did the Germans use in their attack on Russia in June–July 1941?
3. When was the Wehrmacht's peak involvement on the Eastern Front?
4. After June 1942, besides the Western Front, where else did the involvement of the Wehrmacht increase?
5. From December 1942, Wehrmacht divisions on the Western Front did not drop below 45 divisions. Why was that?
6. In December 1943, the Wehrmacht had 176 divisions on the Eastern Front. How many did it have in total on all its other fronts combined?
7. In December 1944, the Wehrmacht had 135 divisions on the Eastern Front. How many did it have in total on all its other fronts combined?
8. Looking purely at these statistics, what reasons for the defeat of the Germans can you identify?

### Lend-Lease

The Soviets benefited greatly from the Lend-Lease supplies from both Britain and the United States. Britain sent more than 3000 Hurricane fighters (plus 4000 other aircraft), 5218 tanks, more than 5000 anti-tank guns, 4020 ambulances and trucks, over 5000 radio and radar sets and over 15 million pairs of army boots.[7] In addition to this, from October 1941 the Americans sent an enormous amount of equipment. This included, 427 284 trucks, 13 303 combat vehicles, 35 170 motorcycles, 2 670 371 tons of petroleum products (gasoline and oil) and 4 478 116 tons of foodstuffs.[8] These supplies were targeted and planned. The fighter aircraft and armour vehicles sent by the Western Allies would have been useful (especially in late 1941 and early 1942), but as the Soviet production figures reveal, by mid-1942 they were producing enough of their own to cover their losses. The importance of Lend-Lease was to allow the Soviets to focus on building their own armour vehicles and fighter aircraft but not worry about producing army boots (as these came from the British) or trucks (as these were supplied by the Americans). Food was probably the most vital resource supplied by the Allies, as the food they sent made up one-third of the food needs of the USSR during the course of the war. Despite the best efforts of the Germans in 1944 to produce war materials to continue to fight the war, the Allies were able to produce far more, outnumbering the Germans on the battlefield and overwhelming them with firepower.

## Learning from failures

However, material advantage alone does not explain victory. As demonstrated by the French in 1940 or the Russians in 1941, having more men and tanks alone did not guarantee success. The ability of the Red Army to survive the German onslaught and then to learn to win on the Eastern Front, using defence in depth and updating their Deep Battle doctrines, created the conditions to destroy the Wehrmacht in the field. For the Western Allies, the failures in France and the learning curve in North Africa were applied in the invasions of Italy and France in 1944. Certainly, air power was also a significant factor. The strategic bombing campaign of the British and Americans reduced the Germans' productivity, severely affected their morale and forced Germany to direct significant resources into the defence of the Reich. Above the battlefield, the Allied fighter-bomber 'Jabos' were



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the archenemy of German armour, completely blunting any advantage the Germans had in terms of their equipment. If the Red Army defeated the Germans on the ground, it was certainly the Western Allies who defeated them in the skies over Europe.

## In conclusion

Better planning and coordination, combined with the economic strength of the United States joining the war effort, gave the Allies a huge advantage. German equipment was better built than much of the Allied equipment, but there was never enough of it. This material advantage of the Allies was most clearly seen on the Eastern Front. Put simply, the Wehrmacht was bled white by four years on the Eastern Front. The German war effort, even with the superhuman and also inhuman efforts of 1944, could never match the production achieved by the Allies. On the Eastern Front, during the Soviet offensives of 1944 and 1945, the Red Army suffered much heavier losses than the Wehrmacht; however, unlike the Germans, the Soviets were able to make good these losses. The Germans had entirely rested their hopes on achieving a quick and decisive victory brought about by the internal collapse of the communist government as much as military success.

Aims and strategies of the Axis and Allies

1. What can be considered the key Axis strategic mistakes in the war? Discuss these in class and determine which you feel are the most important and why.
2. What were the key successes in terms of Allied strategies?
3. How did Allied and Axis political and military leaderships develop differently over the course of the war? What factors impacted on their leaderships?
4. Who had the advantage in raw materials by 1941–42, but who was able to produce more at this time? Why was this the case?
5. How important were the performances of the home fronts to Allied victory and Axis failure?
6. What impact did American Lend-Lease supplies have on the Allied war effort?
7. Summarise in a paragraph the factors that you think contributed the most to Allied victory and to German defeat. Share your arguments with the class.

# The Nuremberg war crimes trials

Unlike the armistice of World War I, there was to be no peace treaty signed with the Nazi government at the conclusion of World War II. Despite the unconditional surrender, a Nazi government continued to operate under Admiral Dönitz in the northern part of Germany until 23 May 1945, when it was arrested. For the Allies, some changes in leadership also occurred. On 16 April 1945, after a long battle with ill health, US President Roosevelt passed away to be replaced by his Vice-President, Harry S Truman. Despite his popularity as a wartime leader, Winston Churchill suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of Labour leader Clement Attlee in the July British general election. It was Truman for the United States and Attlee for Britain who oversaw the postwar process and the beginning of the Cold War with the Soviet Union.

## Planning for war crimes trials

Before the war ended, the Allies were preparing to try the German leadership for its part in causing the war and its role in various 'war crimes'. After World War I, there was a feeling that an opportunity had been lost to call individuals to account for their wartime actions. In 1943, American-Polish lawyer

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Raphael Lemkin first coined the term 'genocide' to describe the attempt to destroy an entire race of people. In October 1943, the Moscow Conference – signed by China, Russia, the United States and Britain – contained a 'Statement on Atrocities'. This defined the Allies' desire to prosecute those responsible for 'atrocities, massacres and cold-blooded mass executions'. This declaration showed the determination to try major war criminals but also those accused of lesser, more localised crimes. These individuals would 'be sent back to the countries in which their abominable deeds were done in order that they be judged and punished according to the laws of these liberated countries'.[9] The determination to prosecute major war criminals was declared at the Yalta Conference by the Russian, American and British leaderships in February 1945, who left the detail to their foreign secretaries to resolve. After the horrors uncovered in the German concentration and extermination camps, there was a sufficient impetus to establish a war crimes tribunal to try those deemed responsible. In June 1945, a conference was held to determine the nature of the war crimes trials at Nuremberg. This resulted in the Charter of the International Military Tribunal – called the Nuremberg or London Charter – issued on 8 August 1945, which set down the laws and procedures by which the Nuremberg trials were to be conducted. The charter stipulated that crimes of the European Axis powers could be tried. Three categories of crimes were defined: crimes against peace, war crimes and crimes against humanity. It also laid down that 'superior orders' was not an adequate defence in war crimes. The indictments were for:

> 1 Participation in a common plan or conspiracy for the accomplishment of a crime against peace
>
> 2 Planning, initiating and waging wars of aggression and other crimes against peace
>
> 3 War crimes
>
> 4 Crimes against humanity.
>
> Ian Dear and Michael Foot, *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, OUP, Oxford, 1995, p. 824

Not all the defendants were indicted on these charges (see Table 6.5 on page 174). Part of the indictments challenged European legal understandings. The use of the term 'conspiracy', well-known in American legal circles, had no basis in French, Soviet or German law. It also proved difficult as 'conspiracy' had been separated from 'planning, initiating and waging wars of aggression'. This led to prosecutors over-exaggerating the coherency of Nazi policy-making and gave the defendants opportunities to try to minimalise their role by highlighting the confused nature of the Third Reich's government. Aside from this, the trial was groundbreaking in terms of trying people according to international law, for war crimes and crimes against humanity. An awkward part of the indictment was the insistence by the Soviets to attribute the Katyn massacre – where 22 000 captured Polish officers were murdered by the Russian NKVD in 1940 – to the Germans. The Soviets presented no evidence and the charge was not sustained.

With Hitler, Goebbels and Himmler dead, 24 defendants were selected to represent every branch of the armed forces, the Nazi Party and the economic, civil, propaganda and legal branches of the Third Reich. In the end, 21 defendants appeared in court. Martin Bormann, Hitler's secretary, who had not been found but was still believed to be alive, was tried in absentia. Two did not appear: Gustav Krupp was declared mentally unfit to stand trial; Robert Ley, the labour leader, committed suicide before the trial started. In addition, seven organisations – the Leadership Corps of the Nazi Party, the Reich Cabinet, the Schutzstaffel (SS), the Sicherheitsdienst (SD), the Gestapo, the Sturmabteilung (SA), and the General Staff and High Command, comprising several categories of senior military officers – were also to be tried.

International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg

## The trial

On 20 November 1945, amid much media and public interest, the International Military Tribunal began at the Palace of Justice in Nuremberg, before eight judges: two French, two Russian, two English



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and two American, who presided. Sir Geoffrey Lawrence from Britain served as the main judge. Evidence presented included the Hossbach Memorandum of 1937, detailing Germany's desire to start a war. The German organisation of the Final Solution was outlined. Films were shown of liberated concentration camps that shocked the court – and some of the accused – with the enormity of the crimes with which the defendants were being charged. Various documents and witnesses established the complicity of the defendants with the Final Solution and the murders of Poles, Jews and Russian prisoners of war. The former leader of *Einsatzgruppe D*, Otto Ohlendorf, casually admitted to the murder of around 90 000 Jews between June 1941 and June 1942.

Getty Images/Hugo Jaeger/Timepix/The LIFE Picture Collection

**SOURCE 6.16** Nuremberg War Crimes Trial. The 21 defendants who appeared in court were each charged with four counts.

In March 1946, the accused began their defence and most of them put on a poor show. They blamed Hitler and denied responsibility, even when orders were presented bearing their signatures. SS leader Ernst Kaltenbrunner was dubbed the 'man with no signature' after he repeatedly denied that it was his name that appeared on various orders. When asked rhetorically what further pressure Hitler could have placed on the Czechoslovakian President when he 'requested' the Germans occupy his country in March 1939, former Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop naively answered 'war, for example', to roars of laughter in the court.

Getty Images/Raymond D'Addario/Galerie Bilderwelt

**SOURCE 6.17** Hermann Göring in the witness box at Nuremberg, March 1946.

Hermann Göring did not minimise his responsibility; he knew he would be convicted and was looking to establish himself in history. He managed a worthy performance in court, exasperating the US prosecutor, Robert H Jackson, on Germany's war preparations. When asked why Germany's war plans were secret, he pointed out that this was similar to every other country in the world. He fared worse with the British prosecutor, who revealed Göring's complicity in the murder of the Allied POWs recaptured after the **Great Escape** in March 1944.

**Great Escape**
An Allied mass escape from a German POW camp in March 1944. Fifty recaptured officers were shot by the Gestapo

Albert Speer accepted his guilt and made a good impression on the court with his contrition. This was important for him, as he was heavily implicated in Germany's war production, but he declared his ignorance at the excesses of the slave labour program that it used and was believed. He denied hearing Himmler's Posen speech in October 1943, in which Himmler outlined the Holocaust in no uncertain terms, claiming that he had left the conference early, which was later found to be a lie.

## Trying the German forces with war crimes

The German military leadership was heavily implicated in committing war crimes and its prosecution was considered groundbreaking. These men, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces Wilhelm Keitel and Chief of the Operations Staff of the Armed Forces Alfred Jodl, could not claim to be simply following orders. Instead, they were forced to admit that they did not stand up to Hitler's demands

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and that they signed orders that were criminal. The 'Night and Fog' decree from December 1941, which demanded the deportation and often murder of those suspected of acting against Germany, was signed by both men. Keitel was also implicated in the execution of Allied commandos who had operated behind the lines. Admiral Karl Dönitz was found guilty of waging aggressive war and war crimes but, with the help of an affidavit provided by American Admiral Chester W Nimitz, proved that the United States had also practised unrestricted submarine warfare.

On 30 September, the court adjourned for sentencing, and two days later the verdicts were announced. The Soviets had wanted all those found guilty to be executed, but the French, British and Americans opted for various punishments: 12 of the accused were sentenced to death, seven received prison sentences and three were acquitted (Franz von Papen, Hjalmar Schacht and Hans Fritzsche). In addition, the Gestapo, the SD, the SS and Nazi Party Leadership Corps were found to be criminal organisations, while the Nazi Cabinet, the SA, and the General Staff of the High Command were found not to be criminal. The luckiest defendant was Albert Speer, given a 20-year sentence, while the man who worked for him in the slave labour program, Fritz Sauckel, was given death. Colonel-General Jodl was also considered to have been punished too heavily. After their appeals were rejected, the death sentences were carried out on the night of 16 October 1946. The seven given prison sentences were sent to Spandau prison in Berlin to serve their time. The last prisoner, former Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess, died there in 1987.

**TABLE 6.5** Defendants, charges and sentences for the Nuremberg War Crimes Trial, September 1945 to October 1946

| DEFENDANT | COUNT 1 | COUNT 2 | COUNT 3 | COUNT 4 | SENTENCE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hermann Göring | Guilty | Guilty | Guilty | Guilty | Hanging |
| Rudolf Hess | Guilty | Guilty | Not guilty | Not guilty | Life |
| Joachim von Ribbentrop | Guilty | Guilty | Guilty | Guilty | Hanging |
| Wilhelm Keitel | Guilty | Guilty | Guilty | Guilty | Hanging |
| Ernst Kaltenbrunner | Not guilty | - | Guilty | Guilty | Hanging |
| Alfred Rosenberg | Guilty | Guilty | Guilty | Guilty | Hanging |
| Hans Frank | Not guilty | - | Guilty | Guilty | Hanging |
| Wilhelm Frick | Not guilty | Guilty | Guilty | Guilty | Hanging |
| Julius Streicher | Not guilty | - | - | Guilty | Hanging |
| Walther Funk | Not guilty | Guilty | Guilty | Guilty | Life |
| Hjalmar Schacht | Not guilty | Not guilty | - | - | Acquitted |
| Karl Dönitz | Not guilty | Guilty | Guilty | - | 10 years |
| Erich Raeder | Guilty | Guilty | Guilty | - | Life |
| Baldur von Schirach | Not guilty | - | - | Guilty | 20 years |
| Fritz Sauckel | Not guilty | Not guilty | Guilty | Guilty | Hanging |
| Alfred Jodl | Guilty | Guilty | Guilty | Guilty | Hanging |
| Martin Bormann | Not guilty | - | Guilty | Guilty | Hanging |
| Franz von Papen | Not guilty | Not guilty | - | - | Acquitted |
| Arthur Seyss-Inquart | Not guilty | Guilty | Guilty | Guilty | Hanging |
| Albert Speer | Not guilty | Not guilty | Guilty | Guilty | 20 years |
| Konstantin von Neurath | Guilty | Guilty | Guilty | Guilty | 15 years |
| Hans Fritzsche | Not guilty | - | Not guilty | Not guilty | Acquitted |



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Twelve further trials were held before US military courts, not before the International Military Tribunal, but took place in the Palace of Justice in Nuremberg. These US trials are collectively known as the 'Subsequent Nuremberg Trials' or the 'Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals (NMT)'.

**TABLE 6.6** Subsequent war crimes trials held at Nuremberg

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| I | Doctors' Trial | December 1946–August 1947 | Trial of doctors involved in medical experiments |
| II | Milch Trial | January–April 1947 | Trial of Luftwaffe Field Marshal Erhard Milch, accused of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity |
| III | Judges Trial | March–December 1947 | Trial of Nazi judges |
| IV | Pohl Trial | April–November 1947 | Trial of Higher SS Economic Office (involved in Holocaust) |
| V | Flick Trial | April–December 1947 | Trial of leading industrialists of Nazi Germany |
| VI | IG Farben Trial | August 1947–July 1948 | Trial of leading industrialists of Nazi Germany |
| VII | Hostages Trial | July 1947–February 1948 | Trial of German generals involved in war crimes |
| VIII | RuSHA Trial | October 1947–March 1948 | Trial of SS organisations responsible for the implementation of the Nazi 'pure race' program |
| IX | *Einsatzgruppen* Trial | September 1947–April 1948 | Trial of those involved in the *Einsatzgruppen* murder squads |
| X | Krupp Trial | December 1947–July 1948 | Trial of leading industrialists of Nazi Germany |
| XI | Ministries Trial | January 1948–April 1949 | Trial of members of the German Foreign Office |
| XII | High Command Trial | December 1947–October 1948 | Trial of high-ranking generals of the German Wehrmacht |

## Nuremberg: an assessment

The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial was profoundly significant; it was the first time that individuals were prosecuted for crimes against humanity and war crimes using international justice. There were a number of controversial aspects; the trial was criticised for being 'victor's justice', being held too close to the end of the war, with judges supplied by the victorious nations. The length of the trial was also considered problematic. The public showed great interest when the trial began in November 1945; however, the final judgment was not reached until the following October, by which time sympathies had shifted and the threat of the Soviet Union as a possible future aggressor in Europe was beginning to take shape.

In some respects the criticisms are justified, but in others they are not. The fact that there were 12 death sentences handed down, a range of prison sentences and three acquittals indicates that due process was followed. Speer was regarded as being extremely fortunate. He had charmed the court with his contrition and a concocted story that he had tried to kill Hitler at the end of the war. The argument that the trial was held too close to the end of the war needs to take into account what happened with the subsequent trials. After the media interest had waned, more immediate problems, such as the developing Cold War between the Russians and the Western Allies, came into focus. As a result, the trials of the doctors, industrialists and members of killing squads were held in almost empty courts. Worse still, when sentences at these trials were handed down, they were

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watered down on appeal. When the *Einsatzgruppen* trial ended in April 1948, of the 20 defendants, 13 received the death penalty. However, on appeal, nine of these death penalties were reduced to life imprisonment, while prison sentences were lightened to 10 to 15 years. Four years later, in the midst of the developing Cold War and in an effort to build a new alliance with West Germany, all of these prisoners were released.

A criticism of the Nuremberg War Crimes Trial was that the Soviets were not called to account for their actions. Their invasion of Poland in agreement with the Germans in September 1939 was not mentioned at the trial, nor was there an effort to uncover those responsible for the Katyn massacre of Polish officers in 1940. The Western powers knew that Stalin was guilty of crimes against humanity for which the Germans were being charged. Nor did the Western Allies prosecute those responsible for the German bombings of London, Warsaw and Rotterdam as war crimes, since they had engaged in massively destructive bombing campaigns of their own in contravention of the Hague Convention of 1907.

WS
Historians evaluate Nuremberg

1. Outline the process between 1943 and 1945 to formulate the war crimes tribunal.
2. What were the four charges levelled at the major war criminals in the first Nuremberg trial?
3. Besides individuals, which organisations in the Nazi state were charged with being criminal?
4. What legal issue arose from charging the defendants with 'conspiracy'?
5. How well did the defendants perform during the trial? What roles did Hermann Göring and Albert Speer play?
6. What were the various sentences passed? Who among the defendants were considered to be harshly and lightly punished with their sentences?
7. How many other war crimes trials were held at Nuremberg up to 1948?
8. What aspects of the Third Reich's civil and military hierarchy was the focus of these trials?
9. At the subsequent Nuremberg trials, what factors impacted the sentences of some being reduced on appeal?
10. Class debate: What can be considered the successes and failures of the Nuremberg trials?

# Conclusion

The last two years of World War II in Europe produced some of the most violent destruction witnessed by mankind. The Allied campaigns in Italy established a foothold in Europe that was extended with the D-Day landing in June 1944. In the same month, the Russian offensive in Belarus destroyed the fighting potential of the Wehrmacht and took it back to its starting point from June 1941.

Despite the overwhelming economic and material odds now thrown at the Third Reich, the Germans refused to surrender. From July 1944 until the end of the war, more Germans lost their lives than in the previous four years of conflict. Despite the reliance on terror and political soldiers such as the Waffen-SS, the Germans were unable to slow down the Allied advance on any front. Gambles such as the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944 only wore down the dwindling German strength. The Eastern Front culminated in the apocalyptic Battle of Berlin, which cost thousands of civilian lives and the deaths of Hitler and Goebbels.

After the war, the wartime commitment of the Allies and the revelations of the Nazi crimes led to the world's first war crimes trial, held at Nuremberg in 1945 and 1946. The charges brought against the 24 major war criminals ranged from conspiracy to wage war to crimes against humanity. Despite the trial's detractors, justice was served. After the main trial, a number of subsequent trials prosecuted the government, military, economic, medical and administrative arms of the Third Reich.

*The End,* Kershaw review



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# Chapter summary

- In early 1944, the Germans were retreating on the Eastern Front and in Italy.
- In 1944, the Germans produced more aircraft, tanks and artillery than they had ever produced before.
- The Allied landings at Normandy were a decisive success.
- Operation Bagration was the Soviets' major summer offensive in June 1944, targeting German Army Group Centre.
- On 20 July 1944, a resistance group inside Germany tried to kill Hitler.
- The Germans placed their last hope in their 'wonder weapons', the V-1 and V-2, and a split developing between the Soviet and Western Allies.
- At the end of the war, the Allies were determined to prosecute those Germans accused of starting the war and committing war crimes.
- The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial was largely successful but has been criticised for being prepared in too much haste, for representing victors' justice and for ignoring the various crimes of the Soviet Union.

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# CHAPTER REVIEW

## CHAPTER REVISION QUESTIONS

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of major Allied operations to the final defeat of Nazi Germany.
2. Assess the factors that led to the final defeat of Germany in 1944–45.
3. Evaluate the role of Hitler in the final phase of the war.
4. Evaluate the view that the Russian counteroffensives were critical to the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945.
5. Assess the view that the Allies defeated the Axis because of their superior resources.

## EXTENDED-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

6. Evaluate the view that the Allied invasion of Europe was critical to the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945.
7. How significant were the Russian counteroffensives of 1944 for the final defeat of Germany? Use Source 6.18 to support your response.

Getty Images/Keystone

**SOURCE 6.18** A B-17 Flying Fortress of the US Eighth Air Force flies over the Bettenhausen Ordnance Plant at Kassel, near Cologne.

8. To what extent did the strategies and tactics of the Axis powers shape the course of the European war?
9. Assess the significance of the Nuremberg trials.



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