

CHAPTER 26

WORLD WAR II



For the second time in just twenty-five years, a European conflict became a world war. It would be even more devastating than World War I, wreaking destruction on a global scale. Germany's invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, like its invasion of Belgium in 1914, started a chain reaction that brought the world powers into the conflict. The Soviet Union occupied eastern Poland, Finland, and the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Japan joined Germany and Italy, and the United States entered the war on the side of Great Britain and the free French government exiled in London. Following Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Communist state became an ally of Britain and the United States.

The Second World War was the first in which civilian populations became systematic, strategic targets. Beginning with the invasion of Poland, Germany used genocide both as an instrument of war and as an end in itself. More than 6 million Jews perished in Europe during World War II, most in German death camps. The technology of warfare developed rapidly; existing weapons were perfected, and by the end of the war, the atomic bomb, a terrible new weapon, had taken a terrible toll on human life. When the war ended in 1945, Europe seemed to be entering an even more threatening era. Unlike at the end of World War I in 1918, few people imagined that World War II would be the "war to end all wars."

THE COMING OF WORLD WAR II

Determined to achieve his territorial goals and willing to go to war if necessary to do so, Adolph Hitler in 1936 allied with Italy and Japan. He sent German troops into Austria in 1938 and then Czechoslovakia a year later, believing that Great Britain and France would not resist, but prepared to go to war if they did so. Finally, Germany and the Soviet Union astonished the world in August 1939 by signing a mutual nonaggression pact. This cleared the way for Hitler to launch a murderous attack on Poland. That pact included a secret agreement by which Germany and the Soviet Union

would divide Eastern Europe between them. Attempting to avoid war at all costs, Britain and France accepted the occupation of Austria and Czechoslovakia but drew the line at Poland. The Second World War began.

The Axis

Benito Mussolini had already signed a pact with Hitler in October 1936, forming what the Italian dictator called an "Axis." Hitler made clear that Germany's interests lay to the east; Mussolini could have the Mediterranean and a free hand in Yugoslavia, Albania, and Greece. Joint participation in support of the Spanish nationalists during the Spanish War (1936–1939; see Chapter 25) brought Nazi Germany and fascist Italy closer together. Mussolini accepted Austria's loss of independence in exchange for a closer relationship with Germany. Concluding that German military strength could further Italian aims, the Duce ordered his soldiers to goose-step like the Germans, claiming that it was the military stride of ancient Rome. This led to considerable embarrassment for the elderly King Victor Emmanuel III, who tried it but fell down. Mussolini also ordered his countrymen to stop shaking hands and take up the ancient Roman military salute of an outstretched arm at a 45-degree angle.

Racial theories had hitherto never played more than a minor part in Mussolini's rise to power or his daily bombast. The Duce, who had a Jewish mistress, had mocked Hitler's "delirium of race." Mussolini had at first enjoyed widespread support among Italian Jews—about one of every three had first joined the Fascist Party. But in 1938 Mussolini began a campaign against Italian Jews, who numbered no more than 50,000 in a country of 40 million people. These measures managed only to irritate many Italians in a country in which Jews seemed perfectly well assimilated.

Germany found another authoritarian partner in Japan. Over the last half of the nineteenth century following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Japan had made itself an industrial and military power. In need of raw materials such as oil and rubber, the Japanese government sought to build an empire in Southeast Asia. By the late 1930s, the Japanese army had reached 1 million men, with reserves of twice that number. The Japanese air force had 2,000 fighter planes, including the new "Zero" fighter, as fast as any in the world. In 1931, Japan embarked on a piecemeal conquest of Manchuria at the expense of China. Since Japan has virtually no natural resources, its goal was to create a resource base, which would be necessary for fighting the total war that many young Japanese generals eagerly anticipated. A year later, the Japanese government created the client state of Manchukuo, declaring the last emperor of China, Henry Pu-Yi, to be its emperor.

Fearing that the Soviet Union might try to hinder its military expansion, Japan late in 1936 signed a formal friendship treaty with Germany, the "Anti-Comintern Pact" (anti-Communist International), hoping also to discourage possible British and American intervention in Asia. In 1937, Japa-



Prisoners of the war between China and Japan over the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, 1931.

nese forces began to conquer chunks of northern China to establish a buffer zone between Manchukuo and the Soviet Union. Japan then embarked on a major naval expansion program, exceeding both in number and size the limits stipulated by the Washington Naval Conference (1921–1922) to which Japan, among the other powers, had agreed. The United States was entrenched in isolationism and still suffering the Depression. Angered by Japanese aggression and Japan's alliance with Nazi Germany, Britain joined the United States in imposing an embargo on the sale of oil and other vital raw materials to Japan.

German Aggression and British and French Appeasement

In November 1937, Hitler unveiled to his generals plans to absorb Austria and Czechoslovakia, perhaps as early as the next year. Hitler's confidence derived partly from information he had received that Neville Chamberlain, the new Conservative British prime minister, who in a speech had once called Hitler's National Socialism "a great social experiment," might accept Germany's annexation of Austria and the German "Reichsraum" as inevitable. Chamberlain was concerned only that the annexation occur without strife. The British prime minister feared that if Britain went to war against Germany, Hitler's allies Italy and Japan would sacrifice British imperial interests in the Middle and Far East—for example, in Egypt and Burma. Furthermore,

he viewed German ambitions toward the German-speaking parts of Austria and Czechoslovakia, as well as toward the Polish Corridor, as in keeping with the principle of nationalism. He believed that Germany had been treated too harshly by the Treaty of Versailles.

Convinced that Britain would not act, Hitler bullied Austrian Chancellor Kurt von Schuschnigg to legalize the Austrian Nazi Party. When Schuschnigg announced that a plebiscite on the question of his nation's independence would be held, Hitler ordered German troops into Austria, justifying the invasion with the absurd claim that German citizens were being mistreated there and that Austria was plotting with Czechoslovakia against Germany. On March 12, 1938, most of the Austrian population greeted German troops not as conquerors, but as liberators. Hitler thus effected the unification (*Anschluss*) of Germany and Austria that had been specifically forbidden by the Versailles Peace Settlement. The Nazis arrested more than 70,000 people and frenzied Viennese crowds beat up Jews. Britain and France sent official protests, but the British government permitted the German Reichsbank to confiscate funds that the Austrian National Bank had deposited in the Bank of England. This provided the Nazis with valuable gold and foreign currency reserves.

Czechoslovakia was next on Hitler's list. During the summer of 1938, he orchestrated a campaign against the Czech government. At issue was the status of the 3 million Germans living in Czechoslovakia, most in Sudetenland. However, Hitler was also furious that some anti-Nazi Germans had found refuge in Prague. President Edvard Beneš (1884–1948), with Poland casting a covetous eye on the long-disputed coal-mining region of Teschen, now desperately sought reassurance from France and the Soviet Union. Both were obligated by separate treaties to defend Czechoslovakia against

Austrians salute Germany's annexation of Austria, March 1938.



attack. But the Soviets refused to act unless joined by France, and France refused to act without considerable British assistance, which Chamberlain had already ruled out. In any case, France could really only help its Eastern European allies by attacking Germany, which the French government viewed as out of the question. In May, German troops massed along the Czechoslovak border.

On September 15, 1938, Chamberlain flew to the Führer's mountain retreat in southern Germany. When Hitler informed him that he would risk world war to unite the Sudeten Germans to their fatherland, Chamberlain agreed to try to convince the French and Czech governments that Germany's absorption of the Sudetenland was the best hope for peace. Hitler promised Chamberlain that this would be the last territorial revision of the Treaty of Versailles that Germany would demand. On September 19, 1938, Britain and France virtually ordered the Prague government to cede to Germany territories where the 3 million ethnic Germans formed a majority. Chamberlain returned to Germany to see Hitler again on September 22. He asked only that the new borders of Czechoslovakia be protected by a joint agreement.

Faced with the kind of collective security agreement he loathed, Hitler now threatened that Germany would occupy the Sudetenland by October 1 and would recognize Polish and Hungarian claims on territory ceded to Czechoslovakia in 1918 (he was already encouraging Slovaks to push for autonomy). This would have dismembered Czechoslovakia for all practical purposes (see Map 26.1). The French government balked, demanding Hitler's original terms as presented to Chamberlain. Hitler then seemed to draw back, agreeing to meet with Mussolini, French Prime Minister Édouard Daladier, and Chamberlain to settle everything once and for all. In London, Chamberlain confronted mounting skepticism. The British government ordered preliminary measures for civil defense in case of war. Chamberlain tried to rally British public opinion with a speech on September 27: "How horrible, fantastic, incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas masks here because of a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing. It seems still more impossible that a quarrel which has already been settled in principle should be the subject of war."

At the multilateral conference at Munich in September 1938, Hitler refused to allow representatives of the Soviet Union to attend. Czech officials were not even permitted to assist at the dismemberment of their own country. Chamberlain and Daladier agreed to immediate German occupation of the Sudetenland (the most industrialized part of the country), Poland's annexation of Teschen, and the transfer of parts of Slovakia to Hungary, all in exchange for Hitler's personal guarantee of the redrawn borders of the partitioned nation. Chamberlain stepped off the plane in London announcing to cheering crowds that he had brought his country "peace in our time."



MAP 26.1 GERMAN AND ITALIAN EXPANSION, 1935-1939 Aggression by Germany and Italy against their neighbors.

In France, popular opinion did not want another war, and the military expressed apprehension about taking on the refurbished and expanded German armed forces. The French government felt abandoned by Britain, and by neighboring Belgium, which three years earlier had abrogated its 1920 military agreement with France and proclaimed its neutrality. France,



Neville Chamberlain promises "peace in our time" after his return from Munich in September 1938.

which had completed a line of bunker-like fortifications—the Maginot Line—to the Belgian frontier and counted on Belgium's ability to defend against a German attack, was now more exposed to a German onslaught. The French government also feared that Hitler might convince Franco of Spain to join Germany in a war against republican France from the other side of the Pyrenees.

The appeasement of Hitler at Munich provided the German army with more time to prepare for the conquest of what remained of Czechoslovakia. Appeasement—the term would subsequently take on a negative sense—had already characterized both British and French foreign policy in dealing with Mussolini (as the Ethiopian invasion demonstrated). Appeasement as foreign policy was influenced by the sheer horror of the Great War and many Europeans' unwillingness to contemplate a new conflict. Appeasement did not mean peace at any price, but rather the belief that if Germany could be appeased on one or two demands, then Hitler would be satisfied, or so the reasoning went, and Europe would be safe from war. It was pure delusion.

On March 16, 1939, Hitler shattered the Munich agreements. German troops marched across the Czech border and occupied Prague. Again, as in the case of Austria, the British government helped Hitler out by allowing the transfer of 6 million pounds of Czech gold deposits from London banks to the German-occupied state. Germany strengthened its forces with the addition of the Czech air force and army, and it no longer had to maintain strong defenses on its southern border. Hitler's brazen move shocked Mussolini, who complained, "Each time Hitler occupies a country, he sends me a message." In April 1939, Italian troops invaded and annexed Albania. British factories began turning out fighter planes as quickly as possible.

Looking east, the euphoric Hitler now demanded that Lithuania relinquish the Baltic port of Memel, which had been given to Lithuania by the Treaty of Versailles. Lithuania did so. He then insisted that Poland relinquish the port of Gdańsk (Danzig) and international access to the Polish Corridor that had by virtue of the Treaty of Versailles separated East Prussia from the rest of Germany. As always, Hitler offered a concession that would prove empty as soon as it had served its purpose: this time it was support against the Soviet Union's claim to parts of Poland that bordered Ukraine.

The Polish government, which had been in a state of crisis since the death of Józef Pilsudski, its authoritarian ruler, in 1935, readied its military defenses. The British government, which had refused to consider any alliances with the small states of Central Europe, now hurriedly signed a pact with Poland on April 6, 1939, guaranteeing Polish independence and assistance in case of German aggression. On April 26, Chamberlain—even he had now lost his illusions—announced to the House of Commons that conscription of men twenty and twenty-one years of age would begin. France (which was now also committed to Poland by alliance) and Britain then signed pacts with Romania and Greece and offered military support to Turkey. Hitler probably hoped that rapid Polish capitulation in the face of a German invasion might present its Western allies with a *fait accompli* that could discourage a military response. But Hitler accepted the strong possibility that war would follow any German move against Poland, even though he knew that the German economy could not reach full capacity for war production until 1943.

Few statesmen in France or Great Britain still harbored any illusions about what was next. British public opinion rapidly turned against appeasement. Winston Churchill (1874–1965), one of the few British leaders who had been convinced since 1936 that war against Hitler was inevitable, called for an alliance with the Soviet Union against Germany. Discussions with Soviet diplomats dragged on, stumbling on the refusal of either Poland or Romania to accept Soviet troops on their territory, necessary to any effective defense against a German attack. Chamberlain then heard rumors that Stalin and Hitler were conducting diplomatic discussions, but laughed them off.

Undeterred by Britain's reaffirmation of its commitment to defend Polish independence, or by doubts expressed by some of his confidants in April 1939, Hitler ordered the German army to prepare for an invasion of Poland on the following September 1. He signed in May the "Pact of Steel," a formal military alliance with Italy. Mussolini, who called the pact "absolute dynamite," nonetheless thought that he could continue to play off Germany, Britain, and France against each other. He had believed Hitler when he said that he would not begin a war with Poland for several more years. But knowing that doctored statistics could not hide the fact that Italy was

unprepared for war, and now tied by a formal alliance to Hitler, the Duce had painted his country into a corner.

The Unholy Alliance

Stalin himself no longer had doubts about Hitler's ultimate intentions toward the Soviet Union. But the Russian army needed time to prepare for war. Stalin had decimated the officer corps during the purges of the past three years. In the short run, Hitler wished to avoid war with the Soviet Union while he was fighting in Poland; in the longer run, anticipating war with the Western powers, he sought, like Bismarck in different circumstances before him, to avoid fighting a war on two fronts. Stalin did not trust the Western Allies to maintain their commitment to resist Hitler and did not think that even a Soviet pact with Britain and France would prevent Hitler from attacking Poland.

In one of the most astonishing diplomatic turnarounds in history, Hitler announced on August 23, 1939, that Germany had signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Nonaggression Pact with the Soviet Union, which was named for the two foreign ministers who negotiated it. The man Stalin had called "the bloody assassin of the workers" signed an agreement with the Communist leader Hitler had referred to as "the scum of the earth" and who dominated a state that Hitler planned to conquer. Hitler believed that a German pact with the Soviet Union would smash the will of Britain and France to defend Poland.

Stalin had reasons not to trust Britain or France, which had not bothered to consult the Soviet Union while appeasing at Munich. Hitler and Stalin divided up eastern Central Europe into "spheres of influence." The German dictator assured Stalin that "in the event of a territorial and political rearrangement," the independent states of Latvia and Estonia, coveted by Russia, as well as Finland and eastern Poland, would be fair game for the Soviet Union. Stalin still assumed that the imperialist powers ultimately would destroy each other in a protracted war.

In the meantime, most Germans seemed prepared to follow Hitler into a new war. A popular German magazine in April 1939 had cheerfully run the headline, "Gas Masks for German Children Now Ready."

THE WAR IN EUROPE BEGINS

The war for which Hitler had prepared for so long began with a rapid, brutal German attack on Poland. Stalin's Soviet Union then occupied eastern Poland. As Nazi troops overran Poland, the latter's Western allies, Great Britain and France, protested, but took no military action. Soviet troops soon invaded Finland, and German forces occupied Denmark and then

Norway. Hitler next turned his attention to the west, invading France, the Netherlands, and Belgium, and launching massive bombing attacks against Britain.

The German Invasion of Poland

On September 1, 1939, about 1.5 million German troops, led by an armored division, poured into Poland. Fighters and light bombers thundered overhead, carefully coordinating their attacks to protect the infantry. Britain and France responded two days later by declaring war on Germany.

Hitler wanted Polish resistance crushed quickly enough that Britain, and possibly France as well, would limit their reaction to a declaration of war. But he was prepared to fight the Western allies if necessary.

Poland had a large and well-trained army of more than 1 million soldiers. The German air force destroyed half of Poland's planes in the first attacks on its bases. Bombers battered Warsaw. Poland's frontier defenses collapsed before the onslaught of motorized columns of the German *Blitzkrieg* ("lightning war"). After moving east as German forces advanced, suffering heavy losses in the process, the Polish government moved to Paris on September 17. Warsaw fell ten days later. The German armies immediately implemented a policy of terror, killing prisoners of war, burning hundreds of towns and villages, and systematically massacring the Polish elite, while preparing the way for the settlement of the conquered lands by Germans.

German tanks move into Poland, September 1939.



From the east, Soviet armies invaded Poland on September 17. They did so with Hitler's blessing, under a secret agreement made between Stalin and Hitler as part of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Nonaggression Pact. Poland, partitioned three times late in the eighteenth century, was once again divided up. On Stalin's orders, more than 14,000 Polish officers and intellectuals were executed in the forest of Katyn about 200 miles southwest of Moscow. The Soviet dictator ordered the transfer of Poles in cattle wagons as "special settlers" to the eastern reaches of the Soviet Union.

The "Phony War"

As Hitler had hoped, Britain and France took no military action. Few people seemed willing to "die for Danzig (Gdańsk)," the Polish port Germany had lost by the Treaty of Versailles. British and French military experts, shocked by the speed of the German victory over Poland, overestimated the strength of Hitler's armies. An immediate French and British attack on Germany from the west might have been successful while the Germans were tied up in Poland, where the German army and air force had seriously depleted available munitions. Britain and France had more than twice as many divisions ready, and the German air force had few planes available to fight in the west. French troops made one brief, unopposed excursion fourteen miles into Germany, and then fell back. The British Royal Air Force flew over Germany, but dropped only leaflets calling for peace. Both the British and French governments believed that an attack on Germany would fail. They had been stunned by Hitler's pact with Stalin; unlike in World War I, it now appeared that Germany would only have to fight a war on one front.

Hitler confidently announced to his generals that he planned to order an invasion of France in the near future. The German army and air force were readied, while the French army dug in behind the supposedly impregnable fortifications of the Maginot Line, that line of bunkers stretching from Switzerland to the Belgian border (see Map 26.2).

The winter months that followed the Polish invasion became immediately known as the "phony war." Planned first for November and then for January, the German invasion of Western Europe was postponed until the spring of 1940. French troops stared into the rain, mist, and fog from their bunkers. Fearing German bombing attacks, the British government issued Londoners gas masks and imposed a nighttime blackout. In Rome, Mussolini had developed cold feet just before Hitler's invasion of Poland, because he knew that Italy lacked enough coal, oil, iron, and steel to wage a lengthy war. But he believed a German invasion of France inevitable. Mussolini announced that Italy's status would be one of "non-belligerence," a term he selected to avoid comparisons with the "neutrality" against which he had vociferously campaigned before Italy entered World War I in 1915.



MAP 26.2 THE GERMAN AND ITALIAN ADVANCE, 1939-1942 The opening of the war included advances by the Germans into Poland, the U.S.S.R., the Scandinavian countries, the Balkans, and North Africa. The Italians sent troops into Albania, and from there into Greece. The British unsuccessfully attempted to take a stand against the Germans in Norway, and British and French troops were evacuated from the continent at Dunkirk.

The War in the Frozen North

While the “phony war” continued in the west, fighting began in northern Europe. The Russian border with Finland, independent since the Russian Revolution, lay only fourteen miles from Leningrad. Stalin demanded that the Finnish government cede strategically important territories to the Soviets. When the Finnish government refused in November 1939, the Red

Army invaded. Badly outnumbered Finnish soldiers fought bravely in sub-zero temperatures, sometimes on skis, carrying light machine guns against Russian tanks and temporarily holding back the Soviet forces. Finland harbored no illusions about winning the "Winter War," but, like Poland, hoped to be saved by British and French diplomatic or military intervention. France now favored, at least in principle, armed intervention on behalf of Finland. So did Britain's Winston Churchill, who had angered his Conservative Party by opposing appeasement of Hitler at Munich. But Finnish resistance soon was broken. By the Peace of Moscow, signed March 12, 1940, the Soviet Union annexed about 10 percent of Finnish territory.

With the goal of stopping Swedish iron ore from being shipped to Germany, in April British ships mined the Norwegian harbor of Narvik, despite the objections of the government of Norway. On November 9 German troops occupied Denmark, which surrendered without a fight (see Map 26.2). German paratroopers landed at Oslo and other Norwegian port cities, followed by troops put ashore by ships. German soldiers repelled Allied troops, who arrived at the end of April with sketchy orders and inadequate weapons.

Prime Minister Chamberlain had assured the British House of Commons that Germany "had missed the bus" by waiting so long to attack in the west. But Germany's lightning occupation of Denmark and victory in Norway brought down the Chamberlain government. Churchill, who had been a member of Parliament on and off since 1900, became prime minister on May 10, 1940. The outspoken Churchill was an unpopular choice among even some Conservatives, who held an overwhelming majority in Parliament. Many remembered his impulsive attachment to far-fetched military operations during the First World War, which had led to the catastrophic defeat of British troops at Gallipoli in 1915. Even one of his trusted advisers said that Churchill had ten new ideas each day, but that nine of them were bad. Still, his resilience, determination, and dedication made Churchill an extraordinary wartime leader.

The Fall of France

German troops stared confidently across the Rhine River at their French opponents. The German army could simply sidestep the French Maginot Line, which stopped at the Belgian frontier. Germany enjoyed vast superiority over France in the air (France had only about 500 first-line fighter planes, Germany 4,000). Furthermore, the German army and air force were already well-practiced, having conquered Poland.

French soldiers had become demoralized by the winter months in the damp bunkers along the Maginot Line. The plan of the French high command to engage the enemy forces as they moved into the Low Countries was undermined by the Belgian and Dutch governments; both, hoping to remain neutral, had been unwilling to coordinate defense planning with the French army. The French generals lacked confidence in the strength

of their forces and—at least some—in the Third Republic itself. French tanks were as good as those of Germany but lacked sufficient fuel and were dispersed among infantry divisions, instead of concentrated in tank divisions as in the German army. French communications networks along the front were inadequate. After eight months of “phony war,” many people in France were uncertain as to why they might be once again fighting Germany.

Compounding serious military problems, the British and French governments were already sniping at each other. The French resented the fact that their ally sent a relatively small British Expeditionary Force to France; the British government seemed willing to defend France down to the last Frenchman. On the other hand, the French had irritated their British counterparts by opposing Allied bombing of Germany, fearing that the expected swift reprisals would strike them, not Britain.

On May 10, 1940, the “phony war” in the west suddenly ended. In a carefully rehearsed attack, German gliders landed troops who captured a massive Belgian fortress. Airborne divisions took the airport and central bridges of the Dutch port of Rotterdam; German bombers then destroyed ships, docks, and the heart of the old city, killing 40,000 people. The German assault on France began through the Ardennes Forest on the Belgian border; ten tank divisions pushed seventy miles into France. German planes, controlling the air, swept down on French troops and destroyed half the planes of the British Royal Air Force in three days. Mussolini, a portly vulture circling above the wounded French prey, declared war on France on May 10, but an Italian army managed to advance only about a hundred yards across the border toward Nice.

French commanders then foolishly sent most of their armored reserves into the Netherlands while German tanks, having reached the Meuse River in eastern France, now turned west and moved toward the English Channel. They were vulnerable to an Allied counterattack, but only a minor challenge by a tank column commanded by French General Charles de Gaulle (1890–1970) slowed the German drive to the Channel. Instead of attacking, British troops retreated from Belgium into France, heading toward the Channel. German columns reached the Channel on May 21, 1940, cutting the Allied forces in half. The Netherlands surrendered on May 15, Belgium on May 28. By now the roads of northern France were choked, not only with retreating British and French troops, but with Belgian and French refugees fleeing the battle zones, strafed by German planes.

France’s defeat was now only a matter of time. British troops, joined by remnants of the French forces, managed to hold off the German army, making possible the evacuation of 340,000 British and French troops at the end of May and early June 1940 from Dunkirk by every available British vessel, including fishing trawlers and pleasure craft. The German army wheeled to confront the French troops still uselessly defending the Maginot Line. The French government left Paris for Bordeaux, as it had in 1870. The German



Hitler takes a triumphant stroll through Paris in June 1940.

army occupied the capital on June 14. On June 16, Marshal Philippe Pétain, hero of the Battle of Verdun in 1916, became premier. The next day, he asked Germany for an armistice. France and Britain had several months earlier agreed that neither ally would ask for an armistice without the approval of the other. The British government wanted the French armies to move to North Africa and continue the war from there. However, on June 22, the gleeful Hitler accepted the French surrender in a railway car in the spot where Germany had signed a similar document in November 1918. Hitler then set out to tour Paris. On July 3, the British navy sunk a battleship, a cruiser, and several destroyers of the French fleet as they lay in port at Mers el-Kébir in Algeria, killing 1,300 French sailors. The British command feared that the ships might fall into German hands.

The Battle of Britain

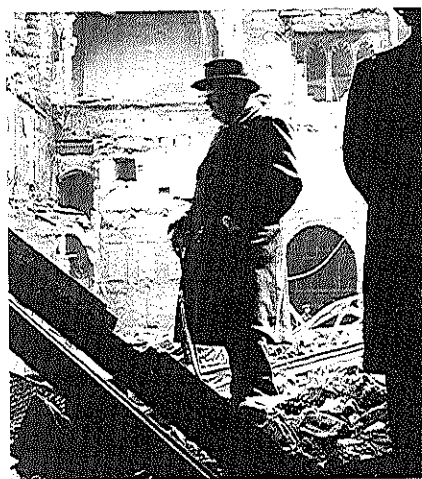
Britain would fight on. Addressing the House of Commons, Churchill declared, "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat. . . . You ask, what is our policy? I will say: it is to wage war, by sea, land, and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us."

Hitler now considered whether an invasion of Britain could succeed. Germany held the French and Belgian Channel ports, a position it had never achieved during World War I. Furthermore, with Ireland having proclaimed its neutrality, the Royal Navy no longer had use of southern Irish ports.

Fearing a German attack, the British government interned German subjects, including some of the 50,000 Jewish refugees from Nazism. In some places, officials took down road signs and place names, and shopkeepers shredded local maps to disorient any German invading army. For an invasion of Britain to succeed, the German air force (the Luftwaffe) had to control the skies. The ensuing Battle of Britain, fought over the Channel and above southern England, lasted four dramatic months, from the very end of July through October 31, 1940, although most of the climactic duels in the sky took place in August and September. The German bombing "blitz" of London began on September 7. Londoners took to the subway stations and underground air-raid shelters for protection. The British used radar, first developed in 1935, to detect German attacks. Recently built British Spitfires and Hurricanes reached greater speeds than the German Messerschmitt fighters and could break through fighter escorts to get to the cumbersome German bombers. Hitler ordered the bombing of key industries and aircraft factories in England even as British bombers appeared over Berlin in August, demonstrating that Britain was far from defeated.

Britain lost 650 fighter planes, but factories were producing replacements and new pilots were being trained. As German air losses mounted, the Luftwaffe turned to less accurate night bombing to keep the British fighters out of the air. At the end of September 1940, Hitler was forced to abandon his plan to invade England. Churchill called the Battle of Britain his country's "finest hour."

(Left) Evacuating children from London during the German bombing "blitz," 1940. *(Right)* British Prime Minister Winston Churchill amid the rubble in London, 1940.



A GLOBAL WAR

World War II rapidly spread to almost all corners of the globe. Total war absorbed national resources on an unprecedented scale, as factories began to turn out weapons, munitions, and war materiel. Governments assumed considerable control over economies, coordinating production, raising taxes, and imposing rationing. Scientists were put to work in the war effort.

In June 1941, Germany launched an air and ground attack on the Soviet Union. However, Hitler failed to reckon with determined Russian resistance, as well as with the harsh Russian winter. The largest invading army in history ground to a halt in the frozen snow. Finally, on December 7, 1941, Japanese planes carried out a surprise attack on the U.S. naval and air force base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The raid inflicted great damage on the U.S. Pacific Fleet and brought the United States into what had become a global conflict fought on an unprecedented scale.

Total War

Britain was the first combatant in World War II to find itself engaged in a total war. As the war expanded, other states confronted similar challenges. German military planners counted on Hitler's confident assertion that the United States would stay out of the war and that Germany could bring the British to their knees. But the United States, where British resistance won sympathy and admiration, could help Britain in other ways. On December 29, 1940, President Franklin D. Roosevelt announced that the United States would be "the arsenal of democracy," despite official neutrality. Since direct loans might recall for many Americans the defaults by those countries in debt to the United States after World War I, Congress passed the Lend-Lease Act in March 1941. It authorized the president to lend destroyers, trucks, and other equipment, and to send food to Great Britain, which in exchange would lease naval bases in the Caribbean to the United States.

Unlike Germany, which had been preparing for war virtually since Hitler came to power, Britain had to start almost from scratch. The British government succeeded in rallying the king's subjects to wartime sacrifices. Because very few people had any doubts about the extent of the Nazi threat to Britain itself, military conscription at the beginning of the war was quickly accepted. Before the war began, the British armed forces comprised 500,000 people; at the end of the war, 5 million. Women took the places in industry vacated by departing troops, accounting for 80 percent of the increase in the labor force between 1939 and 1943. In 1939, 7,000 women worked in ordnance factories in Britain; in October 1944, there were 260,000.

The British War Cabinet imposed governmental controls on the economy and by 1942 had achieved a high degree of coordination in wartime production. The government imposed higher taxes, implemented rent control, established rationing, and called for voluntary restraints on wage raises.

Pants came without cuffs or zippers; a suspicious gray "utility loaf" replaced white bread. British farmers augmented agricultural production by increasing the amount of land under cultivation by a full third.

In October 1940, Churchill established a scientific advisory committee to put some of Britain's most eminent scientists to work designing more powerful and reliable weapons. One of the most significant breakthroughs of the war was not a technological innovation but the solving of the complex puzzle of a secret code. British intelligence officers, aided by mathematicians, deciphered communications between Hitler and his high command during the Battle of Britain. This subsequently allowed the Allies to know many German military moves in advance. British intelligence officers then broke the German communications code, facilitating, among other things, the identification of spies. By the end of 1943, the code breakers, some using the "Enigma" machine developed after World War I to decipher secret messages, were intercepting more than 90,000 messages a month. The British Psychological Warfare Division, along with their U.S. counterpart, also put the science of psychology into the service of modern warfare, waging radio and leaflet campaigns in an attempt to weaken the enemy's will to continue fighting.

Hitler's Allies

Hitler sought other allies in an attempt to win the war quickly. Seeking to discourage the United States, Japan's rival in the Pacific, from entering the war on the Allied side against Germany and Italy, the two Axis powers signed the Tripartite Pact with Japan in September 1940. Germany and Italy recognized Japan's interests in Asia, while Japan acknowledged those of Germany and Italy in Europe. The treaty specified that each power agreed to cooperate should any one of them be attacked by "a Power at present not involved in the European war or in the Chinese-Japanese conflict." Hitler then tried to convince Francisco Franco, whose victory in the Spanish Civil War Hitler had helped make possible, to join the war of the Axis powers against Britain. The German dictator envisioned a Spanish seizure of Gibraltar and German use of naval bases in the Spanish Canary Islands. The Spanish dictator pleaded the poverty of his country and, as if to emphasize the point, arrived at the meeting with Hitler hours late on a plodding train. After spending eight hours cajoling Franco, Hitler said, "I would prefer to have three or four teeth extracted rather than go through that again." Franco's Spain, however much ideologically in tune with Hitler's Germany, remained officially neutral.

In Romania, King Carol II was powerless in the face of his greedy neighbors, who were encouraged by Germany. He surrendered to Hungary a part of Transylvania that had been awarded to Romania by the Treaty of Versailles and that included a considerable Hungarian population. Stalin forced Romania to hand over to the Soviet Union northern Bukovina and Bessara-

bia, which had once been part of the Russian Empire. Bulgaria also helped itself to Romanian territory. As a result, the Romanian fascist Iron Guard rebelled and forced King Carol to abdicate in favor of his son Michael in September 1940.

Now convinced it was facing a long war, Germany hurried to secure a supply of raw materials by occupying Romania and its rich oil fields in October 1940. A right-wing general, Ion Antonescu (1882–1946), ran the country with the help of the Iron Guard, which served German interests and unleashed its fury against Romania's Jews and Communists. Both Romania and Hungary formally joined the Axis in November 1940.

From the beginning, it appeared that Italy's contributions to the German war effort would be minimal at best. Mussolini aimed to take as much territory in North Africa as possible before the British surrender upon which he counted. After having failed to launch air attacks, as Hitler had wanted, on British bases on the Mediterranean island of Malta, Mussolini invaded Egypt in September 1940, refusing a German offer to supply tanks because he wanted Italy to claim victory on its own. Unable to provide troops with air cover, Italian forces suffered a series of defeats at the hands of British forces.

Desperate for victory somewhere, on October 28, 1940, the Duce surprised Hitler—as well as his own generals—by ordering his army to invade Greece from Albania. Having paid large bribes to Greek generals and officials not to resist, Mussolini anticipated an easy victory. But a Greek patriot army drove the Italians back into Albania, where resistance movements made life difficult for Mussolini's troops. The Italian army took out its frustrations against the Croatian population of Dalmatia on the Adriatic coast. In the meantime, the British navy battered the Italian fleet.

Italy's imperial holdings in East Africa rapidly crumbled in the spring of 1941. A British and French force took Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital, in April. Hitler sent General Erwin Rommel (1891–1944), commander of a tank division, to North Africa to bail out the Italian troops. Mussolini vowed to continue the war “until the last Italian is killed.”

The German Invasion of Russia

Hitler always intended to invade and defeat the Soviet Union, despite the Molotov-Ribbentrop Nonaggression Pact of August 1939. After occupying eastern Poland following the German invasion of Poland, Soviet troops had occupied the Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania during the summer of 1940, claiming that they had been illegitimately detached from Russia after World War I, when they had become independent. German interest in Finland and moves in Romania now made Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov (1890–1986) anxious. The Soviets sought reassurance in a new pact, one that Mussolini would sign as well. Molotov went to Berlin. Assured personally by Hitler that Britain lay defeated,

Molotov replied, "Then whose bombers are those overhead, and why are we in this bomb shelter?"

Hitler intended "Operation Barbarossa," the invasion of Russia, to be a "quick campaign" of no more than ten weeks' duration. He hoped that Japan would attack Siberia, thereby forcing Stalin to divert troops there. Some German generals held the Russian army in such contempt that they ordered no serious assessment of Russia's existing or potential military strength. If the Finns on skis had been able to hold off Russian divisions with seemingly little more than snowballs, how could German fighters and tanks fail to break through with relative ease?

The opening of a Balkan front delayed Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union, which had been planned for May 1941. Britain had sent forces to Greece following the Italian invasion, which made German bases in Yugoslavia even more crucial. An anti-German faction had overthrown the Yugoslav government in March and refused to join the Axis or to allow German troops into the country. Hitler ordered an invasion of Yugoslavia in April. German armies then pushed into Greece. As in World War I, Bulgaria in March cast its fate with Germany. Bulgarian troops occupied parts of Greek Macedonia and Thrace. The German army forced a British withdrawal from the Greek mainland to the Aegean island of Crete, which soon itself fell to German paratroopers. Greece was occupied by German, Italian, and Bulgarian troops. Five percent of the Greek population died of starvation, along with hundreds of thousands killed in the fighting or executed. By the end of May 1941, Hitler's armies held all of the Balkans.

Hitler could now concentrate on an invasion of the Soviet Union. Stalin, however, failed to heed warnings from Britain and the United States that Russia was Germany's next target. Believing these warnings, including some of his own army's military reports, to be part of a conspiracy to turn him against his German ally, Stalin ordered the execution of some of his intelligence officers.

On June 22, 1941, German planes, tanks, and more than 3 million troops attacked the Soviet Union. The German generals were convinced that the Soviet forces could be easily defeated. However, the Soviets had many more men, field artillery, tanks, and aircraft than Germany, and for the most part their weapons were of quality equal to or even superior to that of the Germans. But German forces quickly devastated Soviet defenses and communication and transportation networks. One army pushed toward Leningrad in July 1941, laying siege to the city. But Leningrad held. The battleship *Aurora*, which had served the Bolshevik cause in the Revolution of 1917, was pressed into service, its guns commandeered from a museum. A second German army captured more than 250,000 prisoners near Minsk (now in Belarus), 250 miles northeast of Warsaw; a third, finding support from anti-Russian Ukrainians, took Kiev in September 1941. Hitler rejected his generals' suggestion that the attack on Moscow be given priority. Instead, armored units were transferred to the northern army besieging Leningrad.



Peasants watching the effects of the German invasion of Ukraine, August 1941.

The German advance left Russian towns and villages in ruins, and hundreds of thousands of civilians dead. But despite enormous battlefield casualties, as well as half a million captured prisoners dying of hunger and cold in German camps, Russian resistance stiffened. News of Nazi atrocities helped rally virtually the entire population. German armies bogged down in the face of determined resistance around Smolensk. Soviet state-run factories were converted to wartime production, soon turning out great numbers of tanks of good quality. The United States, still officially neutral in the conflict, extended the Lend-Lease policy to the Soviet Union.

Their drive to victory stalled, despite having captured more than a million square miles of Soviet territory, the German troops, like Napoleon's armies in 1812, found that a frozen winter, the coldest in a century, followed the chilly Russian fall. "Hitler no more resembles Napoleon than a kitten resembles a lion," Stalin taunted. Oil for tanks and guns froze. So did soldiers. The German high command, so certain of a quick victory, had not bothered to provide them with warm clothing and blankets for temperatures reaching far below zero.

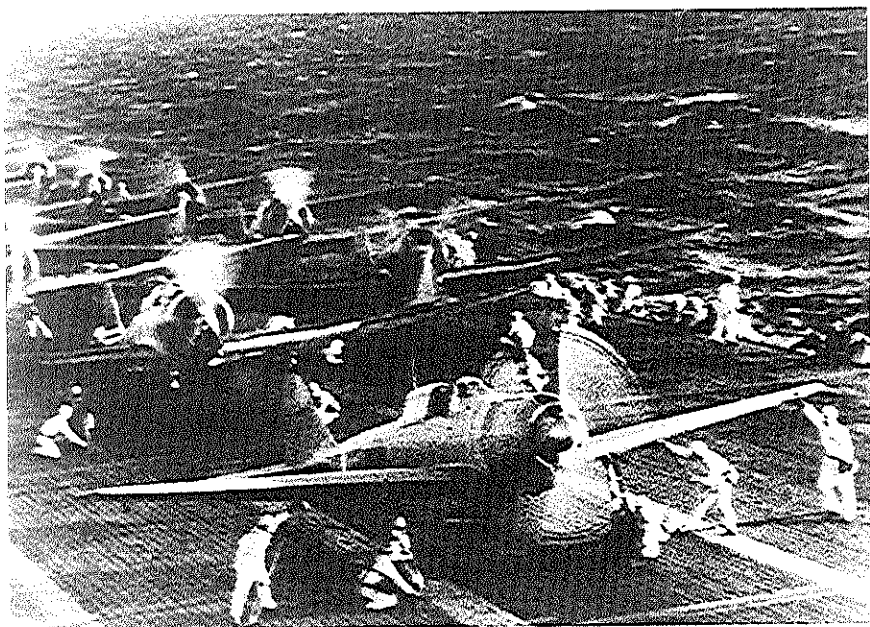
After ordering a halt in the push toward Moscow, Hitler, fearing the consequences of retreat on German morale, ignored the advice of his generals to pull back and await spring weather. Early in December 1941, a desperate German attack stalled twenty miles from Moscow. The German army never got closer. During the first year of the Russian campaign, German casualties reached 1.3 million, or 40 percent of the original invading force, the greatest losses of any single military operation in history.

Japan's Attack on the United States

Four years of aggression in Asia brought Japan to the point of confrontation with the United States. Since invading Manchuria in 1931 and proclaiming it the puppet state of Manchukuo a year later, Japan had sought to expand its influence and territory in the Pacific region. Southeast Asian oil was one Japanese target, particularly after the United States, Great Britain, and the Netherlands imposed an economic boycott following the Manchurian invasion. The Japanese quest for rubber, tin, and other raw materials threatened British economic interests in Burma and Malaya, as well as those of the Dutch in Java and of the United States in the Philippine Islands.

In 1937, Japan had joined the Anti-Comintern Pact that Germany and Italy had signed the previous year. Also in 1937, the Japanese army moved further into China and occupied the main ports, moves that the American government viewed with alarm. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Nonaggression Pact, signed between the Soviet Union and Germany in August 1939, had voided the Anti-Comintern Pact, as the Soviet Union was a Communist state. After Japanese troops entered Indochina, in September 1940, Japan concluded the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy, thus becoming part of the Axis. In an effort to stop the flow of Allied supplies to Chinese forces over the railway from Hanoi and a long dirt road from Burma, Japan had assumed a "protective" occupation of French Indochina in July 1941. A nonaggression

Japanese dive bombers preparing to take off from an aircraft carrier before attacking Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941.



pact with the Soviet Union, signed in April 1941, two months before the German invasion of Russia, bolstered Japanese confidence that it could attack and inflict a stinging defeat on the United States and force the Americans to a negotiated settlement.

On Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, a Japanese force of fighters and dive-bombers surprised the American naval and air force base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Three U.S. battleships were sunk, and five were severely damaged; ten other vessels were destroyed or disabled and 188 planes destroyed. The attack killed 2,403 naval and other military personnel, and more than 1,000 were wounded. However, three aircraft carriers were at sea and could still be readied to take on the Japanese fleet in the Pacific Ocean. Vast stocks of oil, too, survived. Japan quickly followed with successful invasions of Malaya, the Philippines, Singapore (where almost 60,000 British soldiers surrendered), and Pacific islands as far distant as the Aleutians near Alaska (see Map 26.3).

Because American intelligence officers had deciphered Japan's coded messages, President Roosevelt had known that Japan was planning to launch a war against the United States. Yet the attack on Pearl Harbor came as a surprise, in part because U.S. intelligence services were swamped with messages suggesting attacks at other locations. Calling December 7, 1941, "a day that will live in infamy," Roosevelt declared war on Japan.

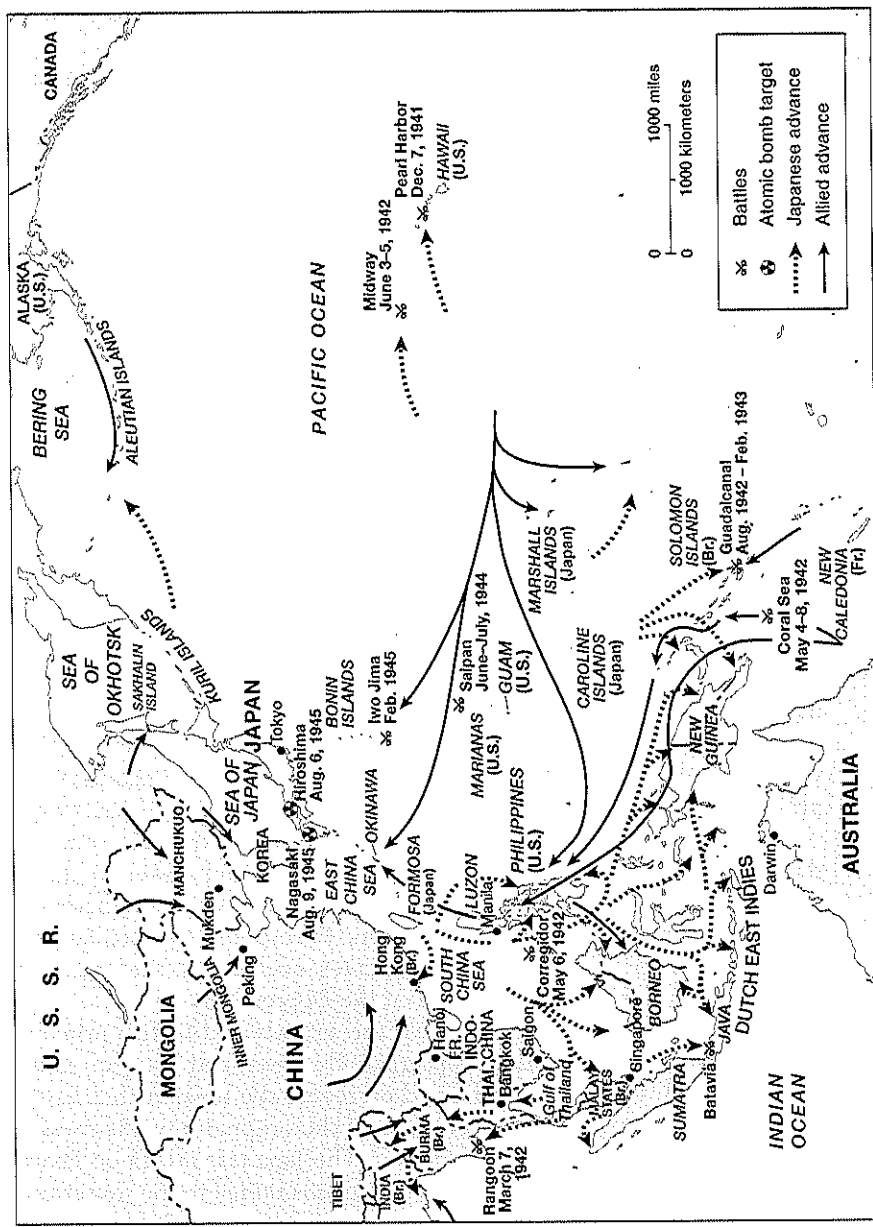
Hitler, bound by treaty to Japan, then declared war against the United States. He believed that public opinion in the United States was against American involvement in another European war. In fact, he knew amazingly little about the United States.

Upon hearing the news of Pearl Harbor, Churchill exclaimed, "We have won the war!" The entry of the United States into the war against Germany provided, as in 1917, a crucial material advantage to the Allies. Despite its slow recovery from the Depression, which hit it harder than any other nation, the United States had become the largest industrial power in the world, producing more than the next six powers combined. American factories were quickly converted to military production. In response to wartime demand, industrial production in the United States doubled by the end of 1943, finally pulling the United States out of the Depression.

Despite the patronizing attitude of the self-assured British prime minister, a warm personal relationship gradually developed between Churchill and Roosevelt. Their rapport helped overcome the tension that had developed between the two powers because of the original unwillingness of the United States to join Britain in the war. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor ended U.S. isolationism. American citizens rallied to the war effort, particularly against the Japanese. "Remember Pearl Harbor!" struck a chord in the United States that "Remember Belgium" or "Remember France" could not have.

The fact that an Asian power had attacked the United States galled Americans, many of whom believed that Asians were inferior. Amid rumors

MAP 26.3 THE JAPANESE ADVANCE AND ALLIED COUNTEROFFENSIVE, 1941–1945 After launching a surprise attack against the U.S. naval and air force base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, the Japanese successfully invaded most of the Southeast Asian countries and many of the Pacific islands.



that Japanese citizens and Japanese Americans were preparing to carry out acts of sabotage in the United States, the U.S. government interned in "relocation centers" about 40,000 Japanese citizens residing in the United States and 70,000 Japanese Americans, most living on the West Coast. American citizens of German descent, in contrast, were not interned.

The first of several meetings between the British and American military chiefs of staff took place in Washington, D.C., in January 1942. The Allied commanders decided to give the European theater of war the highest priority. An immediate concentration of attacks against Japanese forces seemed less urgent. In any case, it would take considerable time to dislodge the Japanese from the Southeast Asian countries and Pacific islands they had conquered.

HITLER'S EUROPE

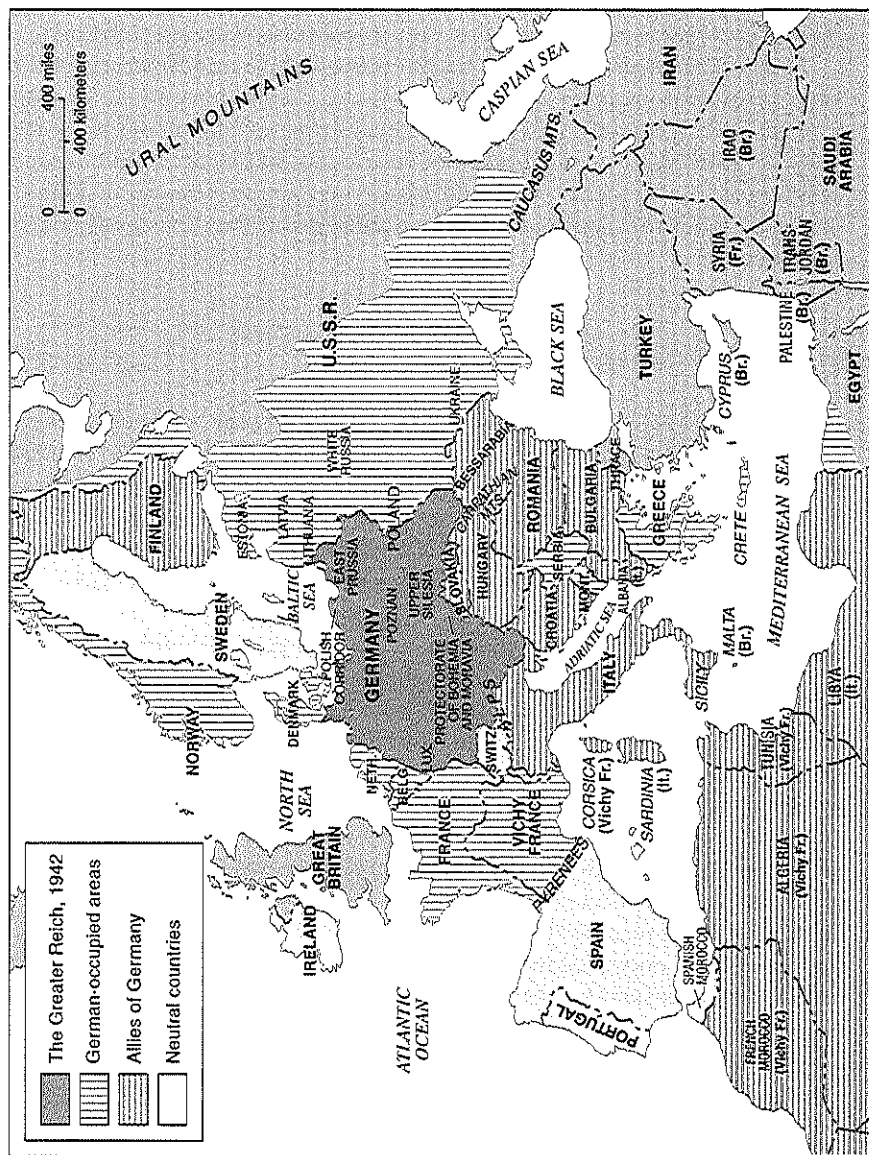
Whether or not each conquered state retained some autonomy, German policies were first directed at extracting useful raw materials needed to wage an extended war. The exact nature of the relationship between Germany and each occupied state varied from country to country. Yet in all of these states the Nazis carried out Hitler's policy of genocide against Jews and others belonging to what he considered to be inferior races, often aided by local collaborators.

In every country overrun by German troops, people could be found who were eager or willing to collaborate with the Nazis. These ranged from leaders willing to serve German interests to ordinary people whose political biases or hope for gain or even just survival led them to help the Nazis. Yet, in many countries, resistance movements bravely opposed the rule of the Nazis or their allies. The largest and most successful resistance was in mountainous Yugoslavia, where resisters were able to take on entire German divisions, and, to a lesser extent, in France, where groups of guerrilla fighters undertook hit-and-run attacks against the Germans and the collaborationist government. In Germany, resistance to Hitler and the Nazis barely existed, notwithstanding a courageous attempt by disenchanted army officers to assassinate Hitler in July 1944. To the end, most Germans remained loyal to the Führer, or at least could not or did not resist.

The Nazi "New European Order"

Hitler sought to exploit the economic resources of the countries his armies had conquered and to assure that no effective opposition could emerge in any of them. Germany annexed the disputed Polish territories it had claimed, including Poznan, Upper Silesia, and the Polish Corridor; Hitler considered them German in the first place. Direct German administration was extended to Ukraine and Belarus. Germans who lived in Poland,

MAP 26.4 HITLER'S EUROPE, 1942 Hitler's expansion to the east and west, showing the greatest extent of the German occupation of Europe.



Lithuania, or those parts of the Soviet Union that were behind German lines were "repatriated" to Germany, or settled in the newly conquered territories (see Map 26.4).

German policies were different in Poland and Russia, whose peoples Hitler considered to be racially inferior. Following the fall of Warsaw, Hitler had sent five special "action" squads to Poland with orders to wipe out the Polish upper class. All over the country, businessmen, political leaders, intellectuals, and teachers were executed or sent to extermination camps.

Norway and Denmark, deemed by Hitler to be sufficiently "Nordic" or "Aryan" to be "Germanized," were allowed relative autonomy. In Denmark, where the only elections in any country under a Nazi regime took place, the Danish Nazi Party won a paltry 2 percent of the vote. Hitler left Germany's central and southern European "independent" allies with some autonomy, depending on the extent to which they followed his wishes. Admiral Miklós Horthy ruled Hungary under increasingly close German supervision, particularly after Hitler learned that he tried to play both sides by getting in touch with the Allies in 1942. Slovakia, which had been denied independence by the Versailles settlements, had become autonomous when Germany marched into Czechoslovakia in 1938, splitting the country into two parts. Pro-German nationalist fascists held power in Slovakia. In wartime Romania, the fascist Ion Antonescu ruled. Hitler divided Yugoslavia into the states of Serbia, Montenegro, and Croatia. Placing Serbia under direct German administration, he put Croatia and Montenegro under the rule of an authoritarian leader informally responsible to Mussolini.

The Germans imposed crushing obligations on conquered lands, including enormous financial indemnities and exchange rates that strongly favored the German currency. Germans operated factories and shipping companies in occupied countries. In France, the Germans first took movable raw materials and equipment useful for war production. As the war went on, German demands became greater; the occupation authorities closely regulated the armament, aircraft, mining, and metal industries. Some French businesses made the best of the situation, eagerly working with German firms. A few quietly subverted German demands and expectations for cooperation.

The "Final Solution"

Hitler's obsessive racial theories had become official policy in Nazi Germany before the war (see Chapter 25). For the Nazis, the process of forging the "national community" meant the elimination of groups they considered to be "outsiders." They made a temporary exception of foreign laborers, upon whom the economy depended during the war. In 1939, Hitler had ordered the killing, often by injection, of Germans who were mentally deficient and handicapped. At least 70,000 mentally retarded people perished, including children, before public objections that the victims were German halted this practice in August 1941. In addition, the Nazis sterilized between

320,000 and 350,000 German "outcasts" between 1934 and 1945; these included people determined by Nazi doctors to manifest "hereditary simple-mindedness," alcoholism, homosexuality, chronic depression, schizophrenia, or those who were deemed "work shy." Hitler mandated experiments to determine how thousands of people could be killed "efficiently" in assembly-line fashion.

In 1939, Hitler told Heinrich Himmler (1900–1945), the leader of the S.S., to plan for the occupation of Poland and the Soviet Union. The short, stout Himmler was obsessed with the pagan Germans of prehistory, establishing several spurious academic institutes to study his crackpot theories. Himmler welcomed Hitler's order to "eliminate the harmful influence of such alien parts of the population." Hitler announced to the Reichstag on January 30, 1939, that the result of the anticipated war would be "the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe," the "final solution."

Nazi plans to exterminate Jews took shape as German military defeats mounted in Russia. There the massacre of Russians had already begun. In January 1941, Himmler announced to S.S. leaders a change in policy. Hitler no longer wanted to transform Slavs into a slave labor force, but rather wanted to destroy at least 30 million of them. Germans eventually would occupy their lands. German troops and death squads executed Russian prisoners and civilians. Before the war ended, at least 3.3 million Soviet prisoners of war—of 5.7 million captured—were executed or died in German prisoner-of-war camps.

A Gestapo directive on July 17, 1941, ordered commanders of prison camps in the east to liquidate "all the Jews." In October 1941, the Nazis began to prepare for the Holocaust, the genocide of European Jews. Hermann Göring ordered Reinhard Heydrich (1904–1942), the chief of the secret police, to prepare "a total solution of the Jewish question." By the end of 1941, 1 million Jews had been massacred. Heydrich and other Nazi officials met in Wannsee, a Berlin suburb, in January 1942. There they drew up even more systematic plans for genocide.

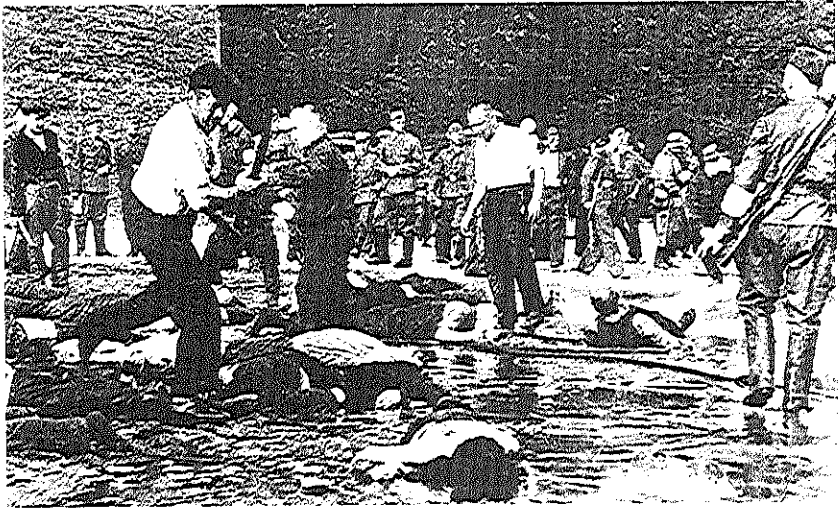
The assembly-line-like murders of Jews began, first in mobile vans, using carbon monoxide gas, then in the extermination camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau near Krakow in southern Poland. By 1942, the Nazis had built other extermination camps, surrounded by barbed-wire, electrified fences, and watchtowers (see Map 26.5). Gallows stood in an open space near the prisoners' wooden huts. But most victims were exterminated in airtight gas chambers with Zyklon B gas, chosen because it killed with efficiency. The victims' eyeglasses, gold from their teeth, and all other valuables became the property of the Reich.

Inmates of the camps wore tattered striped uniforms, and they were identified by numbers tattooed on their arms. They were ordered to file past an officer, who selected those deemed "unfit" for hard labor, which at Auschwitz was about 70 to 75 percent. He sent them toward a building marked "shower" or "bath," and some were given, in the ultimate cynical



MAP 26.5 NAZI DEATH CAMPS Sites of the death camps in Europe.

gesture, a small piece of soap. A recent, unknowing arrival at Auschwitz inquired of another prisoner as to the whereabouts of his friend. "Was he sent to the left side?" . . . 'Yes,' I replied. 'Then you can see him there,' I was told. 'Where?' A hand pointed to the chimney a few hundred yards off, which was sending a column of flame up into the gray sky of Poland. It dissolved into a sinister cloud of smoke." Those people sent to the right—mostly the young in relatively good health—would continue to live until they dropped dead of fatigue or were subsequently sent to the left side in another "selection." Almost all children were killed right away, because they were too young to work as slave laborers in the I.G. Farben chemical factory near the camp. At Auschwitz, the daily death count reached as high as 15,000 victims. Overall, Hungarian Jews perished in the largest numbers, followed closely by Poles. One of the granddaughters of Alfred Dreyfus, the Jewish French army officer falsely accused of treason in the 1890s (see Chapter 18), perished there in 1944.



Jews being massacred in Lithuania, 1942.

The fascist states of Croatia and Romania, both Germany's allies, carried out the mass murder of Jews themselves. The Romanian government killed 300,000 Jews in the provinces that the Soviets had occupied in 1940, but few in what the Romanians considered the heartland of the country. In Lithuania, Ukraine, and, to a lesser extent, Poland, there were many cases of local populations massacring Jews.

Some people protected the Jews. A small French town took in Jewish children, producing identity cards for them that made them family members. In Marseille, Varian Fry, an American editor, journalist, and member of the American Refugee Committee, relentlessly planned escape routes, purchased tickets, and, where possible, obtained transit and other visas and found sponsors for about 1,000 Jews early in the war, including the painter Marc Chagall and the poet André Breton. A Warsaw woman rescued 2,500 children from the city's Jewish ghetto. In Amsterdam, Christians brought food and other supplies to a German Jewish family, hidden in a secret annex apartment in the father's office building for several years. In her resolutely cheerful diary, the young Anne Frank described her family's hiding place as "a paradise compared with how other Jews who are not in hiding must be living." It frightened her to think of her friends who had fallen into the clutches of "the cruelest brutes that walk the earth." Several months after her fourteenth birthday, Nazi soldiers discovered Frank's family. She and her family were deported to Auschwitz. Frank died in the death camp of Bergen-Belsen in the spring of 1945.

In Denmark, most of the Jewish population was saved in October 1943. When word came that the German occupying forces were preparing to



Dutch Jews on their way to the trains for transport from Amsterdam to a concentration camp.

deport Danish Jews, Danes ferried Jews across the straits to nearby neutral Sweden. There a courageous German cultural attaché had helped prepare the way. Perhaps fearing that mass deportations might spark Danish resistance, in this case the German authorities looked the other way. In Bulgaria, King Boris and his government, although allied with Nazi Germany, simply abandoned plans to deport the country's 50,000 Bulgarian Jews. (yet Bulgaria willingly handed over to the Nazis and thus to certain death Greek and Yugoslav Jews). In Hungary, Horthy resisted for three years German demands that the Jews of Hungary be sent to death camps. After German occupation in 1944, he ordered the deportations of Jews that had begun to be stopped. Yet Hungarian police killed tens of thousands of Jews in Hungary. In Croatia, where Italy had established an occupation zone, some Italian army officers protected Jews (and Serbs as well) from Croatian death squads. But when, in August 1942, Germany requested that the Italians turn the Croatian Jews over to the Nazis, Mussolini wrote "No objection" across the letter. Italian authorities had little interest in rounding up Italian Jews. They ignored German directives, or they could be bribed to look the other way. Some non-Jewish Romans contributed their jewelry to help raise a ransom demanded by the Germans from Jews under threat of deportation. Others helped Jews hide. They did so at great risk; German troops executed entire families of those who hid or even gave food to Jews.

Nazi doctors performed barbaric experiments on prisoners. These included experiments in the sterilization of Slavic women; measuring the pain a patient could survive when being operated on without anesthesia;

how long one could live in subfreezing temperatures; or whether prisoners would allow themselves to be killed if they thought their children might be spared. Gypsies were also Nazi targets, viewed as “biological outsiders” who were both “alien” by virtue of not being “Aryan” and “asocial,” because they were nomadic. A half million gypsies perished. Communists, socialists, and repeat criminal offenders were also considered “asocial.” Many of them perished as well. The Nazis persecuted homosexuals ruthlessly, identifying them in the death camps with pink stars.

One of the most haunting questions of World War II is at what point the leaders of the Allies and of neutral states actually learned that the Nazis were undertaking the extermination of an entire people. Rumors of mass exterminations had begun to reach Britain and the United States in 1942, although the details were not known. Even after confirmation provided by four young Jews who escaped from Auschwitz in the summer of 1942, and by information arriving via the Polish underground and diffused by the Polish government in London, many people—including even some leaders of the Jewish communities in Britain, Palestine, and the United States—refused to believe “the terrible secret.” (“Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians [by the Turks in 1915]?” Hitler exclaimed just before the war.) Articles in British, Swiss, and U.S. newspapers began to relate the mass killings of Jews. Pope Pius XII (pope 1939–1958), who had served as the Vatican’s representative in Berlin before his election as pope and who issued no papal encyclicals condemning anti-Semitism, knew of the death camps by the end of 1943. Yet the pope did no more than offer reminders of the necessity of “justice and charity” in the world.

The U.S. and British governments had no official reactions to the terrifying news. A head of the British intelligence service claimed that Poles and Jews were exaggerating “in order to stoke us up.” President Roosevelt certainly knew by the summer of 1942, but he rejected the idea of retaliatory bombing of German civilians. He believed that only a sustained military effort could defeat the Nazis. With Hitler’s invasion of Russia having gone awry, it looked as though the tide was beginning to turn against Germany. The Allied governments feared that if too much publicity was given to the disappearance of hundreds of thousands of Jews—millions seemed simply too many to believe—it might generate calls to aid them directly. This, they worried, might undercut the united war effort. The Holocaust continued until the very end of the war; by then 6.2 million Jews had been murdered.

Collaboration

In Western Europe, the Nazis found leaders willing to follow German directives obediently and often enthusiastically. In Norway, Vidkun Quisling (1887–1945), organizer of a fascist party in the 1930s, became the puppet head of state in Norway, his name entering the dictionary as synonymous with traitor. In Belgium, principally Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of

the country, the German occupation gave the fascist leagues influence they had not had before the war. France had been divided by Germany in June 1940 into an occupied zone and a smaller southern zone that retained independence through collaboration with the Nazis. The free zone had its capital in the spa town of Vichy in central France, although in November 1942 German troops occupied all of France. The xenophobia and anti-Semitism of the right-wing French politicians and writers of the 1930s came to fruition in Vichy. Traditional conservatives dissatisfied with the Third Republic for religious and political reasons also lent their support to the Vichy regime.

The elderly Marshal Pétain served as the head of state of the Vichy government, which the United States officially recognized. He remained popular, at least until late 1942, because some people shared his anti-Marxism and anti-Semitism. He presented himself as having saved the French state from extinction at the hands of the German invaders.

But although Vichy may have temporarily saved the French state, Pétain and other collaborators sacrificed the French nation. In the "new order," "country, family, work" replaced "liberty, fraternity, equality" on French coins. Vichy proclaimed a "spiritual revival" against "decadence." Pétain dissolved the Chamber of Deputies and favored the Catholic Church by banning Masonic lodges and divorce. As in Mussolini's Italy, Vichy attempted to impose a structure of "corporatism" on the French economy and society, but with little success. These vertical economic structures were intended to replace unions, which, as in Germany and Italy, became illegal.

The Vichy *milice* (police) raiding a French farmhouse looking for *maquis* (resisters).



Vichy enacted restrictions on Jews similar to those in force in Germany. Beginning in October 1940, a series of laws forbade Jews from holding jobs in public service, education, or cultural affairs, or in professions such as medicine and law. A law in July 1941 sought "to eliminate all Jewish influence in the national economy"; the state appointed a trustee who could sell any property or liquidate any business owned by Jews.

These exclusions were only the beginning. French police cooperated with German soldiers after Hitler's May 1941 order to round up 3,600 Polish Jews in France. In December, the Vichy government proclaimed that it would collaborate with the Nazis with "acts, not words," and did just that. In July 1942, the French police seized 13,000 Jews, most of them foreign-born, in Paris, sending them to death camps in the east. Premier Pierre Laval (1883–1945) insisted that children be sent along with their parents. A Parisian woman later recalled, "I saw a train pass. In front, a car containing French police and German soldiers. Then came cattle cars, sealed. The thin arms of children clasped the grating. A hand waved outside like a leaf in a storm. When the train slowed down, voices cried, 'Mama!' And nothing answered except the squeaking of the springs of the train." Vichy France was the only territory in Europe in which local authorities deported Jews without the presence of German occupying forces, at least in the so-called free zone until November 1942. A militia of determined collaborators created in January 1943 continued to round up Jews, seeking to crush all resistance.

Resistance

Everyone in German-occupied territories knew the potential cost of resistance. In Czechoslovakia, the assassination in May 1942 of Reinhard Heydrich brought the destruction of the entire village of Lidice and most of its inhabitants. When partisans killed ten Germans in a Yugoslav town in October 1941, the Nazis retaliated by massacring 7,000 men, women, and children.

Yet people did resist. On April 19, 1943, the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw, from which already about 300,000 Jews had been sent to the death camps after German troops had concentrated Jews there from other places, rose up against the Nazis. They were crushed almost a month later with the loss of at least 12,000 lives. Thousands of those who had survived perished in the camps. Poland had what amounted to a secret underground state linked to the government in exile, many clandestine publications, and a "Home Army" about 300,000 strong, whose members fought with Allied troops in Europe and Africa. On August 1, 1944, the Warsaw Uprising began. After two months of intense fighting, German military strength again won out, with 200,000 Poles perishing in the fighting or executed afterwards.

Resistance movements were most effective where hills and mountains offered protection from German troops, as in central and southern France, Greece, and Yugoslavia. Active and effective resistance was least possible in

the flatlands of Holland, western Belgium, Moravia, and northern France, areas in which it was difficult to hide and where there were heavy concentrations of German troops, and many collaborators as well. Wherever possible, the Allies dropped supplies to resistance groups. But only in Yugoslavia and, to some extent, France, did the resistance movements help bring about Germany's defeat.

In Yugoslavia, the tenacious Croatian Communist Josip Broz (1892–1980), who became known by his code name of Tito, formed the first army of partisans able to engage the Germans effectively in combat. Tito had served in the Austro-Hungarian army during World War I and was badly wounded and captured. Returning in 1920 to newly independent Yugoslavia, he became an active trade unionist and in 1923 joined the Yugoslav Communist Party. Tito spent six years in prison for his political activities. In 1937 he was named general secretary of the Communist Party.

Tito's partisans fought courageously against the collaborationist Yugoslav puppet states. The Croatian minister of education voiced the opinion that a third of the Serbs should be forced to convert, a third expelled from Croatia, and a third killed. Croatian forces killed 300,000 Serbs. The Cyrillic alphabet used by Serbs became illegal. When asked if he did not fear the punishment of God for what he had done, a fascist (Ustaša) guard retorted,

Marshal Tito (Josip Broz), pictured on the right, Communist head of the Yugoslav Resistance, with his wartime staff in the mountains of Yugoslavia, 1944.



"Don't talk to me about that. . . . For my past, present and future deeds I shall burn in hell, but at least I shall burn for Croatia." At the same time, members of the conservative Serb resistance (Chetniks), who remained loyal to the Yugoslav king, killed thousands of Croats and other non-Serbs.

Tito insisted on cooperation between Serb and Croat resisters, and maintained contacts with non-Communist groups. Protected by the rugged mountains of Croatia, Tito commanded 20,000 men by 1943. Despite being hounded by German, Italian, and Bulgarian troops, and both Croatian fascists and Serb Chetniks, he managed to carve out entire zones under his control. Late in the war, the British government ended support for the Chetniks and began to supply Tito's forces with heavy equipment. Yugoslav partisans tied up entire Italian and German divisions. Tito established local Communist committees to serve as governing authorities in each region liberated.

On June 18, 1940, General Charles de Gaulle, broadcasting from London, called on the French people to resist German rule. The next month, Churchill established an agency in London to provide material assistance to resistance groups. Churchill grudgingly respected de Gaulle for his uncompromising will to oppose the Nazis and the Vichy collaborators, but he also detested him personally. The same room could not hold the two domineering personalities. Roosevelt believed the towering Frenchman dangerously ambitious, a potential thorn in the Allied side. In December 1941, de Gaulle surprised the Allies by sending a small force to capture the French islands of Saint Pierre and Miquelon off the coast of Newfoundland, which were controlled by Vichy France.

Roosevelt believed that there was nothing to be gained from recognizing de Gaulle's London-based "Free French" movement as the legitimate French government. The U.S. government hoped that Vichy might be convinced to try to keep French North Africa out of German hands. The British and U.S. governments worried that recognizing de Gaulle's movement might alienate many people in France. In the meantime, Vichy propaganda repeatedly reminded the public that the British navy had sunk French ships in July 1940, with a huge loss of life.

Several resistance movements in France were united only by a hatred of Nazi occupation and Vichy collaboration. Communists, despite not officially turning against Vichy until Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, formed a well-organized and effective resistance force, building on pre-war organizational networks. Jean Moulin (1899–1943), a former departmental prefect during the Third Republic, led de Gaulle's Free French resistance in France. Moulin managed early in May 1943 to unify the resistance groups within the National Council of Resistance. He was betrayed by a collaborator and died under torture in July 1943 without revealing the names of others in the resistance network.

Resistance spread when the Germans in 1943 began to force France to provide workers for factories in Germany. Many of those refusing to go to

Germany fled into the hills and mountains of France. These resistance bands came to be called the *maquis*, a name for rugged brush in the south of France that could conceal them.

Better armed by airplane drops of guns, the *maquis* grew bolder. By 1944, they controlled some areas in southern France, at least at night, vulnerable only to the arrival of German military columns, diversions that the German army could by then ill afford. General Dwight Eisenhower (1890–1969), commander of Allied forces in the European theater of operations, later claimed that the resistance in France was the equivalent of fifteen military divisions.

Against Hitler in Germany

The vast majority of Germans remained loyal to their Führer, even as defeats mounted and Allied bombers frequently droned overhead and news of horrendous losses on the Russian front became known. Disgruntlement and bitter jokes were common, but they did not threaten the regime. Those who had never approved of Hitler retreated into family life and the daily struggle to get by. When wartime deprivation left people grumbling, Germans tended to blame Hitler's subordinates, not the Führer.

German resistance against Hitler was fragmented and ineffective. Courts sentenced 15,000 Germans to death for crimes against the state, under an expanded definition of capital crimes, which included listening to BBC radio broadcasts from London. Trade union and Communist groups, earlier smashed by the S.S., emerged again as economic conditions worsened in 1942 and 1943. Some students in Munich and Communists in Berlin bravely distributed anti-Nazi propaganda, but such courageous acts were not widespread. About 250,000 people in Germany were imprisoned or forced to emigrate because of their political opposition and at least 150,000 German Communists were executed. The active connivance of ordinary Germans aided the S.S. and Gestapo in rooting out potential sources of opposition. Even humane gestures toward Jews or foreign workers were dangerous. Here and there, young people responded to Nazism by adopting a counterculture of nonconformity, refusing to join the Hitler Youth, listening to American music deemed decadent by Hitler, and scrawling anti-Nazi graffiti on walls. The Nazis publicly hanged several sixteen-year-old boys for such actions.

The only serious plot against Hitler came among traditional conservatives within the army. On July 20, 1944, Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg (1907–1944) carried a bomb in his briefcase to a staff meeting with Hitler near the Russian front. Stauffenberg, who had been badly maimed in battle, was a conservative aristocrat appalled by the Nazi murder of Jews and Soviets and by what he considered Hitler's amateur management of the war. He hoped that Hitler's assassination would allow the army to impose its rule. He placed the bomb under the table beneath Hitler, who instinctively shoved the briefcase out of his way, moving it to the other side of a heavy table support.

The bomb exploded, wounding Hitler slightly. Those implicated in the plot were quickly arrested and slowly strangled by nooses of piano wire as they writhed on meat hooks. Movie cameras recorded their agonizing death for the later amusement of Hitler, his mistress, and friends. Hitler also ordered the execution of about 5,000 other Germans in positions of authority whose loyalty seemed suspect, including family members of conspirators. Thousands of Germans poured into the streets in major cities to celebrate their Führer's escape from death.

THE TIDE TURNS

By the end of 1942, the Germans were on the defensive on the high seas, in the Soviet Union, and in North Africa, where Italian forces were routed and German forces pushed back (see Map 26.6). The entry of the United States into the war in December 1941 helped turn the tide against Germany. American war supplies and then armed forces strengthened the Allied cause as they had in World War I. The German war machine was chaotically managed and German resources increasingly inadequate to fighting a war on so many fronts.

Hitler's invasion of Russia turned into a full-fledged military disaster, culminating in the crushing defeat and surrender of German forces at Stalingrad in February 1943. As Hitler's Balkan allies one by one pulled out of the war, the Allies launched an invasion of Italy from North Africa, forcing the king of Italy to agree to a secret armistice and pushing German troops to retreat to the north. On June 6, 1944, Western Allied forces launched a massive invasion of France, landing on the beaches of Normandy, and forcing the German army to pull back, fighting all the way. The Allies first reached the Rhine River in March 1945.

Now confident of victory over Hitler, the Big Three (Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin) began to plan for the end of the war. As the Soviet army began to push the Germans back across a broad front in July 1943, it became clear that when the war ended, the Red Army could control large parts of Eastern and Central Europe. This probability brought dissension to the Big Three, particularly as Churchill feared that the Red Army might never leave the Eastern European nations it liberated from German occupation.

Germany on the Defensive

With the majority of German men between the ages of eighteen and fifty in the army, Germany's war machine required more workers. By late 1941, there were already 4 million foreigners working in Germany, including prisoners of war (in violation of international agreements), and in May 1944, almost twice that number, the majority of whom were Soviet citizens. More German women now worked in the factories.

In the meantime, Germany's day-to-day operation of the war effort remained chaotic, as ministries, military branches, and Hitler's favored henchmen competed against each other. In the spring of 1942, Hitler named the architect Albert Speer to be minister of armaments production. Speer's organizational skill helped triple German production within two years. But not until 1944 did Hitler grant Speer responsibility for the needs of the air force, Göring's personal preserve. Hitler then awarded Göring "plenipotentiary powers" over the entire war effort. German war supplies remained inadequate to the enormous goals Hitler had set. Realists like Speer began to see a German military victory as difficult, even improbable.

As in World War I, German military commanders placed their hopes on closing Allied shipping lanes across the Atlantic, thereby preventing supplies from reaching Britain. Many American ships and crews went down in the icy Atlantic. However, most got through. German U-boats, the hunters, became the hunted. New submarine-detecting devices enabled airplanes and destroyers to sink German submarines with depth charges.

The War in North Africa

With the failure of the submarine campaign against Allied shipping, Germany now had to depend on its army's success on land. In North Africa, the German tank division commanded by Erwin Rommel, known as the "Desert Fox" because of his quick judgment and daring tactical improvisations, had forced British troops back from Libya into Egypt. Victories in the spring of 1942 at Bir Hacheim and Tobruk, where the Germans captured a garrison of 35,000 British troops, put Rommel only sixty miles from Alexandria. However, at the end of August 1942, the British tank force of General Bernard Montgomery (1887–1976) pushed back another Rommel offensive. Montgomery knew his enemy's plan of attack in advance through reports from British intelligence services. The Allied forces, enjoying superior strength and controlling the skies, then broke through the German and Italian defenses at El Alamein (in Egypt) in early November 1942. For the next ten weeks they pursued the German armored division across the desert all the way to Tunisia.

The Allies now faced major strategic decisions. Churchill wanted to strike at what he called the "soft underbelly" of the axis through Italy, the Balkans, and the Danube Basin after driving Hitler's armies from North Africa. This would leave British forces in an excellent position to protect British interests in the Middle East. Stalin, however, continued to insist on a major Allied attack against Germany in the west to force Hitler to divert resources from the Russian campaign. Stalin pointed out that the Red Army had borne the brunt of the war against Hitler, inflicting 90 percent of the losses the German armed forces had suffered in battle since June 1941. Churchill, however, feared that a direct confrontation with the



Free French troops attacking in the North African desert, 1942.

largest concentration of German troops might be disastrous and wanted to postpone a cross-Channel invasion of France as long as possible.

With the Axis reeling in North Africa and British troops now controlling Egypt and Libya, the Allied commanders now decided first to drive all German and Italian troops out of North Africa before contemplating an invasion of France from Britain. They had been sobered by a disastrous cross-Channel raid by Canadian troops against the French port of Dieppe in August 1942.

In November 1942, the Allies launched "Operation Torch." A British and American force commanded by American General Eisenhower landed on the coast of French Algeria and Morocco, easily overcoming Vichy French resistance. To his consternation, de Gaulle now learned that the Allies were negotiating with the Vichy commander in North Africa, Admiral Jean Darlan (1881–1942). Despite Pétain's order that Vichy forces in North Africa continue to oppose the Allied invasion, Darlan ordered his troops to accept a cease-fire after three days of fighting. Hitler used Darlan's capitulation in North Africa as an excuse in November 1942 for German forces to occupy the "free" zone of Vichy France. Little now remained of Vichy's illusion of independence. French naval commanders scuttled their own ships to prevent them from being used by the German navy.

The Allies named Darlan as "the head of the French state" in return for his promise that French troops in North Africa would now join the Allies. De Gaulle demanded that Britain and the United States recognize his

French Committee of National Liberation as France's legitimate government. But Churchill, an old imperialist, viewed with concern de Gaulle's pressing determination to maintain France's empire, in the context of the two powers' long-standing imperial rivalry. Churchill feared that if the British government recognized de Gaulle as the head of the French state, it would be committing itself to supporting a new France, the direction of which could not yet be seen. A French monarchist solved part of the Allied dilemma by assassinating Darlan. The Allies forced de Gaulle to share leadership of Free France with another general, a slap in the face that de Gaulle neither forgot nor forgave. After the defeat of a vigorous German counterattack, by the end of May 1943, no German or Italian troops remained in North Africa.

The Allies' strategic bombing campaign, the goal of which was to sap German morale as much as to hamper the production of planes and guns, began to take its toll in 1943. The American poet Randall Jarrell remembered, "In bombers named for girls, we burned / the cities we had learned about in school." The Royal Air Force could now strike at night with reasonable accuracy, and the ability to scramble German radar reduced losses. British bombers dumped tons of bombs during night raids over the industrial Ruhr Valley and major cities. Many American bombers were lost despite fighter escorts because the U.S. Air Force preferred daytime attacks, when pilots could more easily find their targets. However, the impact of the strategic bombing campaign on German wartime industrial production was far below Allied expectations.

Hitler's Russian Disaster

On the eastern front, Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union turned into a military disaster. Defeats in Russia during the last months of 1942 and in 1943 sent the German invaders reeling. The Red Army was now receiving better and more plentiful supplies from the Allies through the icy northern port of Murmansk and from Iran in the south. By now Soviet factories were turning out a steady supply of tanks and trucks equipped to fight in the snow and ice. German tanks faced not only improved Soviet tanks but also handmade incendiary bombs consisting of bottles, gasoline, and cloth fuses known derisively as "Molotov cocktails," after the Soviet foreign minister, which had first been used by Finnish partisans against Soviet troops.

Improvements in the organization and discipline of the Red Army also made their mark. Stalin held back on the ideological indoctrination and murderous purges that had characterized the 1930s. The Soviet army that Hitler had once mocked, now larger and more effectively deployed than his own, wore down German forces.

In the north, Leningrad, first reached by German troops in July 1941, held on against a German siege that lasted 506 days, the longest in modern history. More than 300,000 Soviet troops were killed; more than a million Russian civilians starved to death. Hitler's printed invitations to celebrate

Leningrad's fall could never be sent out. Further defeats in the north made Germany's drive to the Soviet oil fields of the Caucasus Mountains, and the Donets Basin industrial region in the south, all the more critical. In the south, the Red Army slowed the German advance toward Stalingrad, a strategically located industrial city on the Volga River.

The battle of Stalingrad, which began in November 1942, was a great turning point in the European war. The Soviets had begun concentrating a huge force around the city, even as early German successes deluded Hitler into thinking Stalingrad's fall was inevitable. As Soviet troops held off the German assault in house-to-house fighting, Hitler confidently began to transfer some of his exhausted troops to the north. The Soviet army counter-attacked on November 19, trapping the weakened German armies as Soviet tanks moved easily across the frozen ground. From Berlin, Hitler ordered his troops to hold out until the last man. By the time German survivors surrendered on February 2, 1943, the German army had lost more than 300,000 soldiers.

Soviet troops fought their way into Leningrad. In July 1943, in a battle involving more than 9,000 tanks, the Red Army lost many times more men and tanks in a decisive battle in and around the city of Kursk, 500 miles south of Moscow. In the greatest tank battle ever fought, the Soviets managed to repel a massive German attack against an exposed Soviet line of defense and then pushed the Germans back, with a huge loss of life, a Pyrrhic victory. This further depleted the German armored divisions that had once seemed invincible. The Soviets were now battering the enemy on three fronts, even as Hitler was forced to divert troops to Italy and the

Red Army soldiers pick their way through the rubble of Stalingrad.





Devastation in Hamburg (left) and Stuttgart (right) after Allied bombing of Germany.

Balkans. The Red Army recaptured all of the Crimea in the south by May 1943, pushing the Germans back to Ukraine in the summer.

In February 1944, Soviet troops reached what had been the eastern Polish border before the German invasion. In the meantime, waves of British and American bombers continued to devastate German cities; over 40,000 people perished in attacks on Hamburg in July 1943, during which more than 9,000 tons of bombs rained down on the port city.

One by one, Germany's Balkan allies bailed out. Romanian troops had greatly aided the Nazi campaign in Odessa and the Crimea; Romanian oil and wheat had fueled the German war effort. Now, in March 1944, seeing the writing on the wall, the Romanian government approached the Allies, hoping to arrange a separate peace. In August, King Michael finally ended Ion Antonescu's military dictatorship, and the new Romanian government declared war on Germany.

Hitler intended Bulgaria to serve as a buffer against a possible Allied invasion from Turkey. Bulgaria enjoyed the most autonomy of any Nazi-held Eastern European state because it provided Germany with badly needed grain, permitted German military bases on its territory, and had declared war on Britain and the United States back in 1941. Hitler had allowed Bulgaria to annex Thrace from Greece (where Bulgarian forces had executed thousands of Greeks and banned the Greek language) and to take Greek and Yugoslav Macedonia. Now, as Germany's defeat appeared increasingly likely, the Bulgarian government brazenly announced its war against the Allies had ended. The Soviet Union declared war on Bulgaria in

September 1944. Following a popular insurrection, the Soviet Union controlled the resulting coalition government, as in the case of Romania. Soviet domination began to take shape.

The Allied Invasion of Italy

With North Africa and its airfields secure, the Allies decided to invade Sicily as a first step in an invasion of southern Italy. The plunging morale and material conditions of the Italian population, who had been promised an empire by Mussolini but had received only hardship, contributed to the Allied decision.

In July 1943, Palermo and Messina quickly fell to Allied troops. The fascist Grand Council asked King Victor Emmanuel III to end Mussolini's dictatorship. The king, eager to save his throne and fearing a complete German takeover, dismissed the stunned Mussolini as prime minister and ordered his arrest. The new government, while announcing that Italy would continue to fight alongside Germany, began secret negotiations with the Allies. When Hitler learned this in September 1943, he ordered his troops to occupy Italian airfields.

At a minimum, an Allied invasion of the Italian mainland would tie up considerable numbers of German troops and probably knock Italy completely out of the war. Romanian oil fields would be within reach of bombers taking off in Italy. The Italian resistance had gained momentum. Socialists, Catholic groups, and above all, Communists began to print clandestine newspapers and organize scattered attacks against fascists. The United States, still pushing for a full-scale landing in France, reluctantly agreed to the Italian invasion. In the meantime, the Italian king, fearing Hitler's wrath, reassured Germany of Italy's loyal participation in the war as an ally. However, the Italian government signed an armistice with the Allies on September 3, 1943. Victor Emmanuel naively hoped that Italy could make peace with both Germany and the Allies, and that his monarchy would survive the end of the war.

On the same day that the armistice was signed between Italy and the Allies, British and Canadian troops crossed the Strait of Messina, beginning the invasion of the Italian peninsula. The king and his family fled Rome with the new prime minister, leaving a million Italian soldiers with the choice of being interned by the Germans or deserting their units. Most deserted and 80,000 Allied prisoners of war escaped from camps in Italy.

The Allies set up a new government in the south, its members drawn from the resistance groups. In the meantime, on September 12, 1943, a daring German commando raid freed Mussolini from a mountaintop prison. In Berlin, Hitler proclaimed the Duce head of the "Italian Social Republic," a puppet regime. Mussolini ordered the execution of the members of the Grand Council who had opposed him and denounced the Italian people for having betrayed him.

The Germans slowly retreated behind one river after the next, with both sides taking large losses. The new front settled on a series of fortifications a hundred miles south of Rome, over which stood the old monastery of Monte Cassino. In January 1944, two Allied divisions landed behind the German lines at Anzio. Only in the spring, after terrible losses, were Allied troops able to break through the German defenses to free their armies still trapped near Anzio. The Allies took Rome on June 4, 1944. The German armies fell back to establish a new defensive perimeter south of the Po River between Pisa and Florence.

The Big Three

Soviet advances against German forces increasingly focused Western attention on the future of Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans once Hitler's Germany had been defeated. At a meeting in Casablanca, Morocco, in January 1943, Churchill and Roosevelt had concerned themselves only with military strategy and not with the future of Europe. With Stalin absent, the British and American governments agreed to put off discussions of the territorial settlements that would follow Germany's defeat. Churchill and Stalin had already informally agreed to Soviet absorption of the Baltic states after the war. They did so despite the opposition of Roosevelt, who argued that Stalin had joined the war against the Nazis only after Hitler had attacked the Soviet Union.

Stalin's insistence that the United States and Britain open another front in the west by invading France in part stemmed from his fear that his allies wanted to see the Red Army slowed in its drive westward. As deliveries of Allied supplies to Russia through Murmansk trickled to a halt, Stalin seemed confirmed in his suspicions.

Meeting at Moscow in October 1943, the British, American, and Soviet foreign ministers reaffirmed an agreement that the Allies would accept nothing less than Germany's unconditional surrender. The Allies also reaffirmed their intention, originally stated in the Atlantic Charter of August 1941 signed by Roosevelt and Churchill, that a United Nations organization replace the ineffective, moribund League of Nations. But again they left open the thorny question of the political future of Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans after the war.

Stalin finally met Churchill and Roosevelt in Teheran in November 1943. The leaders formulated harsh plans for post-war Germany. Stalin stated that the Soviet Union was not about to contemplate any change in its border with Poland as it existed in June 1941, the result of the Soviet invasion and absorption of much of eastern Poland in 1939. Yet, despite the occasional flurry of improvisational map-making—using knives, forks, and matchboxes on the tablecloths—the Big Three still left the essential specifics of the proposed outlines of post-war Europe for the future.

The D-Day Invasion of France

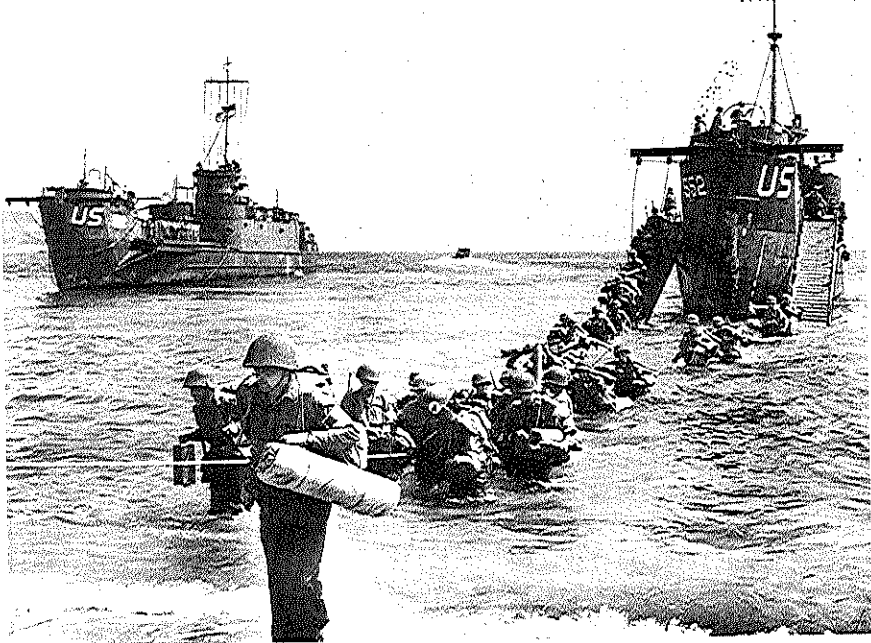
At Teheran, Stalin and Roosevelt convinced Churchill to accept a plan for the invasion of France. General Dwight Eisenhower coordinated the "D-Day" landing in France, "Operation Overlord." Born in a small town in Kansas, Eisenhower was a forthright man of integrity. Beneath his sparkling blue eyes, folksy manner, and smile lay shrewdness, cunning, and a remarkable ability for organization. The plan was for 150,000 troops to attack the English Channel beaches of Normandy in western France, followed in the next days and weeks by almost 500,000 more. About 4 million tons of support materiel would have to be landed as well. Floating caissons and old ships sunk off the coast would provide three makeshift harbors. In the meantime, German commanders believed that the most likely place for an all-out assault was near Calais to the north, which offered the closest crossing points from England.

The first hours of Operation Overlord would be crucial. The Allies needed to take and protect a beachhead that would allow the bulk of their troops to get ashore quickly. Planes would drop squadrons of parachutists behind German lines. Hitler had assigned Rommel to organize the German defense against the Allied invasion. Defenders would depend on the rapid arrival of armored units to back up the coastal batteries and infantry units trying to hold their positions against attacking Allied troops.

After a one-day postponement because of a gale, at dawn on the morning of June 6, 1944, Allied troops struggled ashore in shallow water from landing craft and established beachheads on the coast of Normandy. They confronted murderous fire from the cliffs above, taking heavy losses. But the landing succeeded, at least in part because the German air force was outnumbered by 20 to 1. As more men, tanks, trucks, and materiel came ashore, German troops gradually fell back. By the end of July 1944, despite fierce resistance, the Allies held most of Normandy. After seven weeks, the Allies had landed 1.3 million troops and sustained over 120,000 casualties. The Germans lost 500,000 men trying to defend Normandy. Hitler allowed Rommel, discovered to have known about the plot against the Führer's life, to escape execution by committing suicide.

On August 15, 1944, another Allied army landed on the French Mediterranean coast and moved up the Rhône Valley with little opposition. In the meantime, the main Allied army pushed from Normandy toward Paris. Encouraged by the proximity of Allied troops, on August 19, an uprising began in Paris. Because de Gaulle demanded that a French unit be the first to reach the capital, French forces reached Paris on August 22, 1944. In October the British government recognized de Gaulle's administration as the legitimate government of France.

German resistance stiffened at the Rhine River, and the first Allied attempts to cross into Germany failed. Hitler, whose moods varied between wild optimism and resigned depression, had aged rapidly through recurring



U.S. troops wading ashore at Utah Beach, Normandy, June 6, 1944 after the first bloody assault.

bouts with illness. Now, although Germany's collapse seemed imminent, he again seemed confident, telling Albert Speer in November 1944, "I haven't the slightest intention of surrendering. Besides, November has always been my lucky month." In December, Hitler ordered a massive counterattack in the hills and forests of the Ardennes in Belgium and Luxembourg, with the goal of pushing rapidly toward the Belgian river port of Antwerp. After retreating forty-five miles, the U.S. army pushed the Germans back in the Battle of the Bulge.

As the Nazi army retreated in northern Italy, the Red Army approached Germany from the east. On every front, Allied troops increasingly found that their enemies turned out to be boys and older men who had been rushed to the front with virtually no training. German cities burned, notably Dresden, which American planes fire-bombed early in 1945. About 50,000 residents of Berlin died in Allied air attacks. In 1993, about one unexploded World War II bomb was still being discovered every day in Berlin.

Hitler, expressing confidence that the Big Three alliance would break up, held out hope for Germany's newly developed weapons, in which he had earlier expressed no interest: the deadly V-1 jet-propelled "flying bomb" could strike targets from 3,000 feet at speeds of 470 miles per hour; the terrifying V-2 rocket could fly faster than the speed of sound. Launched from France, the first V-1 struck London on June 12, 1944, doing considerable

damage. The first jet- and rocket-propelled fighter planes, the former reaching speeds of 500 miles per hour, arrived in time to join the Battle of the Bulge, but without significant effect. Many ordinary Germans, too, clung to the hope that such a new weapon would turn things around, or that the Western democracies would join Germany in a war against the Soviets. However, with defeat ever closer, Hitler accepted, even desired, the total destruction of Germany, considering it better than the shame of surrender.

ALLIED VICTORY

Romania and Bulgaria had surrendered in August and September 1944, respectively. With the Red Army in control of much of the Balkans, the question was not if Berlin would be taken, but when, and by whom. Though worried that the Soviets sought a preponderant role in Central Europe, as well as in Poland and the Balkans, Eisenhower was prepared to allow the Red Army the prestige of capturing Berlin. The much greater problem still remained: the future of Germany and Eastern Europe. As the Red Army moved closer to Berlin, the meetings of the Big Three in the waning months of the year proved exceptionally important for the future of Europe. Churchill and Stalin met in Moscow in October 1944 and worked out a rough division of post-war Western and Soviet interests in Central and Eastern Europe. By the time the Big Three came together at Yalta in Crimea in February 1945, German armies were falling back rapidly on every front and the Red Army was closing in on Berlin. The American army crossed the Rhine River on March 8, and on April 25, 1945, met up with Soviet troops at the Elbe River just sixty miles south of Berlin.

Victory in Europe

Churchill was determined to work out an informal agreement with the Soviets as to the respective spheres of influence in the Balkans when the war ended. In October 1944, he met with Stalin in Moscow. This time Roosevelt, who suspected Churchill of trying to maintain the British Empire at all costs, did not participate. Churchill later described the conference with Stalin: "I said, 'Let us settle about our affairs in the Balkans. How would it do for you to have ninety percent of the say in Romania, for us to have ninety percent of the say in Greece, and go fifty-fifty about Yugoslavia?'" After adding 75 percent for the Soviet Union in Bulgaria and fifty-fifty for Hungary, the British prime minister pushed the paper across to Stalin. "There was a slight pause. Then he took his blue pencil and made a large tick upon it, and passed it back to us. It was all settled in no more time than it takes to sit down."

When the Big Three met in the Soviet Black Sea resort of Yalta in February 1945, the Red Army had drawn within 100 miles of Berlin. Some

soldiers in the Red Army enacted terrible revenge against the Germans, encouraged by Soviet propaganda that emphasized the necessity of humiliating the defeated German population, as well as by the impersonal nature of the war. Soviet soldiers, some of whom had come upon the ghastly death camps in Poland, gunned down German soldiers who had surrendered, and pillaged villages. Soviet soldiers sometimes systematically raped all German females who were more than about twelve years old. Hungarian and Romanian women also were attacked—in Hungary, Soviet soldiers entered a mental hospital, where they raped and killed. Soviet officers tried to bring the situation under control but incidents of rape occurred for several years in Germany after the Nazi defeat. For some Soviets the occupation seemed to represent a continuation of the war and the exacting of revenge.

Soviet military might in Eastern and Central Europe hung over Yalta, where the Allies considered the post-war fate of Germany. Churchill agreed to the post-war division of Germany into British, American, French, and Soviet zones of military occupation. The Soviet zone would be eastern Germany. In Eastern Europe, Communist Party members were working feverishly to expand Soviet influence. Stalin feared that his wartime allies might lead a post-war campaign against communism, which had been the case after World War I. He secretly agreed to Roosevelt's demand that the Soviet Union declare war on Japan three months after Germany's defeat, which the U.S. president believed would expedite Japan's defeat in Asia. But, in exchange, Stalin asked for and received Allied promises that the Soviet Union would control Outer Mongolia, the Kurile Islands, the southern half of Sakhalin Island, and its former naval base at Port Arthur.

Outlines of the Cold War began to take shape at Yalta. Stalin insisted that the new government of Poland be based on the provisional Polish Communist government (to which would be added representatives from the non-Communist Polish government, which had been functioning in London

Joseph Stalin, Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Vyacheslav Molotov at the Yalta Conference, 1945.



during the war). Churchill and Roosevelt also went along with Stalin's insistence that the Soviet Union keep the parts of eastern Poland that had been absorbed by the Soviet invasion in 1939. Poland's western frontier with Germany was to be left to a future conference, one that was never held. The Big Three all agreed that free elections would be held in Eastern Europe. Yet Stalin defied the Atlantic Charter of 1941, when the Allies had agreed that free elections would lead to democratic governments in the nations freed from German occupation, by setting up an unelected puppet government in Romania, as well as Poland.

At Yalta, the Allies remembered that the League of Nations had been doomed in its attempts to keep the peace by the nonparticipation of the then-isolationist United States and by the exclusion of the Soviet Union from the League. Roosevelt wanted to avoid committing the United States to an active role in post-war Europe. He counted instead on the United Nations to resolve future problems by facilitating collective security. In the meantime, with the Red Army occupying Eastern Europe, Stalin held all the cards. Eastern European peoples subsequently had reason to view Yalta as a betrayal and a victory for Stalin.

The awful world conflict moved toward an end. The Red Army launched a final attack on Berlin in April 1945. Italian partisans captured Mussolini near the Swiss frontier. They executed him and his mistress, hanging their bodies upside down at a gas station. Himmler, von Ribbentrop, and Göring

Soldiers from the Red Army hoist the Soviet flag over the German Reichstag in Berlin.



now agreed that Germany must end the war. As Soviet tanks drew near on the night of April 28–29, 1945, Hitler married his longtime mistress, Eva Braun, in the depths of a fortified bunker in central Berlin. Then they committed suicide on April 30 as the rumble of Russian tanks could be heard above. Joseph Goebbels poisoned his six children, shot his wife, and killed himself. Admiral Karl Dönitz, to whom Hitler had delegated authority, surrendered to the Allies on May 8, 1945. The Reich that Hitler had once bragged would last for a thousand years lay in ruins twelve years after its creation.

The Defeat of Japan

The German collapse in North Africa, Russia, and Eastern Europe now allowed the Allies to turn their attention more fully to the war in the Pacific. The sheer scope of Japanese military operations, spread from the Aleutian Islands southwest of Alaska to the South Pacific, put Japan on the defensive. Troops and supplies poured into the Pacific from the United States, which had speedily reconstituted its fleet after the Pearl Harbor disaster. Victory in the Battle of the Coral Sea (May 1942), which turned back Japanese ships carrying troops to the southern coast of New Guinea, protected Australia from possible invasion. A month later, the American fleet and torpedo bombers inflicted a major defeat on the Japanese navy at the Battle of Midway, an island almost a thousand miles northwest of Hawaii (see Map 26.3), sinking four Japanese aircraft carriers.

In August 1942, an American offensive had begun against Guadalcanal, one of the South Pacific Solomon Islands. Guadalcanal fell on February 8, 1943, the first of the Japanese wartime conquests to be recaptured. American assaults in New Guinea and far north in the Aleutian Islands also succeeded. General MacArthur's forces began driving the Japanese from New Guinea in January 1943, completing the task early in 1944. The Americans then adopted the strategy of driving Japanese forces from one island to another, "leapfrogging" through the Pacific. Gradually, the U.S. navy gained control of the seas, its submarines picking off Japanese supply ships. Hard-earned summer victories brought U.S. troops within 1,400 miles of Tokyo. In October 1944, MacArthur's forces attacked the Philippines, defeating the Japanese fleet and the demoralized Japanese troops. There, the Japanese first used kamikaze tactics, suicide missions flown by pilots who crashed their planes into American ships.

The American capture of the island of Iwo Jima on March 27, 1945, brought U.S. planes to within 700 miles of Japan. On Okinawa, the next stop, piles of bleached human bones could still be seen on the beaches a decade after the war's end. Saipan and Guam provided bases from which American long-range bombers could reach Japan. American "super fortress" bombers showered Japanese cities with incendiary bombs that turned wooden buildings into fiery death traps. One attack destroyed 40 percent of Tokyo within three hours. American forces prepared to invade the southern

islands of Japan itself. With the American fleet off Okinawa confronting suicide missions by Japanese pilots, it was clear that such an invasion would cost many lives.

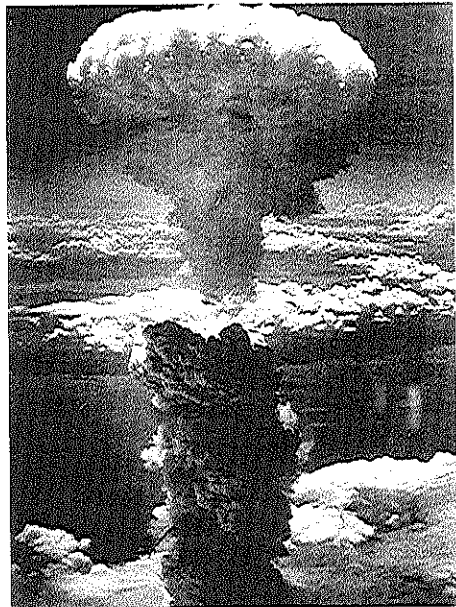
Meanwhile, the United States was readying a new weapon hitherto unimaginable. The development of the atomic bomb (and its more lethal successor, the hydrogen bomb, first tested by the U.S. in 1954) had its origins in theories developed by Albert Einstein (see Chapter 19). In 1938, a German scientist in Berlin had achieved nuclear fission, splitting the atom and releasing tremendous energy. This meant that if a means could be found to split the nucleus of the atom, setting off a nuclear chain reaction, a bomb of enormous destructive power could be built. During the first years of the war, British and American scientists had worked separately on the project. German scientists, too, were working in the same direction. In the United States, German scientists who had fled the Nazis first discovered that an isotope of uranium could set off the anticipated chain reaction. At the same time, Soviet scientists were frantically trying to come up with the atomic bomb, but they were several crucial years behind American scientists.

In 1945, nuclear theory became reality, and the United States exploded the first atomic bomb in a desert in New Mexico on July 16. President Harry Truman (1884–1972; Roosevelt had died in April 1945) learned of this the day before the opening of the Potsdam Conference in the Berlin suburb in July 1945. He informed Stalin of the new weapon the United States now had at its disposal. The Potsdam Proclamation of July 26, 1945, warned Japan that it risked “prompt and utter destruction” if it did not agree to unconditional surrender. When Japanese resistance continued, a U.S. plane dropped an atomic bomb on the Japanese port city of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, engulfing the city in a mushroom cloud of fire and radiation that killed 80,000 people. The Soviet Union then declared war on Japan and Soviet troops moved into Manchuria. On August 9, a U.S. plane dropped a second atomic bomb that destroyed much of Nagasaki, killing 36,000 people in a storm of fire. Thousands more would die of radiation sickness in the days, months, and years to follow.

On September 2, 1945, Japanese representatives signed documents of unconditional surrender on the battleship *Missouri*. The Second World War was over. But a new and potentially even more dangerous atomic age had begun.

CONCLUSION

The first Soviet troops arriving at the Nazi death camps discovered nightmarish horrors. Technology harnessed to the task of genocide had created factories of death. They came upon piles of corpses and of children's shoes; and the few lucky survivors—the living dead—barefoot human skeletons fortunate enough to have been liberated before their turn to be exterminated



(Left) A mushroom cloud envelops Nagasaki after the U.S. Army's deployment of an atomic bomb. (Right) The destruction after the atomic blast at Hiroshima.

had come. The death camps became perhaps the most awful symbol of the total war that was World War II, during which 6.2 million Jews perished, including 2.7 million Polish Jews. At the end of the war, only about 40,000 to 50,000 Polish Jews had survived the Holocaust.

World War II brought mass military mobilization and mass death. At least 17 million people were killed in the fighting and another 20 million civilians perished, half in the Soviet Union, not including those who died in Stalin's gulags. About 30 million people in China perished in the war begun by Japan in Manchuria in 1937. Germany lost more than 6 million people, Japan 2 million, and Britain and France lost about 250,000 and 300,000 respectively. Part of the horror of the period is that we will never really know the full extent of human loss. Millions had been wounded, many crippled for life. Millions of survivors had been carried far from home. Husbands, wives, children, and other relatives were often lost forever. Europe became a continent of "displaced persons," as they were called.

The psychological damage to those who lived through night bombing in shelters, those who spent years waiting for definitive news about missing loved ones, or those who had somehow survived the death camps, cannot be calculated. Europe seemed haunted by the sad memories of last conversations and letters. One survivor recalled his determination to hold on against all odds "to tell the story, to bear witness; and that to survive, we

must force ourselves to save at least the skeleton, the scaffolding, the form of civilization."

After World War II, in contrast to the end of World War I, there seemed little optimism that such a total war could not occur again. Two factors, in particular, contributed to this new feeling of angst. The first was the rising tension even before the war ended between the Soviet Union and the Western Allies. The second was the development of rockets, the jet plane, and above all, the atomic bomb, a terrifying weapon for a new age.

The cataclysmic experience of the Second World War weighed heavily on the social, political, and cultural climate of the post-war era. In every country, those who resisted Nazi rule played a major part in the reconstitution of their nations after the war. Politicians, intellectuals, and virtually everyone else would try to come to grips with what had happened to Europe, to assess blame, and to find hope. For the moment, however, for many, it seemed enough to have survived.

