

War in Europe

MAIN IDEA

Using the sudden mass attack called *blitzkrieg*, Germany invaded and quickly conquered many European countries.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Hitler's actions started World War II and still serve as a warning to be vigilant about totalitarian government.

Terms & Names

- **Neville Chamberlain**
- **Winston Churchill**
- **appeasement**
- **nonaggression pact**
- ***blitzkrieg***
- **Charles de Gaulle**

One American's Story

In 1940, CBS correspondent William Shirer stood in the forest near Compiègne, where 22 years earlier defeated German generals had signed the armistice ending World War I. Shirer was now waiting for Adolf Hitler to deliver his armistice terms to a defeated France. He watched as Hitler walked up to the monument and slowly read the inscription: "Here on the eleventh of November 1918 succumbed the criminal pride of the German empire . . . vanquished by the free peoples which it tried to enslave." Later that day, Shirer wrote a diary entry describing the führer's reaction.



A Personal Voice WILLIAM SHIRER

"I have seen that face many times at the great moments of his life. But today! It is afire with scorn, anger, hate, revenge, triumph. He steps off the monument and contrives to make even this gesture a masterpiece of contempt. . . . He glances slowly around the clearing, and now, as his eyes meet ours, you grasp the depth of his hatred. But there is triumph there too—revengeful, triumphant hate."

—Berlin Diary: The Journal of a Foreign Correspondent, 1934–1941

▲ **William Shirer, a journalist and historian, became well known for his radio broadcasts from Berlin at the beginning of World War II.**

Again and again Shirer had heard Hitler proclaim that "Germany needs peace. . . . Germany wants peace." The hatred and vengefulness that drove the dictator's every action, however, drew Germany ever closer to war.

Austria and Czechoslovakia Fall

On November 5, 1937, Hitler met secretly with his top military advisers. He boldly declared that to grow and prosper Germany needed the land of its neighbors. His plan was to absorb Austria and Czechoslovakia into the Third Reich. When one of his advisors protested that annexing those countries could provoke war, Hitler replied, "'The German Question' can be solved only by means of force, and this is never without risk."





UNION WITH AUSTRIA Austria was Hitler's first target. The Paris Peace Conference following World War I had created the relatively small nation of Austria out of what was left of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The majority of Austria's 6 million people were Germans who favored unification with Germany. On March 12, 1938, German troops marched into Austria unopposed. A day later, Germany announced that its *Anschluss*, or "union," with Austria was complete. The United States and the rest of the world did nothing.

BARGAINING FOR THE SUDETENLAND Hitler then turned to Czechoslovakia. About 3 million German-speaking people lived in the western border regions of Czechoslovakia called the Sudetenland. The mountainous region formed Czechoslovakia's main defense against German attack. (See map, p. 538.) Hitler wanted to annex Czechoslovakia in order to provide more living space for Germany as well as to control its important natural resources.

Hitler charged that the Czechs were abusing the Sudeten Germans, and he began massing troops on the Czech border. The U.S. correspondent William Shirer, then stationed in Berlin, wrote in his diary: "The Nazi press [is] full of hysterical headlines. All lies. Some examples: 'Women and Children Mowed Down by Czech Armored Cars,' or 'Bloody Regime—New Czech Murders of Germans.'"

Early in the crisis, both France and Great Britain promised to protect Czechoslovakia. Then, just when war seemed inevitable, Hitler invited French premier Édouard Daladier and British prime minister **Neville Chamberlain** to meet with him in Munich. When they arrived, the führer declared that the annexation of the Sudetenland would be his "last territorial demand." In their eagerness to avoid war, Daladier and Chamberlain chose to believe him. On September 30, 1938, they signed the Munich Agreement, which turned the Sudetenland over to Germany without a single shot being fired. A

Chamberlain returned home and proclaimed: "My friends, there has come back from Germany peace with honor. I believe it is peace in our time."

KEY PLAYER

ADOLF HITLER
1889–1945

"All great world-shaking events have been brought about not by written matter, but by the spoken word!" declared Adolf Hitler. A shy and awkward speaker at first, Hitler rehearsed carefully. He even had photographs (shown above) taken of his favorite gestures so he could study them and make changes to produce exactly the desired effect.

Hitler's extraordinary power as a speaker, wrote Otto Strasser, stemmed from an intuitive ability to sense "the vibration of the human heart . . . telling it what it most wants to hear."

MAIN IDEA

Summarizing

A What moves did Germany make in its quest for *lebensraum*?



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER

1. **Region** Which European countries did Germany invade?
2. **Location** How was Germany's geographic location an advantage?

Chamberlain's satisfaction was not shared by **Winston Churchill,** Chamberlain's political rival in Great Britain. In Churchill's view, by signing the Munich Agreement, Daladier and Chamberlain had adopted a shameful policy of **appeasement**—or giving up principles to pacify an aggressor. As Churchill bluntly put it, "Britain and France had to choose between war and dishonor. They chose dishonor. They will have war." Nonetheless, the House of Commons approved Chamberlain's policy toward Germany and Churchill responded with a warning.

A Personal Voice WINSTON CHURCHILL

"[W]e have passed an awful milestone in our history. . . . And do not suppose that this is the end. . . . This is only the first sip, the first foretaste of a bitter cup which will be proffered to us year by year unless, by a supreme recovery of moral health and martial vigor, we arise again and take our stand for freedom as in the olden time." B

—speech to the House of Commons, quoted in *The Gathering Storm*

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Motives

B What was appeasement, and why did Churchill oppose it so strongly?

The German Offensive Begins

As Churchill had warned, Hitler was not finished expanding the Third Reich. As dawn broke on March 15, 1939, German troops poured into what remained of Czechoslovakia. At nightfall Hitler gloated, "Czechoslovakia has ceased to exist." After that, the German dictator turned his land-hungry gaze toward Germany's eastern neighbor, Poland.

THE SOVIET UNION DECLARES NEUTRALITY Like Czechoslovakia, Poland had a sizable German-speaking population. In the spring of 1939, Hitler began his familiar routine, charging that Germans in Poland were mistreated by the Poles and needed his protection. Some people thought that this time Hitler must be bluffing. After all, an attack on Poland might bring Germany into conflict with the Soviet Union, Poland's eastern neighbor. At the same time, such an attack would most likely provoke a declaration of war from France and Britain—both of whom had promised military aid to Poland. The result would be a two-front war. Fighting on two fronts had exhausted Germany in World War I. Surely, many thought, Hitler would not be foolish enough to repeat that mistake.

As tensions rose over Poland, Stalin surprised everyone by signing a **nonaggression pact** with Hitler. Once bitter enemies, on August 23, 1939 fascist Germany and communist Russia now committed never to attack each other. Germany and the Soviet Union also signed a second, secret pact, agreeing to divide Poland between them. With the danger of a two-front war eliminated, the fate of Poland was sealed.

Background
Luftwaffe in German means "air weapon."

MAIN IDEA

Evaluating
C How did German blitzkrieg tactics rely on new military technology?

BLITZKRIEG* IN POLAND** As day broke on September 1, 1939, the German *Luftwaffe*, or German air force, roared over Poland, raining bombs on military bases, airfields, railroads, and cities. At the same time, German tanks raced across the Polish countryside, spreading terror and confusion. This invasion was the first test of Germany's newest military strategy, the ***blitzkrieg, or lightning war. Blitzkrieg made use of advances in military technology—such as fast tanks and more powerful aircraft—to take the enemy by surprise and then quickly crush all opposition with overwhelming force. On September 3, two days following the terror in Poland, Britain and France declared war on Germany. C

The blitzkrieg tactics worked perfectly. Major fighting was over in three weeks, long before France, Britain, and their allies could mount a defense. In the last week of fighting, the Soviet Union attacked Poland from the east, grabbing some of its territory. The portion Germany annexed in western Poland contained almost two-thirds of Poland's population. By the end of the month, Poland had ceased to exist—and World War II had begun.



▲ German Junkers JU-87 dive-bombers, commonly known as Stukas, were a mainstay of Germany's blitzkrieg style of attack.



◀ A German tank unit in Western Poland in 1939.



For months there was nothing much to defend against, as the war turned into a *sitzkrieg* endured by soldiers such as this French one on the Maginot Line.

THE PHONY WAR For the next several months after the fall of Poland, French and British troops on the Maginot Line, a system of fortifications built along France's eastern border (see map on p. 538), sat staring into Germany, waiting for something to happen. On the Siegfried Line a few miles away German troops stared back. The blitzkrieg had given way to what the Germans called the *sitzkrieg* ("sitting war"), and what some newspapers referred to as the phony war.

After occupying eastern Poland, Stalin began annexing the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Late in 1939, Stalin sent his Soviet army into Finland. After three months of fighting, the outnumbered Finns surrendered.

Suddenly, on April 9, 1940, Hitler launched a surprise invasion of Denmark and Norway in order "to protect [those countries'] freedom and independence." But in truth, Hitler planned to build bases along the coasts to strike at Great Britain. Next, Hitler turned against the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg, which were overrun by the end of May. The phony war had ended. D

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Motives

D How did Hitler rationalize the German invasion of Denmark and Norway?

France and Britain Fight On

France's Maginot Line proved to be ineffective; the German army threatened to bypass the line during its invasion of Belgium. Hitler's generals sent their tanks through the Ardennes, a region of wooded ravines in northeast France, thereby avoiding British and French troops who thought the Ardennes were impassible. The Germans continued to march toward Paris.

THE FALL OF FRANCE The German offensive trapped almost 400,000 British and French soldiers as they fled to the beaches of Dunkirk on the French side of the English Channel. In less than a week, a makeshift fleet of fishing trawlers, tugboats, river barges, pleasure craft—more than 800 vessels in all—ferried about 330,000 British, French, and Belgian troops to safety across the Channel.

A few days later, Italy entered the war on the side of Germany and invaded France from the south as the Germans closed in on Paris from the north. On June 22, 1940, at Compiègne, as William Shirer and the rest of the world watched, Hitler handed French officers his terms of surrender. Germans would occupy the northern part of France, and a Nazi-controlled puppet government, headed by Marshal Philippe Pétain, would be set up at Vichy, in southern France.

Background

Hitler demanded that the surrender take place in the same railroad car where the French had dictated terms to the Germans in World War I.

After France fell, a French general named **Charles de Gaulle** fled to England, where he set up a government-in-exile. De Gaulle proclaimed defiantly, "France has lost a battle, but France has not lost the war."

THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN In the summer of 1940, the Germans began to assemble an invasion fleet along the French coast. Because its naval power could not compete with that of Britain, Germany also launched an air war at the same time. The Luftwaffe began making bombing



Children watch with wonder and fear as the battling British and German air forces set the skies of London aflame.

runs over Britain. Its goal was to gain total control of the skies by destroying Britain's Royal Air Force (RAF). Hitler had 2,600 planes at his disposal. On a single day—August 15—approximately 2,000 German planes ranged over Britain. Every night for two solid months, bombers pounded London.

The Battle of Britain raged on through the summer and fall. Night after night, German planes pounded British targets. At first the Luftwaffe concentrated on airfields and aircraft. Next it targeted cities. Londoner Len Jones was just 18 years old when bombs fell on his East End neighborhood.

A Personal Voice LEN JONES

"After an explosion of a nearby bomb, you could actually feel your eyeballs being sucked out. I was holding my eyes to try and stop them going. And the suction was so vast, it ripped my shirt away, and ripped my trousers. Then I couldn't get my breath, the smoke was like acid and everything round me was black and yellow."

—quoted in *London at War*

The RAF fought back brilliantly. With the help of a new technological device called radar, British pilots accurately plotted the flight paths of German planes, even in darkness. On September 15, 1940 the RAF shot down over 185 German planes; at the same time, they lost only 26 aircraft. Six weeks later, Hitler called off the invasion of Britain indefinitely. "Never in the field of human conflict," said Churchill in praise of the RAF pilots, "was so much owed by so many to so few."

Still, German bombers continued to pound Britain's cities trying to disrupt production and break civilian morale. British pilots also bombed German cities. Civilians in both countries unrelentingly carried on.

KEY PLAYER



WINSTON CHURCHILL
1874–1965

Churchill was possibly Britain's greatest weapon as that nation faced the Nazis. A born fighter, Churchill became prime minister in May 1940 and used his gift as a speaker to arouse Britons and unite them:

"[W]e shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing-grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender."

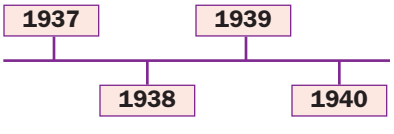
SECTION 2 ASSESSMENT

1. TERMS & NAMES For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- **Neville Chamberlain**
- **appeasement**
- ***blitzkrieg***
- **Winston Churchill**
- **nonaggression pact**
- **Charles de Gaulle**

MAIN IDEA

2. TAKING NOTES
Trace the movement of German expansion from 1937 to the end of 1940 by supplying events to follow the dates shown on the time line.



What event was the most significant? Why?

CRITICAL THINKING

3. ANALYZING MOTIVES
To what extent do you think lies and deception played a role in Hitler's tactics? Support your answer with examples. **Think About:**

- William Shirer's diary entry about headlines in the Nazi newspapers
- Soviet-German relations
- Hitler's justifications for military aggression

4. EVALUATING DECISIONS
If you had been a member of the British House of Commons in 1938, would you have voted for or against the Munich Agreement? Support your decision.

5. DRAWING CONCLUSIONS
Review Germany's aggressive actions between 1938 and 1945. At what point do you think Hitler concluded that he could take any territory without being stopped? Why?