

World War II and the Holocaust, 1933–1945



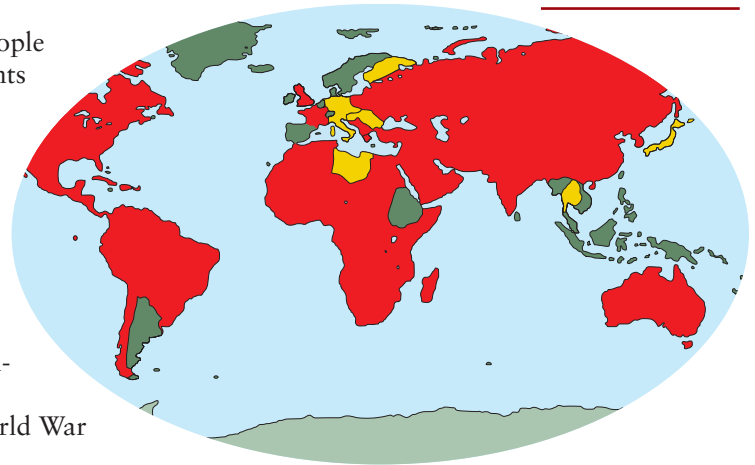
- The Road to War
- Hitler's War, 1939–1941
- East Asia and the Pacific, 1937–1942
- North Africa and Europe, 1942–1943
- Nazi Mass Murder
- The Defeat of Germany, 1944–1945
- The Defeat of Japan
- The Legacy of World War II
- Chapter Review

Japanese Attack On Pearl Harbor, 1941

A motor launch rescues a sailor from the water alongside the burning American battleship *West Virginia* during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. The Japanese attack converted a major war in Europe into World War II, a truly global war (page 858).

On September 2, 1945, a solemn ceremony took place on board the *Missouri*, a United States Navy battleship anchored in Tokyo Bay, Japan. Thousands of uniformed military personnel lined the decks as General Douglas MacArthur, commander of American forces in the Pacific, read the terms of surrender. Then, conspicuous in their formal civilian attire of top hats and tails, representatives of the Japanese Empire stepped forward to sign the surrender papers. The entire ceremony took only a few minutes to end history's bloodiest war.

World War II was over. Sixty million people lay dead, the majority of them noncombatants caught in the gruesome clutches of a total war that made few distinctions between soldiers and civilians. In some respects, the war settled issues left unfinished from the Great War of 1914–1918. In other respects, it opened a new era in the evolution of the modern world. For many of those living at the time, 1945 signified a genuine turning point in history, both a completion of the past and an irrevocable break with it. They would carry the trauma of World War II with them the rest of their lives.



Allied Nations in Red

Axis Nations in Tan

Neutral or Occupied Nations in Green

The Road to War

In the 1930s, most Europeans were trying to put the trauma of the Great War behind them. But to Adolf Hitler, Chancellor of Nazi Germany, that war had never really ended. He had come to power pledged to renew it, and the conflict he started would, until December 1941, be justifiably known as Hitler's War.

The Nazi worldview demanded huge additional territories, as *Lebensraum*, or “living space,” for the German Master Race (Chapter 32). That space, according to Hitler, could be found to Germany's east, on the fertile plains of Poland and European Russia (Map 33.1). Gaining it would require victory in a war for mastery of Europe. France must be defeated, since it would never permit such German expansion without a fight, but Britain, Hitler hoped, could be bought off with a promise to respect the British Empire. The Soviet Union would, of course, fight to save itself, but Slavs, whom Nazis considered subhuman, would be no match for the Aryan armies. Victory was not certain but was likely.

Hitler's program requires a major war

Germany Prepares, 1933–1936

Hitler's initial moves as chancellor mixed aggression with caution. Recognizing German military inferiority resulting from the Versailles Treaty, he worked to improve Germany's international position while confusing its enemies. In 1933 Germany withdrew from the League of Nations, protesting its members' failure to agree on mutual disarmament while they kept Germany disarmed. Simultaneously, however, Hitler negotiated a ten-year nonaggression pact with Poland and renewed a 1926 economic treaty between

Hitler implements a two-track foreign policy

FOUNDATION MAP 33.1 Europe in 1933

Despite its defeat in the Great War, Germany still dominated Europe politically and economically. Note that despite being cut in two by the Polish Corridor and having its western frontiers demilitarized, Germany remained a centrally located nation, well placed to resume its struggle for continental supremacy. Why were its former opponents, Russia, France, and Britain, unable to keep Germany under control?



Germany and Soviet Russia. This combination of combativeness with reassurance allowed observers to see what they wanted to see.

Hitler's double game was derailed in the summer of 1934, when he overreached by authorizing the Austrian Nazi Party to attempt to overthrow the Austrian government. The rebels succeeded in assassinating Austria's chancellor, Engelbert Dollfuss, but then spent the

rest of the evening drinking in Viennese bars and were soon arrested. Benito Mussolini's forces mobilized on Italy's Austrian frontier, sending a clear signal that Italy would not tolerate German intervention in Austrian affairs. Hitler quickly backed down, claiming he had had nothing to do with the assassination, but his international image had clearly been damaged, and his relationship with Europe's senior fascist dictator, Mussolini, was shaky.

Then Hitler's luck improved. In 1935 Mussolini invaded Ethiopia, hoping to avenge Italy's defeat at Adowa in 1896 (Chapter 30) by conquering that nation and beginning the construction of what he called the "New Roman Empire." The League of Nations, to which Italy belonged, promptly placed economic sanctions on Italy—an embargo that banned all exports to Italy except oil. Unable to purchase munitions and industrial equipment from League members, Italy turned to Germany, which as a nonmember could sell to Rome without penalty. Hitler thus was able to build a friendship with Mussolini while demonstrating the weakness of the League.

That same year, Germany formally denounced the Treaty of Versailles (Chapter 32) and proceeded to rearm and create an air force. An angry France discussed anti-German measures with Britain, but received no encouragement. Three months later the reason for British reluctance was revealed: Hitler had purchased British silence by negotiating a naval agreement limiting Germany's fleet to 35 percent the size of Britain's. Hitler's double game had succeeded again. The following year, he dramatized the inability of Britain and France to deal with his increasing power by remilitarizing the Rhineland, again in defiance of Versailles' terms. Once more the victors of 1918 did nothing, in part because they believed that their citizens would not be willing to go to war to prevent Germany from rearming territory that everyone recognized was German in the first place. But the impression of weakness in the democracies was unmistakable.

Outmaneuvering Britain and France, Germany remilitarizes the Rhineland

Civil War in Spain, 1936–1939

British and French ineffectiveness was further highlighted by their response to the outbreak of civil strife in Spain. There a revolution in 1931 had exchanged a monarchy for an unstable republic. In February 1936 a leftist coalition won the Spanish general election; five months later, a group of conservative, fascistic military officers led by General Francisco Franco rose in revolt, invading Spain from its own Mediterranean and North African colonies. The leftist parties rallied to the republican cause as Spain plunged into a catastrophic civil war.

The Popular Front government found itself less well equipped than its rebellious army. Seeking to purchase weapons abroad, it was turned down by Paris and London, who sought to confine the crisis by committing all nations to a policy of nonintervention. This policy benefited the rebels not only because they possessed more and better weapons than the government, but also because two of the three nations that violated the nonintervention agreement—Italy and Germany—backed Franco. The fascist dictatorships, claiming to defend Europe against Bolshevism, sent troops and equipment to the rebels, while Soviet Russia actually confirmed fascist charges by aiding the Spanish Republic. Britain and France merely stood by and watched the Spanish government collapse.

In a material sense, interventionist aid was overrated. The Soviets, more than a thousand miles from Spain, sent not weapons but technicians and advisors. Some of them



Spanish Civil War poster.

helped, but others meddled in disputes within the Spanish Communist Party and actually weakened the republican cause. Germany sent planes that destroyed cities such as Guernica to test the effects of terroristic bombing on civilian populations. But in general Hitler held back, hoping that a prolonged civil war might weaken his enemy France, which was divided over whether to intervene militarily on behalf of the Spanish Republic. Only Italy intervened in strength, sending more than 50 thousand soldiers and significant quantities of weapons. But what the rebels really needed was an embargo on arms sales to republican forces, which in effect they got when Britain and France refused to sell arms to either side.

The democracies respond inadequately to the civil war in Spain

To most of the world, the lesson of the Spanish Civil War appeared to be that the democracies were afraid to confront the dictators, even though Britain and France might hide behind the moral superiority of nonintervention. Toward the end of the 1930s, the principal questions facing Europe seemed to be when and where—and even if—the democracies would stand up to the dictators.

Germany's Eastward Expansion

Italy joins Germany in the Rome-Berlin Axis

German intervention in Spain sealed Hitler's friendship with Mussolini, leading to a German-Italian alliance called the Rome-Berlin Axis. This fascist partnership seemed potentially stronger than the Anglo-French alliance, which lacked the American and Russian support it had enjoyed during the Great War. Along with Germany's earlier re-militarization of the Rhineland, the Axis gave Hitler the foundation he needed to take the initiative in European diplomacy. From February 1938 through March 1939, Germany acted while Britain and France reacted.

Germany's eastward expansion was implemented one step at a time, with careful attention to its flanks and rear. Geography dictated that Austria, on its southern flank, be handled first. In 1919, Austria had tried to unite with Germany rather than stand alone as a feeble remnant of the once-mighty Habsburg Empire. But that union, known as *Anschluss* (*AHN-schloose*), never had a chance because the victorious powers thought Germany should be penalized rather than rewarded for losing the war. Austrian and German interest in *Anschluss* persisted, though, and after Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933, an Austrian version of the Nazi Party grew rapidly and worked toward union. In Vienna, Chancellor Kurt von Schusschnigg quietly sought to maintain Austrian sovereignty without needlessly antagonizing Hitler. This effort ended in February 1938 when Hitler ordered Schusschnigg to accept Austrian Nazis into his cabinet or face war. Hitler himself had begun in 1933 with only three Nazis in a cabinet of 11; clearly he meant to gain control of the Austrian government in a similar way.

Schusschnigg stalled for nearly a month. Then he announced, with four days' notice, a nationwide referendum on Austrian independence. Furious, Hitler ordered an immediate invasion, which succeeded without bloodshed because Austrian forces were instructed by their government not to resist (Map 33.2). German tanks and jeeps, caught with insufficient oil in their crankcases, broke down in embarrassing numbers on the road to Vienna, but nothing could dampen Hitler's joy at proclaiming the union of his homeland and his Third Reich.

Still Britain and France did nothing. They had no alliance with Austria, and their people were unlikely to support a war to prevent German-speaking Austrians from becoming Germans. Hitler had used the self-determination clauses of the Treaty of Versailles to

Map 33.2 German Territorial Expansion, 1938–1939

National Socialist foreign policy was based on the conquest of *Lebensraum*, or living space, in Poland and Russia. Notice the dates of Germany's successive actions, as Hitler's government moved from west to east. Why were these actions necessary in this sequence before Germany could proceed to conquer *Lebensraum*?



his advantage. But Czechoslovakia was next on his list, and that nation had an alliance with France.

Again Hitler argued for self-determination. The western border region of Czechoslovakia, called the Sudetenland (*soo-DÄ-ten-land*), was populated mainly by Germans, and Hitler claimed Germany's right to annex the area. Throughout the summer of 1938, Hitler

After annexing Austria, Hitler turns on Czechoslovakia

pressured the Czechs to cede him the Sudetenland, and the Sudeten Nazi Party increased the pressure by staging provocations and incidents. But the Czechs, counting on French support, stood firm. They knew that as the Sudetenland contained most of Czechoslovakia's frontier fortifications against Germany, the rest of the nation would be defenseless without the region. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, desperate to avert another European war that would doubtless involve his country, flew twice to Germany to meet with Hitler personally. But still the German leader insisted on annexation.

In late September war seemed likely, a fact that worried not only German military leaders (who thought Germany would lose a war against Czechoslovakia, Britain, and France) but also most ordinary Germans, who lacked enthusiasm for renewing the Great War. Mussolini, having no intention of taking Italy into such a war but reluctant to see Germany lose one, suggested a four-power conference at the last minute. Hitler agreed, hosting the conference himself in Munich on September 28–29, 1938. He came away with an Anglo-French agreement that Germany would annex the Sudetenland on October 1.

The Munich Conference gives the Sudetenland to Germany

The Munich Treaty, with its concessions to Germany, was the triumph of appeasement, a policy of giving in to a potential aggressor to maintain the peace. Appeasement arose not out of cowardice but of a sincere desire to avoid another Great War by addressing German concerns over the severity of the Treaty of Versailles. Its fatal weakness was that the Nazi government was not so much interested in these concerns, which it viewed as pretexts, as in what could be gained by the threat of force or by force itself. Czechoslovakia rightly believed that it had been sold out to a bullying dictator. Chamberlain wrongly believed that he had secured “peace in our time”; what he had gained was peace for six months. On March 15, 1939, Germany invaded the remainder of Czechoslovakia, which was now a purely Slavic country with almost no German population. Clearly Hitler's intention was not to pursue self-determination or to adjust genuine grievances but to expand Germany eastward. Poland would be next on the list.

Temporarily the initiative passed to Britain and France, which issued a guarantee of Polish independence on March 31. But this commitment did not impress Hitler, who could not imagine that Britain and France would fight to defend a nation with a weak army when they had sold out Czechoslovakia, a well-fortified country with a strong one. His cynicism made him miss the point: the democracies now knew that his self-determination rhetoric was fake, and at last they took action.

Pressure on Poland increased until, on August 23, Germany shocked the world by signing a nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union. Germany agreed to divide Poland with the Soviets and to grant the Soviet Union other favorable adjustments along its western borders. In return, the Soviets guaranteed Germany regular shipments of grain, oil, and timber. British blockades had caused crippling shortages of food and supplies in Germany during the Great War, so this **Nazi-Soviet Pact** effectively rendered Germany blockade-proof by giving it access to Russian food and resources. Hitler assumed this agreement would convince Britain and France that it was useless to fight over Poland, but when Germany invaded that country on September 1, London and Paris demanded German withdrawal by September 3 (see “Address by Führer and Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler to the German Reichstag”). When the deadline expired, Britain and France declared war on Germany, beginning what would later be known as World War II.



The Munich Conference of 1938. Front row, from left to right: Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler, Mussolini, Italian foreign minister Ciano.

Document 33.1 Address by Führer and Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler to the German Reichstag

For months we have been suffering under the torture of a problem which the Versailles *Diktat* created—a problem which has deteriorated until it becomes intolerable for us. Danzig was and is a German city. The Corridor was and is German. Both these territories owe their cultural development exclusively to the German people. Danzig was separated from us, the Corridor was annexed by Poland . . . You know the proposals that I have made to fulfill the necessity of restoring German sovereignty over German territories. You know the endless attempts I made for a peaceful clarification and understanding of the problem of Austria, and later of the problem of the Sudetenland, Bohemia, and Moravia. It was all in vain . . .

I am determined to solve (1) the Danzig question; (2) the question of the Corridor; and (3) to see to it that a change is made in the relationship between

Germany and Poland that shall ensure a peaceful co-existence . . . I am asking of no German man more than I myself was ready throughout four years at any time to do. There will be no hardships for Germans to which I myself will not submit. My whole life henceforth belongs more than ever to my people. I am from now on just the first soldier of the German Reich. I have once more put on that coat that was the most sacred and dear to me. I will not take it off again until victory is secured, or I will not survive the struggle . . . If our will is so strong that no hardship and suffering can subdue it, then our will and our German might shall prevail.

SOURCE: The archives of the Avalon Project at the Yale Law School, <http://www.fcit.usf.edu/holocaust/resource/document/HITLER1.html>

Hitler's War, 1939–1941

From September 1939 until December 1941, world leaders usually called the new conflict “the European War.” In the newspapers, on radio broadcasts, and in everyday conversation, however, it was known as “Hitler’s War.” Adolf Hitler’s actions had started the war, his ideology inspired it, and his leadership guided Germany to unprecedented territorial domination. By July 1940, German forces occupied most of the continent and intimidated the few neutral nations that remained. Europe’s future appeared to be one of subjugation to the Master Race.

Germany’s invasion of Poland begins World War II

From Poland to France

German conquest of Poland took only four weeks, featuring a new tactic called **Blitzkrieg**, or “lightning war.” Striking more rapidly than the enemy was nothing new in warfare; what made Blitzkrieg so effective was the radio, which permitted instant communication between armored units on the ground and dive-bombers in the air. The resulting coordination of modern mechanized units threw the more conventional Polish forces into disarray and gave the Germans a reputation for machine-like efficiency despite the fact that most of their transportation, like that of other European armies in 1939, was still handled by horses. After three weeks, fulfilling the terms of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the Soviets invaded from the East to help Germany complete the division of Poland (Map 33.3). The USSR proceeded to improve its borders in the Baltic region, taking territory from Finland in the Russo-Finnish War (November 1939–March 1940), and absorbing the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in July 1940 through nonaggression pacts and internal subversion.

Blitzkrieg enables Germany to conquer Poland quickly



German mechanized warfare.

Map 33.3 Hitler's War in Europe, 1939–1940

Once Germany had secured its southern and eastern flanks by absorbing Austria and Czechoslovakia (Map 33.2), Hitler was free to initiate a European war. Observe that Germany and the Soviet Union collaborated to conquer Poland, and that Soviet support left Germany free to turn westward against Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France. How might Hitler's strategy have changed had the Soviet Union not supported his westward aggression?



While the Soviets were occupying additional land, Germany was engaged in the so-called Phony War, a quiet seven-month period in which Hitler first tried to convince Britain to withdraw from the war, and then, having failed in this effort, looked for a strategy that would defeat France. Attacking westward in spring of 1940, Germany broke the French lines by driving armored units through the dense Ardennes Forest on the Franco-Belgian border. The French high command, having observed the effectiveness of Blitzkrieg in Poland, was for some reason unprepared for such tactics in France and had stationed no reserve forces with which to counter a possible breakthrough. Meanwhile the British Expeditionary Force, trapped against the English Channel at Dunkirk, narrowly escaped to England when Hitler ordered a 48-hour halt for tank maintenance. France surrendered on June 24, 1940. General Charles de Gaulle, French Minister of War, fled to London and announced the formation of the Free French movement in hopes of attracting French volunteers to continue the fight against Germany, but few heard his radio broadcast of June 18 and even fewer responded to his call.

The fall of France shocked the world. Until then the war had been a series of sideshows that, although important in themselves, could not settle the conflict. But France was a different matter. Nazi Germany had achieved in six weeks what Imperial Germany had been unable to accomplish in more than four years between 1914 and 1918. Hitler was master of most of the European continent, and any future challenge to his rule would necessitate an invasion of Europe from abroad. The French army had been considered the bastion of democracy against fascist aggression; its amazingly swift collapse demoralized those throughout the world who yearned for Hitler's defeat. Many feared that the Third Reich, as Hitler had boasted, really would last a thousand years.

The Battle of Britain

Yet Britain remained undefeated, and its morale showed no signs of weakening. Winston Churchill had replaced Neville Chamberlain as prime minister just before the Nazi attack on France. Passionately anti-German, referring to Hitler as a “bloodthirsty gutter-snipe” and invariably pronouncing “Nazi” to rhyme with “nasty,” Churchill employed his remarkable rhetorical skills to inspire his island nation and rebuild its confidence in ultimate victory (see “Address of Winston Churchill to Parliament, June 4, 1940”). In this mission he was indirectly aided by Hitler, who had no coherent plan for defeating Britain. Everyone, including Churchill, knew that if the German army landed in England it would win the war; but everyone also knew that Britain's Royal Navy was powerful enough to prevent an invasion. The unavoidable logic in this thinking led Hitler into the unusual tactic of trying to destroy Britain's Royal Air Force so that his own **Luftwaffe** (the German air force) could keep the Royal Navy bottled up in port while the German army invaded.

This approach produced the Battle of Britain, a contest between air forces that the British won between August and November 1940. They used a new detection system called “radar,” invented in Britain in 1938, to direct their fighters against incoming German raiders. Their pilots performed with such efficiency and heroism that Churchill claimed, “Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.”



Hitler receiving news of France's surrender.

The conquest of France makes Germany master of Europe



Fires burn in London during the Battle of Britain.

Britain frustrates Germany's bid for air superiority

Document 33.2 Address of Winston Churchill to Parliament, June 4, 1940

. . . I have, myself, full confidence that if all do their duty, if nothing is neglected, and if the best arrangements are made, as they are being made, we shall prove ourselves once again able to defend our Island home, to ride out the storm of war, and to outlive the menace of tyranny, if necessary for years, if necessary alone. At any rate, that is what we are going to try to do. That is the resolve of His Majesty's Government—every man of them. That is the will of Parliament and the nation. The British Empire and the French Republic, linked together in their cause and in their need, will defend to the death their native soil, aiding each other like good comrades to the utmost of their strength. Even though large tracts of Europe and many old and famous States have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule, we shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end,

we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we 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; and even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this Island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God's good time, the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the Old.

SOURCE: Robert Rhodes James, editor, *Winston S. Churchill: His Complete Speeches, 1897–1963*, Volume VI (1935–1942), (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1974), 6230–6231.

The German Invasion of Russia

Frustrated by a war against an enemy he couldn't invade, Hitler turned east to fulfill the Nazi quest for living space in European Russia. He had promised his generals that he would not fight a two-front war, but since neither Britain nor Germany was capable of invading the other, he could plausibly claim that action on the British front was stalled. Besides, if Hitler's drive for living space was going to succeed, Germany would have to fight the USSR at some point. Hitler assumed that the Russians, a Slavic people scorned by the Nazis as "subhumans," would quickly fall to the Master Race.

The invasion of Russia began on June 22, 1941, and it took the Soviet government completely by surprise (Map 33.4). Washington and London had repeatedly given Moscow intelligence data concerning Nazi troop movements, but Stalin had dismissed them as capitalist lies designed to break up the Nazi-Soviet alliance. He apparently suffered a nervous collapse when the invasion began and emerged 11 days later shaken and grim. By July 16 German armored units had broken the Red Army's lines, taken more than a million prisoners, and penetrated deep into Russia.

The main problem facing Germany was the immensity of the Soviet Union, amounting to one-sixth of the land surface of the globe. The primitive state of local roads slowed the German advance, but even had that advance been swifter, Germany did not have enough soldiers to achieve victory over a country so large. In addition, the Red Army, substantially larger than the German, drew on huge manpower reserves. German forces made their task much more difficult by treating non-Russian ethnic groups, which had initially welcomed them as liberators from Communist oppression, as Slavic subhumans. Finally, Hitler and his high command failed to define a single principal objective, choosing instead to drive simultaneously for the cities of Leningrad, Moscow, and Kiev.

Germany invades Russia to fulfill Hitler's ideological dream

Map 33.4 Germany's Invasion of the USSR, 1941

Frustrated by his inability either to conquer Britain or to force it out of the war, Hitler turned on the Soviet Union in June 1941, intent on fulfilling the Nazi objective of acquiring *Lebensraum*. Note that numerous German thrusts enabled them to occupy immense areas of western Russia but left Moscow unconquered and most of the Soviet Union free of German control. Why was Germany unable to defeat the Soviet Union in 1941?



Moreover, Soviet resistance proved more persistent than Germany had anticipated. By November Kiev had been taken, Leningrad was besieged but could not be completely surrounded, and furious fighting engulfed the western approaches to Moscow. Acting out of sheer desperation, and believing a spy's report that Japan would move against the Americans, British, and Dutch in the Pacific rather than against Soviet Siberia, Stalin in late November transferred 250 thousand Siberian troop reserves west to the Moscow front, under Georgi Zhukov (*gay-ÖR-gē ZHOO-kawf*), his most successful commander. The resulting Soviet counteroffensive in early December caught the Germans off guard and unprepared for winter conditions. The supposedly subhuman Russians then handed

A Soviet counter-offensive surprises the German army

the German army a stinging defeat. The Germans stiffened and held their positions throughout the winter, but Hitler's chain of Blitzkrieg victories was over, and anti-Nazi forces gained new hope.

East Asia and the Pacific, 1937–1942

Meanwhile, events in East Asia and the Pacific were transforming Hitler's conflict into a Second World War. Japan had fought on the winning side in the Great War but had been treated with condescension by its allies after 1919. The Japanese government's request that the Versailles Treaty include a racial equality clause had been rejected by Britain, France, and the United States. At the Washington Naval Conference of 1921, Japan was forced to accept a treaty that limited it to only three large naval ships for every five built by the United States and five built by Britain. In 1924, the United States Congress passed discriminatory immigration legislation that permitted 53,000 British immigrants to enter each year, but only 100 Japanese. Japan concluded that its former allies thought little of its wartime support.

Suffering economically from the Great Depression (Chapter 32), Japan decided in 1931 to secure the natural resources it needed for its rapidly developing industrial capability by conquering China's resource-rich province of Manchuria. Six years later, on July 7, 1937, Japanese army units from Manchuria, staging provocative maneuvers in China, clashed with Nationalist Chinese troops at the Marco Polo Bridge, not far from Beijing.

The New Order in East Asia

Japan followed up this incident by conquering northeast China, hoping to quickly force the Nationalists to accept peace terms. But Chinese president Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kaishek), faced with overwhelming force, refused to surrender or to mount an all-out resistance. Determined to press forward, the Japanese struck south, capturing Shanghai in a bloody three-month battle and taking Nanjing in December. Japanese troops then went on a rampage in Nanjing, massacring as many as 200 thousand people and raping thousands of women.

The international outcry that followed this “**Rape of Nanjing**” energized Chinese resistance to Japanese military occupation. It also inadvertently produced further atrocities. Hoping to satisfy their soldiers and prevent future international condemnation over mass rapes, the Japanese set up “comfort stations” near the front lines, forcing young Korean girls to serve as “comfort women,” whom Japanese soldiers repeatedly raped each day. But the outcry over Nanjing did not slow Japan's advance. By the end of 1938 the Japanese had conquered most of eastern China (Map 33.5). Declaring a “New Order in East Asia,” they portrayed themselves as liberators who were cleansing the region of Western imperialists and creating a prosperous new economic sphere dominated by Asians.

Still the Chinese refused to submit. The Chinese Communists, from their northwestern base at Yan'an, mounted an effective guerrilla campaign that tormented Japanese troops, sabotaged their systems of transport and supply by blowing up trucks and trains, and won the allegiance of many Chinese peasants. Meanwhile the Nationalists, whose

Japanese aggression and atrocities endanger Asia



The Rape of Nanjing.

Map 33.5 Japanese Conquests, 1937–1942

From its island base, Japan in fewer than fifty years created an empire and expanded it to the line shown on the map. Notice that this expansion was achieved at the expense of Britain, China, the United States, France, and the Netherlands. None of the first three countries was willing to accept Japanese domination of the region, and Japan's strength was inadequate to force them to do so. What disadvantages did Japan face as a result of its rapid expansion?



inability to stop the invaders was rapidly eroding their public support, retreated to central China and hoped that Japan would make a major mistake.

A few years later, their hopes were fulfilled. In 1940, after France surrendered, the French colony of Indochina was left unprotected. Attracted by that region's assets and

awed by Nazi success, the Japanese joined the Axis, allying with Germany and Italy in the Tripartite Pact. Japan then began moving troops into Indochina. Hoping to force them to withdraw, the United States imposed an embargo in 1941, depriving Japan of American supplies, including oil. But this embargo only confirmed Japan's conviction that it must possess its own sources of fuel and raw materials.

Japan decides to gain resources through conquest

Acting on this conviction, the Japanese planned a bold and spectacular operation: a campaign to conquer British Singapore and Malaya, the oil-rich Dutch East Indies, and the Philippine Islands, an American commonwealth. The action would start with a surprise assault on the U.S. Pacific fleet, based in the Hawaiian Islands at a naval station called Pearl Harbor.

Japan Strikes in the Pacific

Recognizing its inability to defeat the United States militarily, Japan gambled that a rapid takeover of the western Pacific would shock the Americans and leave them unwilling to spend the time, blood, and money required to retake it. If this hoped-for scenario did not materialize, Tokyo was left with no plausible alternative to defeat. This desperate gamble led Japan to one of the most brilliant tactical victories of the war.

Japan attacks Pearl Harbor to eliminate the U.S. Pacific Fleet

In late November 1941 an invasion fleet headed southward from Japan. Simultaneously Japan's First Air Fleet, an innovative grouping of eight aircraft carriers into a single attack force, left northern Japan heading east. In a carefully coordinated multi-pronged assault spread across thousands of miles of the Pacific, the southern force attacked Guam, Wake Island, Hong Kong, Malaya, and the Philippines on December 7–8, while the First Air Fleet attacked Pearl Harbor. American forces, anticipating the southern but not the eastern thrust, were caught unprepared in the greatest military disaster in American history (see page 844). All eight American battleships anchored in the harbor were either sunk or disabled, and more than three thousand casualties were inflicted. Japanese losses were minimal.

The Pearl Harbor attack boosted Japanese morale, but they lost their gamble. Rather than accepting Japan's actions, U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt obtained a declaration of war from Congress, and American resolve strengthened around the cry "Remember Pearl Harbor!" Four days after the attack, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States. They were under no obligation to support Japan, but Hitler hoped to encourage the Japanese to engage the United States in a lengthy war that would distract America for years. He assumed that the American public would demand an all-out effort against Japan and that U.S. forces would make little impact on the war in Europe until after Germany defeated Soviet Russia. Therefore, Hitler believed, his declaration of war would be without practical effect but would further heighten the morale of the Japanese.

The Allies decide to deal with Germany before Japan

Hitler was wrong on several counts. First, Germany did not defeat Russia. Second, Roosevelt, Churchill, and their military advisors agreed to pursue the defeat of Germany first, making the war against Japan secondary. Finally, the Japanese did not need German encouragement. By May 1942 they had conquered every one of their objectives in an astonishing display of military boldness and skill. When the Philippines finally surrendered to Japan on May 6, 1942, Tokyo controlled the western Pacific, threatened Australia, and was poised to strike against the three American aircraft carriers that, being at sea on maneuvers, had not been destroyed at Pearl Harbor (Map 33.5).

End of the Japanese Advance

Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto (*ih-sō-RŌ-koo yah-mah-MŌ-tō*), architect of the Pearl Harbor strategy, designed another two-pronged plan to destroy the carriers. A massive eight-carrier strike force would leave Japan bound for Midway Island, the only remaining American military possession west of Hawaii. On route, four of the eight carriers would separate from the main body and head northeast, threatening an invasion of Alaska. Yamamoto reasoned that Admiral Chester Nimitz, commanding what remained of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, would be compelled to divide his forces to counter the threat, and his carriers would be isolated and sunk one by one.

But Nimitz, whose intelligence section was reading Japanese naval codes, knew that Midway was the principal target and did not divide his forces. The Americans were still outnumbered by four carriers to three, but a squadron of off-course American dive-bombers accidentally found the Japanese carriers. They took them by surprise and destroyed all four. The Midway disaster ended Japan's string of victories and virtually guaranteed its ultimate defeat.

Japan's strategy fails at Midway

North Africa and Europe, 1942–1943

In the winter of 1941–1942, assuming that Japan would tie down the Americans in the Pacific for several years, Hitler renewed his attack on the Soviet Union by driving south-east toward the oil-rich Caucasus region. That strategic decision was opposed by many of his military advisors. Some encouraged continuing pressure on Moscow, in hope of cracking Soviet resistance there. Others, like Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, begged Hitler to push from North Africa through the Suez Canal and the Middle East, eventually linking up with Japan in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean. Such a strategy would deprive Britain of its oil and might force it into a compromise peace.



Erwin Rommel, the “Desert Fox”.

The Battle for North Africa

Rommel, one of the century's finest battlefield commanders, was in North Africa because of Italian military errors. Mussolini had become overconfident after Germany's defeat of France and committed his finest troops to Italy's African colony of Tripoli in an effort to push Britain out of Egypt. Instead the British forces, outnumbered ten to one, invaded Tripoli and humiliated the Italians by forcing huge numbers of them to surrender. Fearful that Mussolini would abandon the struggle, Hitler decided to send Rommel at the head of two tank divisions, the “Afrika Korps,” to reverse Italy's failure.

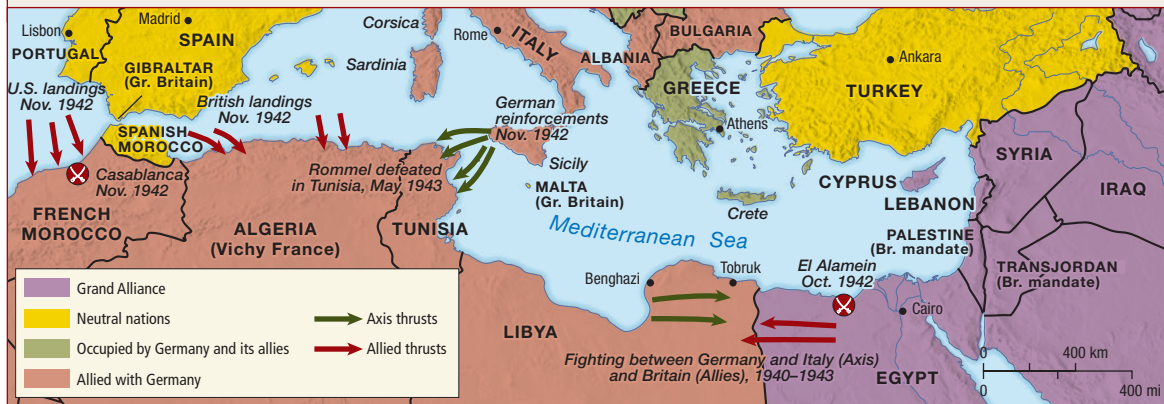
The North African desert turned out to be ideal terrain for tanks. German forces quickly pushed the British back into Egypt (Map 33.6). London naturally reinforced its position in order to defend the Suez Canal, but when Rommel asked for more troops and equipment, as well as for a strategic decision to turn North Africa into a principal combat area, Hitler denied both requests. In both 1941 and 1942 Hitler focused on *Lebensraum* and the Soviet Union rather than the Middle East, thereby missing a reasonable chance at forcing Britain out of the war. Rommel, undersupplied and undermanned, proved tactically brilliant in desert warfare but unable to overcome Britain's material superiority.

The British War Cabinet determined to preserve that superiority. In summer of 1942, Britain's Eighth Army received its new commander, General Bernard Law Montgomery,

Germany loses in North Africa

Map 33.6 World War II in North Africa, 1940–1943

Italy's 1940 attempt to conquer Egypt from its colony in Libya failed completely and forced Germany to send an expeditionary force under Field Marshal Erwin Rommel to North Africa to bail the Italians out. Observe that British and American landings in northwest Africa coincided with a major British victory at El Alamein in 1942. Why did the Allied occupation of North Africa endanger Germany's hopes for victory in World War II?



a feisty Scot who believed in rigorous training and crushing material advantage. That October he attacked and defeated the Afrika Korps. Simultaneously, U.S. forces, having waited nearly a year to engage the Germans, landed in Morocco and Algeria. Caught between the British and Americans, Rommel's troops fought skillfully but hopelessly. Ironically, now that it would do no good, Hitler insisted on reinforcing Rommel—over the latter's explicit objections. When the Afrika Korps surrendered on May 13, 1943, an additional 250 thousand German soldiers needlessly became prisoners of war.

Stalingrad and Kursk

By mid-1943 the war in the east had also turned against Germany. Hitler's decision to drive toward the Caucasus was ill-advised, dragging the German army into a house-to-house battle for the large city of Stalingrad. In November 1942, a Soviet counteroffensive penetrated a weak point in the German lines and encircled the city (Map 33.7). German forces trapped there were forbidden to try to break out until the armies invading the Caucasus could be withdrawn; otherwise more than a million men would have been captured. By the time the withdrawal was completed, it was too late to save Stalingrad. The German Sixth Army, reduced from 220 thousand to 90 thousand freezing, starving men, surrendered on February 2, 1943. It was the turning point of the war for the Soviet Union, and Stalin ordered night-long fireworks over Red Square in celebration.

Germany still held the strategic advantage, however, and proved it by attacking the Soviets near Kursk in July. The week-long fight was the largest tank battle in history until the Ramadan War between Egypt and Israel in 1973; astronauts can still see, from outer space, a large reddish-brown spot near Kursk, the rusting remains of thousands of destroyed tanks. When the battle was over, the Germans had lost and the Soviets had

The Red Army takes the strategic initiative at Kursk

Map 33.7 Soviet Victories at Stalingrad and Kursk, 1942–1943

Unable to take Moscow in 1941, the Germans turned south to the oil fields of the Transcaucasus in 1942. Their defeat at Stalingrad was a principal turning point in the war. But notice that the Red Army was unable to take the offensive until after the German defeat at Kursk in 1943 in the largest tank battle of the war. How did the Red Army then proceed to expel the Germans from Russia?



gained the initiative. Like the Midway defeat for the Japanese, for the Germans Kursk marked the end of expansion.

Civilian Life in World War II

Many of the hardships the Great War imposed on civilians (Chapter 31) returned to plague the home fronts in World War II. Rationing reappeared as a means for managing shortages of food, fuel, clothing, and vital raw materials. Tens of millions labored six or seven days a week in defense plants. Once again, women took up work on farms and in factories as men were drafted. But new burdens appeared in the early 1940s to intensify civilian suffering.

In Britain, Germany, Japan, Poland, and Russia, aerial bombing destroyed homes and burned whole sections of cities. Air raids in the Great War had been sporadic and ineffective, but now they were relentless and devastating. People huddled behind drawn curtains in darkened rooms during nighttime blackouts, which plunged entire cities into darkness to make them less visible to bombers. Others crammed into underground shelters for protection. Sometimes there was no escape: in Hamburg, Dresden, and Tokyo, massive incendiary bombing created firestorms that raised surface temperatures to over 2,000 degrees. Some people caught outside shelters were trapped in asphalt as streets melted; others were boiled alive when they dove into canals to escape the heat; still others were melted into tiny pools of liquid fat.

Ground warfare was no less destructive. In Russia, advancing Germans totally destroyed more than 19 thousand villages, often burning the inhabitants alive in synagogues or churches. When Soviet forces invaded Germany in 1945, they retaliated by crucifying German farmers on barn doors and raping and mutilating women. Japanese soldiers in Manila in 1944 slaughtered the patients and staff of entire hospitals and threw babies against walls to break open their skulls. In the Great War, British propaganda had accused Germans of atrocities against Belgian civilians, but most such accusations were fictional; in World War II, the brutality was both factual and unimaginable.

Many civilians caught in war zones did not survive. Tens of millions perished in China and Russia as battlefields shifted back and forth across major cities. The city council of Benghazi in North Africa posted street signs in both English and German; Benghazi changed hands five times in two years, each change more destructive than the one before. Even in places without armed conflict, death was never far away from civilians. In Bengal in eastern India, shipping shortages and British administrative failures combined in 1943 to produce a famine that killed 1.5 million people. Compared with those who suffered such horrors, civilians enduring shortages and lengthy workweeks seemed fortunate indeed.

Resistance to Nazi Rule

In Nazi-occupied Europe, as nations were systematically plundered to feed and enrich the conquerors, civilians suffered extensively from cold, malnutrition, and deprivation. These hardships, combined with Nazi treatment of conquered nationalities as inferior peoples, provoked desperate resistance to German rule.



Female welder at a munitions plant, 1942.

World War II produces intense civilian suffering

Underground resistance organizations developed quickly in France, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Czechoslovakia, where rugged terrain aided concealment. Britain encouraged these groups by sending agents behind enemy lines and, in Yugoslavia, through air drops of men carrying money and weapons. Countries with level terrain, like Belgium and Holland, could not create complex resistance networks. But in Poland, a country with few mountains, an underground Home Army recruited 300 thousand men and women between 1940 and 1944. These organizations carried out sabotage and spread anti-German propaganda in an effort to keep hope alive.

Yet the resistance movements did not seriously weaken Nazi control. When underground agents assassinated Reinhard Heydrich, Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia, in Prague in 1942, brutal Nazi retaliation served as a warning to all resisters. More than 1,300 Czech men, women, and children from two nearby villages were murdered, and the villages themselves were bulldozed and burned to the ground. Germany monopolized the heavy equipment required to conduct modern warfare; without such materiel, the Polish Home Army was cut to pieces when it revolted in Warsaw in August 1944. The Red Army, a few miles away, did not intervene, seeing an advantage to German slaughter of anticommunist Poles.

Resistance movements fail to cripple the German occupation of Europe

Nazi Mass Murder

For millions of Jews and other innocent civilians, Nazi occupation meant mass murder. Before the war, in Germany itself, Nazi anti-Semitism had been characterized by vandalism, legal harassment, persecution, and beatings. But the German conquests of 1939–1940, and invasion of Russia in 1941, brought millions of Jews under Nazi control. In the summer of 1941 Hitler and the German leadership, obsessed with the Nazi vision of racial purification, decided to exterminate them all.

Extermination Camps

The methodology of mass murder evolved between 1939 and 1941. In September 1939, the Nazi regime started systematically killing people it considered unproductive or inferior. This euthanasia campaign killed more than 120 thousand mental patients, disabled people, terminally ill people, and severely wounded soldiers. A public outcry embarrassed the government and drove the slaughter underground in 1941, but two years of murder had created a variety of extermination methods and an experienced corps of professional killers. In the following years, both the methods and the murderers were used throughout Europe against Jews and others the Nazis considered unworthy of life. Hitler was indifferent to moral considerations and unafraid of the condemnation of other nations. Referring to the slaughter of the Armenians in the Great War (Chapter 31), he observed on more than one occasion, “Who today remembers the Armenians?”

Initially, Jews were shot or gassed with carbon monoxide in the back of vans. Those methods, however, proved time-consuming and wasteful. By the fall of 1941 Germany had begun to experiment with mass gassings in detention-camp buildings disguised as showers. Zyklon-B, a high-potency insecticide, proved effective in murdering hundreds of people at a time. On December 8, 1941, gassings in trucks with Zyklon-B began at

Nazi Germany embarks on a policy of genocide



Jewish Hungarian women at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Chelmno in Poland, the first of six designated extermination sites. Five others followed, all in Poland, including the largest and most infamous, Auschwitz-Birkenau, at which more than two million people were murdered (Map 33.8). By the end of the war nearly six million Jews had perished from gas, brutalization, malnutrition, exposure, and disease in what later became known as the Holocaust.

On January 30, 1942, in a villa in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee (*VAHN-sā*), Reinhard Heydrich, who was then head of the Security Service of the Nazi SS (Hitler's elite bodyguard), convened a conference of Nazi officials from across Europe to discuss the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question": mass murder. Heydrich's deputy and "Jewish specialist," Adolf Eichmann, an expert in train scheduling, explained how Jews from throughout Europe would be transported to camps in Poland. The journeys would take days in unheated and unventilated boxcars without sanitary facilities; food and water would be minimal or unavailable. Many Jews would die before reaching the camps; once there, the rest would die through overwork, exposure to cold, malnutrition, or outright murder. If any objections to this plan were raised at Wannsee, the minutes of the conference do not record them.

Nazi racial doctrine defined Jews as "race defilers" who schemed to destroy the Master Race through intermarriage and seduction. Many of those who assisted in the Holocaust, however, knew little of these ideas. For most ordinary Germans, as well as the Dutch, French, Latvians, Poles, Romanians, Ukrainians, and others who helped them, Jews were outsiders despised for various reasons—as killers of Christ, moneylenders, rivals for economic or educational advantage, or practitioners of mysterious rituals. Some Jews had been assimilated into Europe's dominant cultures, but many remained in cohesive communities and were feared and resented. The Holocaust was conceived and planned by fanatical racists seeking to "purify" Europe of Jews and make it safe for the "Master Race," but it was carried out by ordinary people who did not like Jews and thought little of anyone who did. Some of those involved in the killings were sadists and criminals, but just as often they were otherwise normal people who behaved with unspeakable cruelty out of fear, a desire to conform and obey orders, a sense of their own superiority, or in the hope of gaining some sort of advantage.

The Implementation of Mass Murder

Beginning early in 1942, occupied Europe was "combed" of Jews from west to east. Of those who reached the camps alive, most were gassed within a few hours of arrival. The strongest were selected for forced labor on minimal rations; some were chosen for medical experiments, others for service as prostitutes. By early 1943 most Polish Jews had been gassed at Treblinka or Auschwitz, and the few German Jews remaining after years of persecution were also dead. Much of the richness and beauty of European Jewish culture went with them.

In the rest of Europe, chances for survival varied widely from country to country. Most Dutch Jews were killed at Auschwitz, although some, like Anne Frank, a young Dutch girl whose diary was later found and published throughout the world, were moved from one camp to another. Nearly all the Jews of Denmark survived, protected by Danish authorities and eventually smuggled by boat into neutral Sweden. Italians considered exterminating Jews abhorrent, and not until Germany occupied much of Italy following Mussolini's overthrow in 1943 were most Italian Jews shipped to Auschwitz.

Map 33.8 The Holocaust in Europe, 1941–1945

In pursuit of its racist ideology, Nazi Germany created an intricate network of detention facilities, transit sites, and death camps across Europe. More than six million Jews were murdered, and they were not the only group processed through this system. Note that Soviet POWs, Polish Catholics, Sinti and Roma peoples, Serbians, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and handicapped or politically undesirable Germans were also exterminated. What might account for the widely varying numbers of Jewish deaths from one country to another?





Concentration camp survivors.

Russian, Romanian, Latvian, and Lithuanian Jews were systematically exterminated, while Hungarian Jews were protected by Admiral Nicholas Horthy's pro-German dictatorship until he was forced to resign in 1944. Hundreds of thousands of them were then murdered. By that time, however, the Red Army was moving into Poland, where it liberated the death camps one by one. In advance, however, the Germans evacuated remaining prisoners to Germany by atrocious "death marches," in which tens of thousands died of maltreatment and cold. The survivors were imprisoned in camps in Germany, such as Dachau, Buchenwald, and Bergen-Belsen, where tens of thousands more, ill and malnourished, perished, including Anne Frank, who died in March 1945.

Jews were the primary targets of Nazi extermination policies, but they were not the only ones. Sinti and Roma people from Hungary and Romania, often called Gypsies, were depicted by Nazis as inferior racial stock, placed in camps, and often killed. In occupied Poland, those with college degrees, including doctors, lawyers, Catholic clergy, and military officers, were systematically shot in order to deprive the Poles of future leadership. Soviet and other Slavic prisoners of war were treated brutally; more than 90 percent of them died from overwork, starvation, and sadistic medical experiments. Homosexuals were singled out for isolation, persecution, and murder. Had Germany won World War II, none of the groups of people listed here would have survived.

The Question of Responsibility

In the face of the scale of Nazi atrocities, not fully known until the war's end, people around the world anguished over the question of responsibility: could anyone have done anything to prevent these horrors? The Allied governments protested and publicized the atrocities, but their broadcasts reached few Germans and were not widely believed even in Britain and America. World War I atrocity propaganda had largely been proven false, and most people assumed that the atrocities said to be committed in this war were also false. The Allies, after all, were hardly neutral observers. After Pope Pius XII died in 1958, some suggested that this head of a neutral state and moral leader of global stature, who knew the details of the Nazi program through the Vatican's diplomatic network, should have spoken out against Nazi crimes. But there is no reason to believe that large numbers of German Catholics would have refused to cooperate with their government even had the Pope asked them to do so. Some suggested that the Allies should have bombed the camps, but by 1944, when Allied planes first came within bombing range of Auschwitz, the vast majority of Jews who would perish in the Holocaust were already dead. Moreover, had the camps been bombed, the Nazis would have found other ways to carry out their murderous agenda. In short, Roosevelt's consistently articulated position still seems the most practical: the best way to stop the killings was to win the war and destroy the Nazi regime.

When British and American troops liberated Buchenwald and Bergen-Belsen in spring of 1945, the films they made there shocked the world. Starving people sitting beside mounds of decaying corpses, bulldozers pushing heaps of naked bodies into mass graves, and the hollow-eyed stares of the barely living were shown in newsreels for months. One consequence of the Holocaust, as Hitler had intended, was the virtual destruction of Jewish culture in Europe. An unintended result was widespread pressure for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine as a place of refuge. Yet nothing could replace the hopes and lives destroyed in history's most extensive and appalling genocide.

Responsibility for the Holocaust rests with Nazi Germany

The Defeat of Germany, 1944–1945

By late summer of 1943, defeat of the Nazis seemed possible. In the Soviet Union, encouraged by its victories at Stalingrad and Kursk, the Red Army began the gradual liberation of Soviet soil. In Italy, a successful Allied landing and Mussolini's overthrow gave Germany a second front to defend. But much of Europe was still under Nazi occupation, and the Germans would not be defeated easily.



American soldiers wade ashore at Omaha Beach in Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944.

Squeezing Germany Between West and East

At a meeting that November in Tehran, the capital of Iran, Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin agreed on a third front: an Anglo-American invasion of France, across the English Channel, scheduled for May 1944 under the direction of U.S. General Dwight D. Eisenhower. Stalin promised to support this risky but necessary undertaking with a massive eastern offensive to distract Germany and relieve the pressure on Allied beachheads. When the landings occurred in Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944, they surprised the German military, which expected the invasion to come ashore near Calais, only 19 miles by ship from England (Map 33.9). Despite fierce resistance on Omaha Beach, the Allies held their ground. Stalin's promised eastern drive began on June 22 (the third anniversary of the invasion of Russia) and achieved surprising gains. In mid-August, as Soviet pressure in Poland combined with an Allied breakout from Normandy, it appeared likely that the war in Europe would end in 1944.

Unexpectedly, however, the Germans regrouped and stabilized both fronts. Field Marshal Walther Model, known as “the Führer's Fireman,” shuttled from one side of Germany to the other shoring up shattered lines. In Italy, the Allied invasion was stalled by difficult terrain, German defensive skills, and the poor performance of some American generals. Although it failed, a desperate German winter offensive in the west reminded Allied leaders that Germany's army remained intact and powerful.

The fighting finally ended with a crushing display of Allied superiority in manpower and materiel. The Red Army's January 1945 offensive tore huge gaps in the German lines and probably would have ended the war within weeks had Stalin been less sensitive to the concerns of his allies. At a February conference in Yalta, a southern Soviet resort town, the three Allied leaders—Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin—formally agreed to divide both Germany and its capital, Berlin, into military occupation zones at the close of the war. A Soviet conquest of Berlin at a time when British and American forces had not yet set foot on German soil might have worried and embarrassed the western Allies.

The Allies attack Germany from East and West

Allied Victory in Europe

On March 7, 1945, the Americans and British finally crossed the Rhine and broke into Germany itself. Montgomery's British forces drove across the North German plain, American troops under Generals Omar Bradley and George Patton pierced central and southern Germany, and in the east, the Soviets resumed their offensive in mid-April.

Map 33.9 The Allied Victory in Europe, 1944–1945

Between June 6, 1944 (the date of the invasion of Normandy), and May 8, 1945, Germany was squeezed from west and east. The bulk of the fighting was done by the Red Army, against which Germany deployed 80 percent of its forces, and which occupied most of Eastern Europe on its path toward Germany. Observe that the Eastern Front was twice the length of the Western Front. How might this disparity in deployment of soldiers and resources have affected Stalin's expectations of what Russia might gain from its victorious efforts?



Outnumbered and outgunned, its tanks driven by 60-year-old veterans of the Great War and its fortifications manned by 13-year-old boys, the German army cracked. Roosevelt's death from a stroke on April 12 deprived him of the satisfaction of seeing the war end. On April 30 Roosevelt's principal antagonist, Adolf Hitler, shot himself in his Berlin bunker as Soviet troops took the city one street at a time. Germany surrendered in the west on May 8 and in the east the next day, ending the Second World War in Europe.

The Defeat of Japan

As Germany's dreams of European domination collapsed, Japan's strategy for creating an empire by expelling Western powers from East and Southeast Asia also failed. That strategy was grounded in the assumption that the United States, once defeated at Pearl Harbor and in the Philippines, would never commit the money and troops necessary to conquer Japan. But the American government, capitalizing on widespread fury at Japan's surprise attack in 1941, made those commitments without hesitation. Once mobilized, the U.S. economy and industrial base, much larger than those of the Japanese Empire, secured the eventual U.S. victory.

The American Strategy

In the Pacific war, unlike the war in Europe, most of the combat took place at sea or following the amphibious landing of soldiers from troop ships, and nearly all the fighting was done by Japanese and Americans. Late in 1942 the Americans, ready to take the offensive following their victory at Midway, had to choose a route along which to approach Japan. A northern route across tiny Pacific islands would rely on the U.S. Navy, but its military arm, the U.S. Marine Corps, might be too small for the land fighting required. A southern approach utilizing Australia and the Dutch East Indies would rely on the army rather than the navy, and American policymakers leaned in this direction. But such a choice would center on General Douglas MacArthur, a brilliant egomaniac whose defense of the Philippines had made him a hero in the United States but whose arrogance made him deeply unpopular with superiors and subordinates alike.

The solution was to choose the southern route but divide command between Admiral Nimitz and General MacArthur. This interservice compromise defied logic and led to mass duplication of resources and effort, but it thoroughly frustrated the Japanese, who were caught between two related yet independent offensives, each too powerful for them to defeat (Map 33.10). Japan's conquests had given it vast deposits of raw materials, but Japanese military industries benefited very little from them. Relentlessly, American submarines and surface vessels sank Japanese ships attempting to transport such materials.

Still, the Americans faced difficulties. Amphibious assaults upon Pacific islands proved deadly. Large parts of the Pacific remained unmapped in the early 1940s, and generals coordinating landings with tidal variations had to rely on guesswork provided by Pacific islanders. Once ashore, ground forces faced well-entrenched, skillful Japanese infantry totally dedicated to their cause and willing to follow the ancient samurai code (Chapter 14) by dying to the last man. Poisonous insects and reptiles, stifling heat and drenching rains, and tropical fevers and diseases added to the burden of fighting. American and British forces fighting Japanese troops in the jungles of Burma and New Guinea suffered similarly.

The Americans attack the Japanese Empire by northern and southern routes

The Japanese Empire Contracts

Gradually the Americans pushed the Japanese back. The names of battles on formerly unfamiliar Pacific islands became, for Americans, a litany of sacrifice; for the Japanese, the battles brought hostile forces ever closer to the Japanese home islands. During most of the war only medium-range bombers were available, and they were hardly

Map 33.10 World War II in the Pacific, 1942–1945

Between 1942 and 1945, Japan was attacked by British forces in Burma, by Chinese forces in China, and by American forces in the central and southern Pacific. Note that the Americans, unable to agree on a northern or a southern path to Japan, proceeded along both paths at the same time. The conquest of the Marianas in summer 1944 brought the Japanese home islands within range of American bombers, which then subjected Japan to a devastating bombing campaign, culminating in the use of atomic weapons. How did the intervention of the Soviet Union, which occurred at the same time as the atomic explosions, affect Japan's desire to continue the war?



adequate to cover the vastness of the Pacific. But in late 1944 the United States introduced the B-29 Superfortress. With its pressurized cabin, the B-29 could fly at altitudes up to 35 thousand feet, putting it well beyond the range of enemy fighters and anti-aircraft

weapons. Now, as MacArthur's forces retook the Philippines, aided by the U.S. Navy's decisive victory in October at Leyte Gulf, attention shifted to the capture of two islands. Iwo Jima would place B-29s within range of Japan's home islands, and Okinawa could serve as a staging area for an amphibious assault upon Japan itself.

The fighting for Iwo Jima, a desolate volcanic island defended by 20 thousand Japanese, began in February 1945 and lasted three hellish weeks. The Japanese dug in and died to the last man. They killed six thousand Americans and wounded 25 thousand more, making this the only Pacific battle in which American casualties (31 thousand) exceeded Japanese (21 thousand). The campaign for Okinawa lasted nearly three months (April–June 1945), but in that action Americans killed 110 thousand Japanese while losing seven thousand of their own. In both battles, but especially at Okinawa, Japanese fighter pilots flew suicide missions, deliberately crashing their planes into American ships. These “kamikaze” fighters, named for the “divine winds” that thwarted the thirteenth-century Mongol attacks on Japan (Chapter 15) sank 55 ships and terrified Americans, who considered them evidence of unrelenting Japanese fanaticism. In fact, they were evidence of desperation. As most of Japan's best pilots were already dead, aviation fuel to train replacements was unavailable, and first-time pilots were usually killed at once by experienced Americans, Japan's leaders decided to send them to their deaths in a way that might inflict some real damage.

Kamikaze warfare and Japanese unwillingness to surrender in the face of certain death made Americans dread an amphibious landing on Japan. Aerial bombing, its advocates hoped, might force the Japanese into surrendering before a landing would be necessary. In February 1945 General Curtis LeMay, commanding the 20th U.S. Air Force, employed clusters of incendiary bombs in an effort to burn as much of Japan as possible. On March 9 a raid on Tokyo by 279 B-29s destroyed 40 percent of the city in three hours, killing 89 thousand civilians and demolishing 267 thousand buildings. By summer Japan's six largest cities were devastated, with two million buildings destroyed, 260 thousand people killed, and 9 to 13 million more made homeless. LeMay's practice of dropping leaflets announcing his next target in advance produced panic. As millions of workers fled to the countryside, Japan's war economy, already deprived of raw materials, shut down.

Atomic Weapons

Some Japanese leaders realized there was no point in fighting on. In early July Japan approached the USSR, still neutral in the Pacific war, with a request to inform the Americans of Japan's wish to surrender, so long as the emperor could be retained as head of state and symbol of national unity. Stalin, who had agreed at Yalta to declare war on Japan three months after Germany's defeat, passed the information to Harry Truman, president since Roosevelt's death in April. But the United States had insisted throughout the war on unconditional surrender, and by the time Japan's request reached Truman, he had learned of a fearsome new weapon that he hoped would make it unnecessary to invade Japan, bargain over surrender terms, or bring the Soviets into the Pacific war.

This weapon was the atomic bomb, a secret project initiated in 1942 with the intent of harnessing the immense power released by splitting the atoms of radioactive elements, a process called nuclear fission. American, British, and expatriate European scientists, working at sites in the United States, finally developed a workable device, successfully tested at Alamogordo, New Mexico, on July 16, 1945. Its enormous explosive power,



A U.S. Marine receives communion from a Catholic chaplain atop Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima.

Gruesome combat engulfs Iwo Jima and Okinawa

Aerial bombing destroys Japan's largest cities



The effects of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

equivalent to 20 thousand tons of dynamite in a single bomb, made it the most potent weapon yet developed. Its use against civilian targets raised serious ethical concerns among some of the scientists who helped create it, but there is no evidence that the United States government viewed it as anything other than a weapon of great power that would save lives by ending the war quickly.

The United States uses atomic weapons against Japan

After Alamogordo the Americans possessed enough fissionable material for only three bombs, and Truman ordered two of them sent immediately to the Pacific island of Tinian, where two specially configured B-29s with handpicked, highly skilled crews were waiting. On August 6 the first atomic bomb used in warfare fell on **Hiroshima**, destroying most of the city and instantly killing between 70 thousand and 80 thousand people. Thousands more died from burns and radiation sickness within weeks. On August 8 the USSR, fulfilling Stalin's Yalta promise, declared war on imperial Japan. On August 9 the Americans, having heard no response to their demands for immediate Japanese surrender, dropped a second bomb on Nagasaki, killing 35 thousand people and leveling much of the city. The emperor then intervened and forced a Japanese surrender. With the signing of a formal surrender aboard the U.S. battleship *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay on September 2, history's deadliest war officially ended.

The Legacy of World War II

The Great War, now called World War I, had brought drastic political changes, but those that followed World War II were even more shattering. Nazism, fascism, and Japanese militarism were abolished, replaced eventually by political systems imposed by the conquerors. Italy and Japan remained intact, while Germany and Austria were temporarily divided among four occupying powers—Britain, France, the Soviet Union and the United States. The occupations lasted until 1955 in Austria and 1990 in Germany. The war in Europe was followed by more than four decades of hostility and tension between the USSR and its former allies, a debilitating and dangerous global confrontation known as the Cold War (Chapter 34). The League of Nations, now defunct, was replaced by a United Nations composed of all powers that had declared war against the Axis. It soon expanded to include the losers (although divided Germany remained outside until 1973), and it became a forum for Cold War disputes. The Grand Alliance of Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union broke apart because of distrust between communism and capitalism, and between Stalin and everyone else.

The war's enormous devastation requires massive reconstruction

Terrible devastation complicated recovery efforts. Japanese cities, the largest of them almost totally destroyed, were rebuilt rapidly with American aid, largely because of Japan's importance as a potential Western ally in the Cold War. But Europe was divided between Soviet and Western zones of occupation and influence, and within those zones by national boundaries and ethnic hatreds. Millions of displaced persons, having lost their homes or countries, roamed the continent, seeking villages and towns that no longer existed, searching for relatives and loved ones killed in battle, murdered in the Holocaust, buried by collapsing buildings, crushed by tanks, or simply lost. Cities were clogged with corpses and rubble (Dresden, Germany, was not cleared of rubble until 1965), while hunger, disease, and poverty gripped the demoralized survivors. "Europe is a charnel-house," said Churchill, and Harry Truman, having ridden through Berlin on his way to a conference in July 1945, arrived at his destination trembling. He had fought in the Great War and seen terrible

suffering, he commented, but nothing like this. In the Second World War, 60 million people perished, two-thirds of them in China and the Soviet Union combined.

These terrors were eventually overcome, however, in part because of other aspects of the war's legacy. The Cold War encouraged the Western allies to help rebuild the roads and bridges of their friends and former foes. The Allies' task was assisted by the unprecedented authority the war had conferred on modern governments. To win the war, democracies such as Britain and America had employed such authoritarian techniques as seemed necessary for survival. Afterward, peacetime regimes retained that centralization of power, and they were able to work quickly to bring recovery and stability.

Eventually those aspects of wartime governance were institutionalized or replaced, but other legacies of the war, particularly in scientific and medical fields, had an even more extensive and enduring impact on human life. Radar, which had saved Britain in 1940, was now enhanced through microwave technology, making possible not only the postwar microwave oven but also tiny radar sets on aircraft, which in turn made postwar commercial aviation viable. Passenger aircraft came to be powered by jet engines, first used in wartime Germany and then modified in Britain and America for peacetime use. The world's first computer, which filled a huge room at the University of Pennsylvania after coming online in 1945, foreshadowed an information age previously unimaginable. Eventually, artificial earth satellites made possible intercontinental telephone and television communication, accurate weather forecasting, and Internet transmissions; they were placed in space by ballistic missiles, a technology developed by Germany during the war.

Medically, wartime advances proved tremendously helpful to humanity. The development of penicillin ushered in the age of antibiotics; together with sulfa drugs used to treat previously fatal infections, it saved the lives of many soldiers and allowed generations of children to grow up in relative freedom from life-threatening infectious disease. Residents of the tropics likewise benefited from the development of synthetic atabrine, providing better treatment for malaria. The creation of the potent insecticide DDT for use in the jungles of Asia and the South Pacific sharply reduced outbreaks of malaria and typhus after the war ended. In addition, battlefield perfection of techniques of blood transfusion rendered significant benefits to civilians after 1945.

So the world survived, and some of it prospered after its emergence from the destruction of war. Europe, torn apart by the two world wars (together sometimes called the Thirty Years War of 1914–1945), eventually attained unprecedented levels of stability and affluence, as did Japan and other parts of Asia. The war contributed to the fatal weakening of European overseas empires and exerted a direct impact on the decolonization movements that succeeded after 1945. The horrifying destruction of the war years gave way to rebuilding and rapid economic growth, and the technological and medical improvements of those years benefited nearly everyone. These benefits do not diminish the incalculable costs, both financial and human, of the savage conflict we call World War II, but they do testify to humanity's immense capacity for survival and growth, even in the most agonizing circumstances.

One aspect of the war's legacy, however, threatened to destroy not only what had managed to survive but also the very existence of human life on the planet. Nuclear power offered tremendous potential benefits in terms of energy and peaceful uses of radiation, but the mushroom clouds over Hiroshima and Nagasaki cast a shadow of fear over the postwar years. The Cold War that followed World War II was darkened from its outset by that shadow.

Wartime medical advances offer peacetime benefits

Chapter Review

Putting It in Perspective

In the 1930s it had seemed unlikely that democracy could survive. The anxieties of the 1920s, culminating in the Great Depression, made many believe that only powerful authoritarian governments could deal with the issues left by the Great War. Italy and Japan, which had fought on the winning side, and Germany and Russia, which had lost, shared deep dissatisfaction with the war's results and installed such dictatorships in an effort to reassert their claims. Democracies like Britain and France tried in vain to appease these dictators, while the world's largest democracy, the United States, withdrew from European affairs. In such a climate, rulers like Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin flourished.

Eventually, however, the dictatorships grew impatient with appeasement. Germany started a major war in 1939 in pursuit of living space in the east and a racial paradise for the “Master Race.” Italy joined the struggle in 1940, hoping to profit from Germany's victory over France at little cost to itself. Japan attempted to secure raw materials for its industrialized economy by conquering China and expelling Europeans and Americans from their holdings in the central and western Pacific. By early 1942, these Axis powers appeared to be winning what by then was known as World War II.

But the dictators had overreached. The Soviet Union, itself a dictatorship, had at first appeased Hitler through the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939, but two years later found itself invaded by Germany. Its enormous reserves of manpower and huge expanses of territory proved too much for the German army to handle. Britain survived the defeat of France in 1940 and refused to surrender. Its command of the Atlantic sea lanes and the courage and skill of its fighter pilots saved it from German invasion. Finally, Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor brought the United States into the war. America's tremendous industrial capacity enabled the nation to fight major wars on two fronts, supply its allies with huge quantities of

war materiel, and carry out the research and development required to produce atomic weapons. The devastating combination of Russia, Britain, and the United States provided the Grand Alliance with the overwhelming force necessary to win World War II.

The legacy of the war was mixed. Widespread destruction, the deaths of 60 million people, and the use of massive aerial bombing and atomic weapons marked World War II as the most terrible conflict in human history. But the war also brought dramatic scientific, technological, and medical advances that extended human life expectancy and improved the quality of life for billions of people. Out of the appalling suffering came hope for a better future and widespread resolve to avoid a third world war.

Reviewing Key Material

KEY CONCEPTS

<i>Lebensraum</i> , 845	Luftwaffe, 853
<i>Anschluss</i> , 848	Rape of Nanjing, 856
Nazi-Soviet Pact, 850	D-Day, 867
Blitzkrieg, 851	Hiroshima, 872

KEY PEOPLE

Douglas MacArthur, 845, 869	Erwin Rommel, 859
Adolf Hitler, 845	Bernard Law
Benito Mussolini, 847	Montgomery, 859
Francisco Franco, 847	Reinhard Heydrich, 863
Neville Chamberlain, 850	Adolf Eichmann, 864
Winston Churchill, 853	Anne Frank, 864
Georgi Zhukov, 855	Pope Pius XII, 866
Josef Stalin, 854	Dwight Eisenhower, 867
Jiang Jieshi, 856	Walther Model, 867
Franklin Roosevelt, 858	Omar Bradley, 867
Isoroku Yamamoto, 859	George Patton, 867
Chester Nimitz, 859	Harry Truman, 871

ASK YOURSELF

1. Why did Germany absorb Austria and Czechoslovakia before invading Poland in 1939? What did Hitler's government hope to accomplish?

2. Why was Germany unable to conquer the Soviet Union?
3. Why did Japan attack the United States in 1941?
4. What strategies did the Allied powers use to defeat the Axis forces between 1942 and 1945? What factors made these strategies effective?
5. How and why did Germany murder millions of Europeans during World War II?

GOING FURTHER

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Key Dates and Developments

1937 Japan invades China

1938 Germany annexes Austria
Munich Conference: Germany annexes
Sudetenland

1939 Germany takes Czechoslovakia
Nazi-Soviet Pact
Germany invades Poland; Britain and France
declare war

1940 Germany conquers Norway, Holland, Belgium,
and France
Battle of Britain

1941 Germany invades the Soviet Union
Japan attacks Pearl Harbor

1942 Japan conquers Dutch East Indies and
Philippines

Extermination of European Jews and others
begins
United States defeats Japan at Midway Island
Allies invade North Africa

1943 USSR defeats Germany at Stalingrad
Allies invade Italy

1944 Normandy invasion and Soviet offensive in
the east

1945 United Nations Organization established
Germany surrenders
Atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki
Japan surrenders