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Course Guidebook

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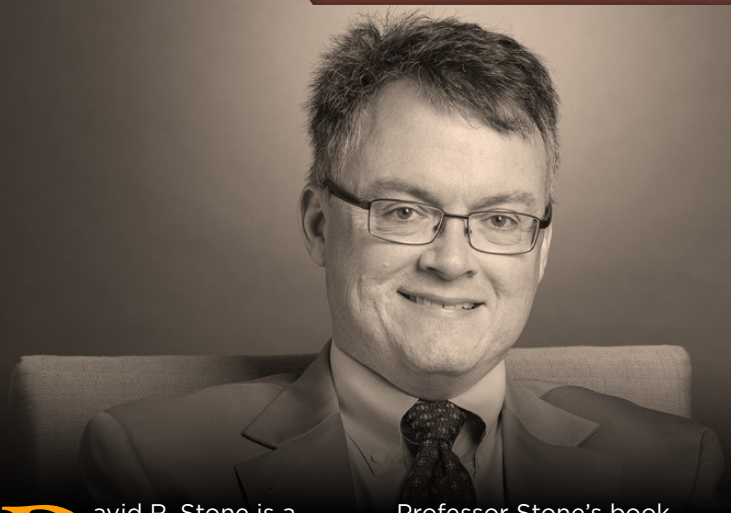

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Professor Stone's book *Hammer and Rifle: The Militarization of the Soviet Union, 1926–1933* won the ASEEES Marshall D. Shulman Book Prize and the Historical Society Best First Book Prize. He also published *A Military History of Russia: From Ivan the Terrible to the War in Chechnya* and *The Russian Army in the Great War: The Eastern Front, 1914–1917*. He edited *The Soviet Union at War 1941–1945* and is the author of several dozen articles on Russian military history and foreign policy.

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NAVIGATION TIP

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Adolf Hitler drove Germany into a war across Europe it had no business fighting and couldn't win, yet Germany and Hitler almost won the war before the Allies could fashion a response. The war Hitler unleashed killed some 60 million people and changed the world forever. To make sense of this global conflict, this course looks at World War II through a particular lens: strategy.

Strategy is about choices—that is, deciding how best to use available resources to achieve goals. It's easy to look at World War II and imagine how things would have gone if key individuals had made different decisions. Throughout this course, lectures will look at pivotal decisions by key political leaders, including Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt, Joseph Stalin, Benito Mussolini, and Adolf Hitler. The course also looks at key military leaders and how they carried out the decisions of political leaders. Those military leaders include Dwight Eisenhower, George Patton, and Bernard Montgomery.

In World War II, it mattered greatly where and how a country chose to commit its resources. There are never enough soldiers and tanks and planes to go around. Fighting in Europe meant there were fewer men for Asia. Building more tanks means building fewer planes. Fielding more soldiers means employing fewer factory workers. Every choice matters.

Studying history through this lens of strategy also makes clearer how the decisions made at the time shaped the world we live in today. The American sense of the world and the role the United States plays are fundamentally shaped by the experience of World War II.

1

THE BATTLE OF MOSCOW, DECEMBER 1941

To give a taste of what this course will be about, this lecture examines the turning point of World War II. This was the moment at which Adolf Hitler stopped winning and started losing. It was the Battle of Moscow in December 1941.

HITLER ON THE VERGE

At the time, Hitler was standing on the verge of total victory. His troops were just outside the Russian capital. His victory seemed imminent if he managed to take Moscow.

Moscow was Hitler's chance to defeat the Soviet Union early in the war. Part of that has to do with the importance of the city itself. In terms of transportation, the entire Soviet war effort ran through the city.

> A map of Russian railroads and highways resembles a bicycle wheel: Moscow is the hub, and transportation links spread out like spokes.

Moscow mattered to the rest of the world as well. In Britain, Winston Churchill had taken his country through its darkest hour, but Britain saw no realistic path to victory by itself. Churchill's desperate hope—and the thing that kept Britain fighting—was that perhaps the additional military heft of the Soviet Union or the United States could defeat the Germans.

Just when the Battle of Moscow hit its height, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and brought the United States into the war against Japan. But there was no guarantee the United States would enter the war against Germany. If Hitler had taken Moscow in late 1941 or early 1942, and the Soviet Union had fallen, it is not hard to imagine the American people deciding that Europe was a lost cause and focusing all their resources against Japan. The stakes at Moscow were that high.

HITLER'S STRATEGIC CHOICES

Hitler made huge strategic choices in the fall of 1941. In August 1941—two months after Germany invaded the Soviet Union—Hitler had the Nazis slow their advance toward Moscow. Hitler took his panzer groups—the key tank forces—and detoured them to the north and south.

To the north, Hitler reinforced the German troops pushing

toward the Soviet Union's second city, Leningrad, a major industrial center. In the south, Hitler's tanks converged behind Kiev in Ukraine, encircling and trapping 600,000 Soviet troops in the biggest single German triumph of the war. The Soviet Union seemed on the verge of collapse. However, the German pause gave Joseph Stalin more than a month to prepare his defenses on the main road directly to Moscow.

Once the Germans consolidated their victory around Kiev, three huge panzer groups assembled. At the end of September, they roared east toward Moscow in Operation Typhoon. As at Kiev, Hitler's generals again used their armored units to break through Soviet defenses. As a result, a half-dozen Soviet armies ended up trapped in pockets around the western cities of Vyazma and Briansk, losing another 500,000 men in the process. The path to Moscow seemed open.

HITLER IN MUD

The Russian word *rasputitsa* means "the time of year when the roads turn into mud." It speaks to two times of the year: the fall, when snow begins to fall but the ground is not yet frozen, and spring, when the ice and snow melts. Hitler's armies ran into the autumn rasputitsa in mid-October. Rain and melting snow took dirt roads and turned them into ribbons of mud, sometimes several feet deep.

Nothing could move. Until the weather got cold enough to freeze the ground, Hitler had to wait. The time he lost began to weigh on him.

Meanwhile, the Soviets were not waiting passively. Instead, just as the Germans inflicted huge losses on the Soviets, the Germans were taking casualties themselves. The panzer divisions that had led the eastward advance were down to only a handful of tanks. Experienced German infantry became exhausted and suffered losses.

WAR OF ATTRITION

The Soviet Union drew on its enormous population to throw more and more fighting men into the line. Many fresh recruits lacked training. Still,

Joseph Stalin

with each mile that brought the Germans closer to Moscow, Hitler's armies were taking losses they simply could not afford.

In mid-October, Stalin ordered the evacuation of some government functions from Moscow. The Germans had taken a major city—Kalinin, now called Tver—just north of Moscow on the 14th, and they were threatening Tula, a major arms-production site just south of Moscow.

To preserve the government's ability to conduct business, Stalin sent several key departments and foreign embassies 600 miles east to the city of Kuibyshev (now called Samara) on the Volga River. This suggested that Stalin was preparing to fight even if Moscow was taken, but it led to panic in the city. Two days of riots and other disturbances upset the capital before things calmed down. Stalin made clear he was staying, and that restored calm.

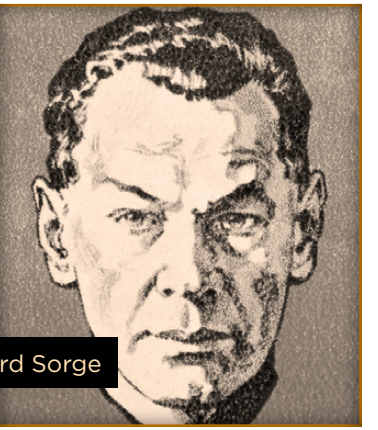
In mid-November, the ground finally froze and German tanks could move again. Now came Hitler's second big decision. He faced a predicament: If he looked at casualties, the supplies of his troops, and what his generals were reporting, it was time to pause and try again later. However, he badly needed victory to seize Soviet resources. He had been a gambler his whole career, and it had always served him well before.

Hitler pressed his generals to keep going through November into early December. German soldiers broke through Soviet defenses, but they took losses they couldn't afford. Still, they reached the outskirts of Moscow.

EVENTS IN TOKYO

Meanwhile, while Hitler's soldiers were poised to take the Soviet capital, important events were also underway in Tokyo, Japan. Richard Sorge was a German journalist operating in Japan as a Soviet spy.

Like other Soviet spies inside the American and British governments, Sorge was especially effective and reliable because he was serving for ideological reasons. Though he'd been born in Russia to a German father and Russian mother,



Richard Sorge

he'd grown up in Germany in a patriotic family.

Over the autumn of 1941, Sorge was able to gather information from his contacts in Japan to make it clear that Japan intended to attack the United States and move into the Pacific. In other words, it would not attack the Soviet Union and invade Siberia. Furnished with Sorge's intelligence and other sources on Japanese plans, Stalin pulled 18 divisions and thousands of tanks and aircraft from the Far East to defend Moscow.

THE DEFENSE OF MOSCOW

Recognizing that the German attack was rapidly losing momentum, Stalin's high command built up a powerful strike force of more than 1 million men, trickling just enough troops into Moscow to keep the Germans out while waiting for the right time to strike. Stalin had also found the right commander to put in charge at Moscow: General Georgy Zhukov, the man more responsible than any other for the Soviet Union's eventual triumph in 1945.

When Germany invaded the Soviet Union, Zhukov became a troubleshooter, rushing to crisis points to shore up crumbling defenses. In September 1941, he took over the defense of Leningrad, keeping the Germans from seizing the city. In October, he came back to central Russia to run the defense of Moscow. As the German advance slowed and then stalled completely, Zhukov organized his troops for a counteroffensive.

At Moscow, by the beginning of December, everything was coming together: The Germans were well past their culminating point, exhausted and frozen. Tough Soviet troops from Siberia were assembling for a counterstrike. And Zhukov was the right man at the right time to lead it.

THE SOVIETS STRIKE BACK

On December 5, 1941, as frozen and exhausted German soldiers lay just outside of the Russian capital, believing

themselves to be on the verge of victory, a massive Soviet assault smashed through their lines to the north of the city. Armed with the tanks and artillery pieces now rolling off Soviet assembly lines, veteran troops who were used to the cold—and experienced in combat—forced German infantry into an increasingly panicked retreat. The next day, a coordinated offensive forced Germans to retreat south of Moscow as well.

Only days after the Soviet attack began, Hitler ordered all offensive actions on the Eastern Front to stop so that German troops could go on the defensive. That wasn't enough. German troops were retreating through a terribly cold Russian winter, and they soon neared panic. Hitler finally had to directly order them to stand fast.

The Germans were dealing with a crazily tangled front line. German soldiers moved into towns and villages for warmth and supply, preparing defenses against attack from any direction. This created little islands of German resistance for the winter. The Soviets, meanwhile, pushed into the gaps they found. Hitler's order to stand fast has been criticized as setting up unrealistic expectations of holding back the Soviets by sheer force of will, but it likely prevented a complete German breakdown.

CONCLUSION

Moscow had been saved, but at a huge cost. The Soviet people's militia sent from the factories into the fight was almost entirely wiped out. Stalin, carried away by his success around Moscow, now pushed too far, and he tried to turn this local victory into a general offensive. He found the Red Army simply wasn't ready for such a task, at least not yet.

Still, the Soviet victory at Moscow was hugely significant. If the Soviets had lost the capital, it is hard to see how they could have continued the war. That would have made Britain far more vulnerable to a Germany now in possession of Soviet resources.

Psychologically, it was also enormously important that the Germans had been

stopped, beaten, and actually forced to retreat. Hitler had been on a run of victories for more than two years by the time of the Moscow counteroffensive. Now, Germany might actually lose the war.

By the time the dust settled in early 1942, the Germans had taken perhaps 500,000 casualties on the Eastern Front. With more than three years of conflict ahead, the German military was already worried about running out of manpower. The German panzer divisions that had led Germany to victory after victory were down to 140 working tanks to cover a 1,000-mile front in the east. German industry—and the German population—would provide more men and more equipment, but the losses were getting harder and harder to sustain.

In turn, Hitler and Stalin drew opposite lessons from Moscow: one right, one wrong. From Moscow, Hitler concluded not to trust his generals. Now, despite his lack of formal military education, Hitler made himself the German army's supreme commander. Stalin, on the other hand, learned the correct lesson: to trust his professionals.

SUGGESTED READING

Braithwaite, *Moscow 1941*.

Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*.

Reinhard, *Moscow*.

Stahel, *The Battle for Moscow*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Would taking Moscow have meant that Hitler's victory in World War II was more or less assured?
2. Was Nazi Germany doomed to defeat when their forces failed to take Moscow?

2

ANTI-SEMITISM AND THE NAZIS

Hitler systematically murdered roughly two-thirds of Europe's Jews: about 6 million of the 9–10 million living in Europe before the war. The large and vibrant Jewish communities of Eastern Europe were wiped out.

The Holocaust is a subject too enormous to cover in a single lecture, so this course examines the tragedy in two parts. This lecture starts at the beginning with a history of European anti-Semitism, the role of the Jews in Nazi ideology, and the Nazis' initial efforts at murdering Jews when the war began.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Jewish worship of the God of the Old Testament was consistent with a Christian point of view. Jesus himself had been born a Jew to Jewish parents as part of a Jewish community. But for Christians, Jesus was the Son of God, and he brought a new message.

The Christian message eventually became quite clear: The Jews had been right once, but the time had now come to turn away from old practices and adopt Christianity. For centuries, the Christian view of Jews was negative and fundamentally religious: The Jews refused to recognize their error in sticking to old ways. They were held responsible for the murder of Jesus Christ and other acts.

Social prejudices followed. Law and tradition often barred Jews from particular occupations and pushed them into others. Christian restrictions on lending money at interest opened the way for Jews in that profession. Laws against Jews owning land pushed them into skilled trades. In Christian Europe, Jews depended on rulers who would permit them to live in a particular place in return for providing useful service. These rulers would often find the Jews a useful scapegoat for criticism.

After the French Revolution, the position of Jews in European society began to change. There was a process of gradual and intermittent emancipation, whereby the legal restrictions on Jews began to disappear. However, as religious anti-Semitism died away, it was replaced by nationalist and ethnic hatred for Jews.

Jews came to be seen as outsiders, no matter how long they had lived in Germany, Poland, and Hungary. Still, that could be overcome to some degree, at least. If Jews acted and behaved as good Germans, and identified themselves primarily as Germans, then they might be able to get past this nationalist form of anti-Semitism. Many Jews—particularly in Germany—accepted this, adapted, and assimilated.

However, other strains of anti-Semitism proved particularly dangerous. First, traditional economic prejudices against Jews had now become replaced by blaming Jews for the failings of capitalism. Jews' old role as economic middlemen and moneylenders made them targets.

Old-style anti-Semitism based on religion was also beginning to give way to a new anti-Semitism that was racial and biological. That new form of prejudice infused all of later Nazi ideology.

> In Germany, even blending in was turned against Jews. To anti-Semites, the Jews who looked and dressed and acted like Germans were considered even more dangerous.

THE JEWS IN NAZI THINKING

Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party, like other parties on the far right, saw attacks on Jews as a winning electoral strategy. Jews were always central to Adolf Hitler's view of the world. He had picked up anti-Semitism in the nasty and polarized politics of Vienna before World War I. Afterward, he became leader of the new Nazi Party, and he returned to those ideas.

Hitler saw the greatest threat to Germany and the world as Judeo-Bolshevism: communism controlled by Jews, drawing in what he viewed as subhuman populations from across Europe. Jews proved a useful scapegoat. The fundamental Nazi appeal was to those who felt dispossessed and threatened by change. That meant that the heart of their support was the lower-middle class who feared economic change and whose savings had been destroyed by inflation after World War I. It was easier to blame the Jews for their economic misery than to actually figure out what had gone wrong with the world economy.

Once Hitler and the Nazis came to power in 1933, there was an initial wave of violence against Jews and a nationwide boycott of Jewish businesses. Under pressure from international opinion—and his own advisors, who

feared foreign backlash—Hitler initially dialed back the mob violence to minimize destruction and foreign boycotts.

At the same time, though, he wasted little time in implementing anti-Jewish laws. Paradoxically, this made German Jews among the most likely of Europe's Jews to survive the coming Holocaust. They had plenty of warning about Hitler's intent and several years to get out of Germany to somewhere safer. Outside of Germany, however, Jews often found themselves caught by war. And once under Nazi control, it was too late to run.

ANTI-SEMITIC MOVES

Within two months of coming to power, the Nazis passed a law banning Jews from the civil service. Taxpaying Jewish German citizens were thus expelled from the government bureaucracy. A single Jewish grandparent was enough to qualify as Jewish, with some limited protection for relatives of Jewish war veterans. Jews were also barred from work as teachers and professors.

Another law—again, within the first few months of the inception of the Nazi regime—barred Jews from university education. They were banned from practicing medicine, and Jewish dentists soon followed. At the same time, incidentally, Hitler expelled women from the medical profession, except as midwives. A third of Jewish lawyers were disbarred.

The next year, Jews were forbidden to work as stage or screen actors. German science took a hit as well. Twenty Nobel Prize winners left the country, including Albert Einstein. For the next two years, Jews were purged from German public life, including their representation in statues and street names.

THE NUREMBURG LAWS

With Hitler solidly in power by 1935, he felt confident in going further. The Nazi regime enacted the Nuremburg Laws, which systematically deprived Jews of civil rights as German citizens. They were stripped of German citizenship. Jews and non-Jews were forbidden to marry. Sex between Jews and non-Jews became a crime.

The exclamation point on this process came in November 1938. A Jewish student from Poland assassinated a German official in Paris. In response, Nazi forces destroyed several thousand Jewish businesses and synagogues. Some 30,000 Jews were imprisoned in camps, and a hundred were killed in the mass violence. By 1939, Jews had been systematically cut off from the German economy.

Hitler publicly declared that if another war came, the result would be "the destruction of the Jewish race in Europe." Many German Jews didn't need to be told and had already sought refuge abroad. Too few others took him seriously.

Most other European states—and the United States—did not want refugees when, in the midst of the Great Depression, jobs were in short supply. By the start of the war, roughly 60 percent of Germany's Jews had left the country. The luckiest reached safety somewhere outside of Nazi reach. The unlucky went only as far as France or other European countries where they were vulnerable to being caught by Hitler's armies and proxies during the coming war. The worst off were those who stayed in Germany. Those Jews, about 200,000 of them, had only a one-in-five chance of making it to the end of the war alive.

THE WAR BEGINS

The outbreak of war in 1939 fundamentally changed the status of Jews in Europe. Because the war closed borders, Jews who found themselves under Nazi control had less ability to leave. More importantly, Hitler's conquest of Poland put a huge number of Jews under German rule.

Prewar Poland had 3 million Jews, and even though many ended up on the Soviet side of the line when Poland was split, that was still a large number for Hitler's regime to manage. These Polish Jews lacked even the partial protection of German citizenship or German friends and family.

The Nazis created a new territorial unit in central Poland, the General Government. The General

Government became a dumping ground for Jews. The Jewish population of Poland was concentrated in extremely crowded ghettos in central Polish cities.

It's hard to know exactly what Hitler intended to do with the Jewish population under his control at this point. The Nazis more generally had not thought through what they were going to do with Jews they dumped into the General Government.

AN EXTREME SITUATION

In 1941, the remaining German Jews were shipped to central Poland. Hans Frank, the Nazi brute in charge of the General Government, began to refuse to take additional population on top of the 3.5 million Jews the Nazi regime had stuffed into the General Government. The Nazis were being faced with a growing problem. They had many Jews on their hands and nowhere to put them.

Although the Jews of the General Government had been concentrated into ghettos, the fact that there was a relatively skilled and captive labor force there proved appealing to some German businessmen. Jewish labor was available for hire. Oskar Schindler, who ended up heroically saving 1,200 Jews from death at Nazi hands, became involved with Jews as a strictly business venture: cheap labor with which to operate factories in occupied Poland.

Even as some Jews proved economically useful to the Nazis, that raised the question about what to do about those who weren't so useful: children, the sick, and the elderly. A number of Nazis took Hitler at his word and began to talk about whether it might make sense to take the Jews who weren't economically useful and simply eliminate them.

SPRING OF 1941

By the spring of 1941, Hitler was fully into his preparations to attack the Soviet Union. He saw the communist Soviet Union as the heartland of Judeo-Bolshevism, and talked in the most brutal terms about what he intended to do there. Between 2 and 3 million Jews lived in the Soviet Union's western borderlands, and

Hitler used his subordinates to make careful preparations for mass murder.

Hitler's short-term aim was to systematically mass murder Soviet Jews as the German army passed through. To achieve this, the chief of Hitler's SS private army, Reinhard Heydrich, created four *Einsatzgruppen*—or special-purpose groups—to follow right behind the German army as it moved into the Soviet Union. Their purpose to was liquidate all communist officials and commissars plus all Jews who were serving the Soviet state.

The Einsatzgruppen also often enjoyed the cooperation of the local non-Jewish population, who assisted in the murder of Jews. After a couple of months, the shooting escalated to the systematic murder of all Jews: men, women, and children. Hitler seems to have given a verbal order at this point to execute every Jew. In the course of two days at the end of September, almost 34,000 Jews were shot at the Babi Yar ravine outside of Kiev and dumped into mass graves.

The Soviet Union was also part of a long-term plan for Jewish people. The German plan involved the systematic ethnic cleansing of huge swathes of territory, leaving only slave labor to be employed in service of German farming colonies.

However, the plan did not work. The Einsatzgruppen found their job of mass murder to be draining. Their men killed a million people, one bullet at a time. That took a psychological toll, though this course does not suggest pity is appropriate for them. The process was also slow and inefficient.

CONCLUSION

German leadership began to believe they needed to find some other way. In late fall 1941, Nazi leadership coalesced around the idea of the systematic mass murder of the Jews of Europe. Instead of bringing death to the Jews in the form of mobile killing squads, the idea arose of conveying the Jews to extermination camps. Those extermination camps could be set up where millions of Jews were already confined: the center of Poland.

SUGGESTED READING

Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews, 1933–1945*.

Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*.

———. *The Third Reich in Power*.

Hilburg, Raul. *The Destruction of the European Jews*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why were the Jews such an effective scapegoat for Hitler?

2. Why was it so difficult to take Hitler's threats against the Jews seriously?

3

TEARING UP THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES

When Adolf Hitler came to power in January 1933, he said he wanted to get Germany out from under the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles—a pact that had imposed strict terms on Germany after World War I, including territorial concessions, financial reparations, and strict limitations on the German military. Hitler's long-term objective was not especially hard to figure out: expand Germany to obtain land and resources, and then make a bid for European domination. Before Hitler made any effort to expand territory, he first had to escape from the military handcuffs Versailles had imposed.

UNDERMINING THE TREATY

Most Germans already saw the Treaty of Versailles as unjust. All German governments had wanted to escape its restrictions. Furthermore, once Hitler was in power, he played down his more grandiose goals. That made him seem—at least at the beginning—not so out of the ordinary.

The Versailles treaty had two key elements still in place in 1933 that Hitler made a priority to undermine or get rid of. First, Germany was not permitted to have troops on the west bank of the Rhine. Although the Rhineland was German territory, the point of the restriction was that in the event of hostilities, France could easily move in. It also ensured that the next war would be fought on German territory instead of on French territory, as World War I had been.

Second, Versailles kept tight restrictions on the German military: It could have no air force, no submarines, and an army of only 100,000 men. Germany quietly worked to subvert those limits in a number of ways, secretly building and experimenting with restricted technology deep inside the Soviet Union and creating a small army built for rapid expansion.

TINY STEPS

Because Germany was objectively weak, Hitler pursued his goals of rebuilding German power and establishing European domination with tiny steps. The first step was rearmament. Hitler laid the groundwork to rearm by pulling Germany out of world disarmament talks six months after he came to power. Then, in 1935, he announced that Germany was rearming and reintroducing the draft. It was clearly a violation of the Treaty of Versailles but did not directly affect any of Germany's neighbors.

Once Hitler blew up the Versailles restrictions on rearmament, the next step was taking full control over German territory: the Rhineland, which lies due east of France, Belgium, and the southeast corner of the Netherlands. In March

THE APPEAL OF APPEASEMENT

Multiple factors kept Britain and France from intervening as Germany incrementally worked against the Treaty of Versailles. First was war-weariness: Neither country's population was eager for another armed conflict.

Another factor in European passivity was a lack of coordination. During the First World War, Germany had fought—and almost won—against a coalition of three great powers. First up were Britain, France, and Russia, and later the coalition was made up of Britain, France, and the United States. Taking on Germany alone seemed like a terrible idea on the eve of World War II. Appeasement simply seemed the better option to many Europeans.

1936, Hitler moved German troops across the Rhine into the western sections of the Rhineland where they had been specifically barred by Versailles.

TROUBLE IN SPAIN

The next sign of where things were headed was the civil war in Spain, a disturbance that reproduced in microcosm the tensions all across Europe. Spain's 1936 elections put a left-wing government in place, which the Spanish right wing and the Spanish army rebelled against.

A vicious civil war broke out between leftist Republicans and the Nationalist right wing as a result. This conflict dragged on for three years. While Hitler and Italy's Benito Mussolini shipped weapons and advisors to the right-wing Spanish Nationalists, Stalin's Soviet Union did the same for left-wing Republicans. Britain and France imposed an arms embargo on both sides and hoped the problem would go away.

The Spanish Civil War didn't have a direct impact on the outbreak of World War II, but it was a symptom. There was a coming showdown with fascism.

HITLER'S PLANS

In November 1937, Hitler convened a key meeting with his top generals and foreign minister where he laid out his thinking about Germany's future. Hitler made clear that he did not want to go to war with Britain and France in the short term. He needed time to rebuild the German military. But over the longer term—perhaps five years—the Germans should expect to fight Britain and France.

In the meantime, Hitler expected to engage in shorter and smaller engagements to grab territory, population, and resources to improve Germany's position. In particular, he saw Austria and Czechoslovakia as relatively easy targets.

A number of Hitler's top generals— upon hearing of Hitler's longer-term plans for war with Britain and France—were appalled. They saw war with Britain and France—and possibly the Soviet Union—as courting disaster. There was even some discussion of a military coup to remove Hitler and head off war.

But Hitler moved to bring the military entirely under his control. The two key figures running the German army were the war minister Werner von Blomberg and the army commander in chief Werner von Fritsch. Hitler got rid of the two Werners by using sex scandals, and his control over the military strengthened.

HITLER TARGETS AUSTRIA

Hitler's next target was Austria. Austria was the German-speaking section of what had been Austria-Hungary until it fell apart at the end of World War I, leaving Austria as a tiny fraction of the former empire.

At the beginning of 1938, Austrian police detected signs that local Nazis were preparing another power grab. The head of the Austrian government, Kurt Schuschnigg—who was a right-wing semi-dictator himself, but not a Nazi—prepared to crack down because he wasn't willing to see Austria taken over by Germany.

In February 1938, the German leader summoned Schuschnigg to his Eagle's Nest mountain retreat where he screamed at the Austrian for hours, threatening a massive invasion. Hitler browbeat Schuschnigg into a series of concessions that would hand over power in Austria to the local Nazis.

When Schuschnigg got home, though, he changed his mind. He tried instead to rally the Austrian population around the cause of maintaining independence. Hitler now ordered the German army to invade. And before that even happened, threatening phone calls to Vienna pushed Schuschnigg out of office. With the Austrian military putting up no resistance, the German army rolled into Vienna, cheered on by local crowds. Austria became part of Germany, in another direct violation of the Treaty of Versailles and another victory for Hitler.

NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN'S DILEMMA

The British prime minister who was forced to deal with Hitler's rise was Neville Chamberlain. He takes an enormous amount of blame for allowing Hitler to get as far as he did. Much of that blame is justified, but Chamberlain was faced with a difficult situation, and he had no easy answers.

Chamberlain had worked to improve conditions for the working class through unemployment insurance and a better health system. War, however, would destroy his dreams of a better Britain, so he tried to avoid it at all costs.

Hitler's next target after Austria was clear: Czechoslovakia. The Czechs were now surrounded on three sides by German territory. Still, Czechoslovakia was not an easy target: It had a strong economy, capable military, and a population in which the majority was not German. Furthermore, the Czechs were allied in a defensive treaty with both France and the Soviet Union.

Hitler did have one big factor working in his favor inside of Czechoslovakia: large numbers of ethnic

minorities. Ethnic Czechs were a bare majority of the population of the country while Slovaks accounted for another sixth. At the same time, the country's more than 3 million ethnic Germans outnumbered the Slovaks and made up nearly a fourth of the population.

These Sudeten Germans were concentrated in an arc along the northwestern border of the country. Even though Czechoslovakia had prospered and flourished as a liberal democracy through the 1920s and 1930s, its democratic freedoms also allowed the German population to organize to protest their diminished status.

By 1938, a third of the ethnic Germans in Czechoslovakia favored the local pro-Nazi party. That year, Hitler began to turn up the political heat in Czechoslovakia through his local sympathizers.

The German military, or Wehrmacht, drew up plans to invade the country. Hitler's aggressive inclinations were clear. The question was what outside parties would do.

While France maintained alliances with Czechoslovakia and other states in Eastern Europe, it was far from eager to go to war with Germany. In addition, France's alliance system in Eastern Europe depended on Poland, and Poland had its own disputes with Czechoslovakia. It wasn't interested in going to war to defend Czechoslovakia.

British policy under Neville Chamberlain was also lukewarm, and Britain had no defense commitment to the Czechs. The policy of British and French leaders became to push the Czech government to make concessions to Sudeten German demands rather than to bolster the Czechs in standing up to aggression, whether internally or externally. By late summer 1938, the German army was preparing for war, and European conflict seemed imminent.

HITLER'S DEMANDS INCREASE

In early September, the Czech government decided its best chance was to give the Sudeten Germans almost everything they had asked for. However, the Sudeten

Germans, acting under Hitler's orders, didn't want concessions. Hitler wanted war, not a deal. The Sudeten Germans rioted in response to getting what they wanted, and Hitler announced his readiness to invade.

The British and French now panicked. Chamberlain got on an airplane and flew to Germany to meet Hitler. The offer he put on the table was that Britain and France would do Germany's dirty work for it—pressing the Czechs into giving the Sudetenland to Hitler—to avoid war. The Czechs, seeing their position as impossible, also agreed.

When Chamberlain offered the Sudetenland gift-wrapped for him, Hitler accelerated his demands again. This proved to be going too far.

An international conference met on Hitler's home ground in Munich at the very end of September 1938. Having provoked the crisis in the first place, Hitler had the governments of Europe now coming to him to compete in giving him what he wanted.

Mussolini then stepped in as a purported peacemaker. He proposed a compromise that was no compromise at all. It called for Germany's immediate takeover of the Sudetenland, with Hungary and Poland taking additional Czech territory. Germany grabbed the Sudetenland, and Czechoslovakia was crippled. Hitler celebrated his triumph.

THE MISSING SOVIETS

The Soviets—who had a defensive agreement with Czechoslovakia—were missing from the table at Munich. To explain the British and French desire to keep the Soviets away, it is necessary to understand their mindset at the time, not knowing what we know today.

For Neville Chamberlain, it wasn't yet clear that Hitler was a monster. Hitler was aggressive, but Chamberlain thought that he could be satisfied with limited concessions. To Chamberlain, Stalin was just as bad. Communism was a threat just as dangerous as Nazism, he felt. Winston Churchill, by contrast, had a clearer grasp

of what the world was dealing with, but Churchill wasn't prime minister yet.

Chamberlain's mistake had consequences. When Britain and France threw Czechoslovakia to the wolves, the lesson for Joseph Stalin was that Britain and France would do anything they could to save themselves, and therefore there was no point in the Soviets risking cooperation with the Western allies. They weren't reliable. Viewed this way, the natural conclusion for Stalin was to explore his options and see what possibilities were out there, including a possible alliance with Nazi Germany.

SUGGESTED READING

Bell, *The Origins of the Second World War in Europe*.

Faber, *Munich, 1938*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Should the democratic powers have stood up to Hitler earlier?

2. What allowed Hitler such a dramatic run of early successes?

4

THE WAR BEGINS, 1939

Czechoslovakia was crippled as a result of the Munich Conference of September 1938. After Britain's Neville Chamberlain—in concert with France and Italy—sought to appease Adolf Hitler, Nazi Germany absorbed Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland with its German population. This also stripped Czechoslovakia of its frontier defenses. Next, the Slovak minority insisted on greater autonomy, further weakening the central government.

On March 15, 1939, Hitler invaded what was left of Czechoslovakia and faced no resistance. He brought the territory under German control. The annexation of Czechoslovakia finally broke the spell of Hitler appearing to be a normal German politician. From that point, the British and French were forced to conclude that Hitler was bent on European domination.

HITLER TURNS TO POLAND

The next target for Hitler was Poland, and the British and the French offered Poland a defensive guarantee. One obvious question, though, was how they could offer meaningful assistance. Poland was stuck on the opposite side of Europe. Getting to Poland meant going through Germany.

Another question was what Stalin would do. If Stalin sided with Britain and France against Germany, that would look like a replay of World War I, which hadn't ended well for Germany. It was vitally important for Hitler to keep Stalin out of the war.

Over the summer of 1939, Germany and the Western allies alike made a play for Stalin's support. Hitler was desperate for it, and he was willing to pay for Soviet cooperation. Britain and France, by comparison, lacked any sense of urgency, and didn't have much to offer. Stalin was in the enviable position of sitting back and waiting for offers to come to him.

The efforts by the Western allies were weak. Because Britain and France were preparing to go to war to defend Poland, they were hardly in a position to give away Polish territory to the Soviet Union. By contrast, Hitler was deadly serious. After the demise of Czechoslovakia at Germany's hands, there were tentative signals back and forth between Hitler and Stalin over the possibility of a deal between them.

STALIN SENDS A SIGNAL

At the beginning of May 1939, Stalin sent a very important signal to Hitler. He fired his foreign minister, Maksim Litvinov, replacing him with one of Stalin's closest associates, Vyacheslav Molotov.

In the 1930s, Litvinov had been Europe's foremost spokesman for collective security—that is, the idea that countries should act cooperatively to contain and punish aggression. With Litvinov removed from the foreign ministry, Stalin was signaling that he was no longer so interested in

coordinated international action to keep the peace. Litvinov was also a Jew. Getting rid of the Jewish Litvinov and replacing him with Molotov was clearly meant as a friendly gesture to Hitler.

By August, Germany and the Soviet Union were moving quickly to an agreement. On August 23, Hitler's foreign minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, arrived in Moscow. Late that night, he and Molotov signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, also known as the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact.

The non-aggression pact had two parts: one open, the other secret. For Britain and France, the open part was bad enough. Germany and the Soviet Union pledged not to go to war with one another or assist anyone waging war on either party.

The secret section was worse. In it, Hitler and Stalin divided up Europe. Hitler agreed to grant the Soviet Union a sphere of influence in Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Eastern Poland, and Bessarabia—the part of Romania bordering the Soviet Union. In turn, Stalin gave Germany a free hand in Lithuania and western Poland. Within a few weeks, the deal was modified slightly: Stalin got Lithuania in return for giving up some of Poland.

The agreement had economic repercussions as well. Germany received food and oil from the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union, in turn, received German machinery and technology.

For decades, the Soviet Union denied the existence of the secret section of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The open section was impossible to deny, but it was explained away as giving the Soviet Union valuable time to prepare for eventual war against Hitler.

THE WAR BEGINS

On the morning of September 1, 1939, German troops crossed the Polish border. World War II had begun. Hitler had hoped to start the war five days earlier, but his ally Benito Mussolini of Italy was not ready. Although momentarily spooked, time would allow for no delay, and Hitler decided to go ahead. For two days, the British and French explored peace conferences and compromises before finally, on September 3, declaring war on Germany.

While Poland had substantial numbers of ethnic minorities—who resented their second-class status—nationalist sentiment and desire to fight was strong among ethnic Poles. Once fighting began, however, German military superiority became clear.

The German army was far better equipped with tanks and aircraft, a fact that crippled Polish resistance from the start. In addition, Poland's French ally had urged not trying to hold Poland's long frontiers. The smarter strategy was to use Poland's rivers as defensive barriers, and withdraw to a centralized position around the capital, Warsaw.

Instead, the Polish government decided to defend all Polish territory by meeting the Germans on the borders. This left Poland even more vulnerable to German war plans.

The German concept was to break through Polish lines with tanks and mobile forces, driving deep into the country and leaving relatively immobile enemy infantry stranded at the border.

True to plan, fast-moving German columns cut off and surrounded Warsaw in a week. The Germans didn't storm Warsaw; they saw little point in losing the troops. Instead, they left it encircled and bombed and bombarded it into rubble. The city finally surrendered on September 28.

THE LIGHTNING WAR

The Germans were waging a new kind of warfare. It was often referred to with the term *blitzkrieg*, or "lightning

war," for its emphasis on speed. The Germans were employing technologies that had appeared in World War I—especially tanks and aircraft—in a new way. The idea was to concentrate striking power to create a gap in enemy defenses and then pour mobile forces into that gap: tanks and infantry on trucks or half-tracks.

If all went according to plan, enemy defenders on the front lines would quickly be left far behind by the German spearheads. Furthermore, they would receive no supplies and quickly run out of food and ammunition. With their communications cut to the higher command, they'd have no idea whether they should retreat, hold in place, or counterattack in some direction.

THE POLISH FIGHT ON

After two weeks, Poland was clearly in bad shape—but not yet defeated. While the German advance had put most of western Poland under German control, much of the Polish army remained intact and under centralized control. It now retreated into eastern Poland to continue the resistance. Simultaneously, the German advance stalled as tanks and trucks ran short on fuel, and troops were exhausted. It seemed as though Poland might be able to continue fighting as supplies from the Western allies flowed in through Romania.

However, all such hopes were crushed on September 17, when Stalin's Red Army invaded Poland from the east. The eastern frontier had been left almost undefended while the Poles fought the Germans. The Soviet invasion ended all hope of successful continued resistance, and it became clear that continuing to fight would cost more lives.

The Polish government instructed its army to evacuate the country. Some individual military units and soldiers did manage to escape across a border. The Polish government itself fled into Romania, then to France, and eventually to London.

Most Polish fighting forces became captives of the Soviets or Germans. Others

did make it to Allied territory to continue the fight against Nazi Germany as part of the British war effort.

POLAND DEFEATED

Because Britain and France had gone to war to defend Poland, this question is relevant: Did they have to fight Stalin as well, now that the Soviet Union had invaded Poland? The answer was no. The British alliance treaty with Poland had specified that Britain would help to defend Poland against Germany. There was a limit to what British military power was capable of doing. Instead, the British and French could only watch while the last organized Polish resistance was wiped out by early October.

World War II would become characterized by astonishing levels of savagery directed against civilian populations. That began in the Polish campaign. Some atrocities were carried out by each side, but while Poles did kill German civilians, it would be wrong to draw a moral equivalence. Polish violence against Germans was not policy, and it was on a vastly smaller scale than the deliberate and systematic violence directed against Poles by the German army.

As Hitler's Einsatzgruppen death squads moved through Poland, they shot Jews and Poles, murdered prisoners of war, and engaged in savage reprisals against civilians who presented resistance to the German invaders.

During the first months of the war, the Germans carried out the summary executions of perhaps 40,000 Polish Christians and 10,000 Polish Jews. Things were only slightly better in Soviet-occupied Poland. Stalin intended to convert the Soviet part of Poland into a docile border province, and that required purging potential resistance.

Social elites of any kind were deported en masse from Poland. The lucky ones, numbering more than a million, ended up in exile deep inside the Soviet Union. The unlucky ones, including tens of thousands of imprisoned Polish army officers, were

regarded as too dangerous to be allowed to live.

It was feared that they might become the nucleus of some future resistance to communist rule. In the spring and summer of 1940, Stalin ordered them to be shot. The bodies were buried in the Katyn Forest in western Russia.

WESTERN RELUCTANCE

British and French reluctance to confront Hitler meant that even once fighting began, there was little stomach to wage war vigorously. Hitler put the vast majority of his forces in the east to attack Poland, leaving his western frontier thinly defended.

British and French actions were brief and symbolic. France moved a few miles across the border in the Saar region and halted. Neither country engaged in the bombing of German targets for fear of retaliation. This fear was quite overblown, because German aviation was concentrated in the east. In addition, Germany hadn't built much of a heavy bomber force.

But there was no stomach in Britain or France for a serious fight in the fall of 1939. Many thought there was no point: Poland had ceased to exist.

SUGGESTED READING

Overy, *1939*.

Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland*.

Watt, *How War Came*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Should Britain and France have tried harder to bring Stalin to their side?

2. Was there a better strategy for Britain and France to pursue in 1939–1940?

5

THE NAZI RISE TO POWER, 1922–1933

Adolf Hitler launched a war that killed 60 million people. This lecture looks at the factors that brought this murderous individual—and his murderous ideology—into power in Nazi Germany. The lecture first looks broadly at the European environment of the 1920s and 1930s, and then specifically at Hitler's path to power. It also looks at his most important predecessor: Italy's Benito Mussolini.

EUROPE AFTER WORLD WAR I

World War I did enormous physical and psychological damage to Europe. It killed millions of people and wrecked economies. At the end of the war, there was a deep and sharp recession as millions of soldiers returned to civilian life and tried to find jobs. The war also discredited traditional political elites.

Italy was in an odd position. Even though it finished the war on the winning side, the Italian public believed it had been cheated out of its rightful due at Versailles. As an example, Italy made only minor territorial gains after having lost 700,000 men during the war.

The Italian political elites were rightly seen as stagnant and corrupt, and they were blamed for having mismanaged the war, the peace, and the economy. Furthermore, Italy was deeply split between left and right wings.

THE RISE OF FASCISM

The man who managed to tap into Italy's discontent was Benito Mussolini. Against a backdrop of economic unrest as well as class conflict and disappointed hopes, Mussolini—and the National Fascist Party he created—stood for order, but order imposed through harsh street violence. He created a new private army from war veterans—the Blackshirts—to break up opposition rallies and beat up opponents. His condemnations of parliamentary democracy played well to general disgust with politics and politicians.

In 1922, Mussolini led the fascists in a grab for power. In a monumental bluff, he declared a so-called march on Rome in which his Blackshirts would either seize power or the political class would surrender to him. There is no doubt that Italian police—backed by the Italian army—was perfectly capable of shutting this down.

However, much of the political class saw Mussolini as preferable to the Italian left wing. Consequently, Italy's king—Victor Emmanuel—refused to allow the army to step in, and he named Mussolini as prime minister.

Italy's fascist party was still comparatively weak, but starting in 1922, Mussolini was able to impose more and more control over the Italian state and society, eventually creating a totalitarian dictatorship.

CHARACTERISTICS OF FASCISM

Fascism played heavily on the theme of unity. Fascism wants to replace diversity with a particular form of order and unity. That message is sometimes appealing to certain people, especially as it was after the upheavals of World War I. The downside, of course, is that fascist unity is imposed by massive and brutal violence.

Fascist movements are, furthermore, rabidly nationalist. They promote a narrative of national greatness and a sense that nations are locked in a constant struggle for existence. In practical terms, that means purging enemies at home and conquering enemies abroad. The enemies at home always include socialists and liberals, and often include Jews.

The fascist vision of society was corporatist. That doesn't mean emphasizing corporations; it means that fascists saw society as needing balance among social groups to serve the interests of the nation-state.

Finally, fascist movements were dedicated to the leader principle. Fascism rejected parliaments, legislatures, laws, civil rights, political competition, and dialogue as the ways to make policy. Everything was subject to the will of the leader.

THE RISE OF HITLER

Adolf Hitler fits a larger pattern of political movements following World War I. These movements played on popular fear and hatred with promises of order and prosperity—which were to be achieved through violence, primarily against minorities at home and enemies abroad.

Adolf Hitler did not start life as a German citizen. He was born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire as the son of a minor government official. He moved to Vienna in hopes of

attending art school. Failing to gain entry, he scraped by as a street artist. Before World War I, he picked up some of the prevailing ideological currents, including anti-Semitism and social Darwinism.

Upon being called up for conscription in the Austrian army, Hitler decided to dodge the draft and fled into Germany, winding up in Munich. When World War I broke out, however, he enlisted to fight for Germany. Now, he finally found a sense of community and something he was good at. He served as a dispatch runner, was wounded, and was decorated for bravery.

At the end of the war, he was temporarily blinded by poison gas and hospitalized. He was devastated by Germany's defeat and by the loss of a place where he felt he fit in.

Germany fell into political and economic chaos after the war, with the threat of revolution on both the left and right wing. The army took upon itself the role of monitoring internal threats. Hitler signed on as an intelligence agent to spy on potentially dangerous movements. In 1919, he visited a meeting of one obscure right-wing party, liked what he heard, and—within two years—was leader of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, or Nazis.

HITLER THE AGITATOR

Hitler discovered a natural talent as a political agitator. By 1923, Hitler was staging his own coup. At this point, he had a personal army—the Brownshirts—in imitation of Mussolini's Blackshirts. On the night of November 8, 1923, he rallied 2,000 Brownshirts in a Munich beer hall and marched them into the center of town the next day.

Unlike with Mussolini in Italy, the German police and army refused to allow the demonstrators to seize power. They shot at the Brownshirts, who melted away. Hitler was arrested and spent nine months in prison for treason. Even so, this was a fairly light sentence for someone who'd tried to overthrow the German government with force.

Hitler used his trial as a public showcase and then spent

his time in prison writing his memoirs—*Mein Kampf*—later emerging to renew his political career with a honed message and rebuilt army. Even with all of Hitler's oratorical talent, his message went nowhere during the relatively prosperous 1920s.

DESTROYING THE SYSTEM

In 1928, the Nazis received only 2.6 percent of the popular vote. However, one event shot the Nazis into the forefront of German politics: the Great Depression. The trigger for the Depression was the crash of the US stock market in October 1929.

Europe's economy followed the US into mass bankruptcies and widespread unemployment. German unemployment surpassed a quarter of the workforce. On top of hyperinflation in the early 1920s, this wrecked the public's faith in the German political system.

A large chunk of voters thought the economic and political system was irretrievably broken and wanted to see a far-left solution. They voted for the German communist party. Another large chunk wanted to see a far-right solution and voted for the Nazis.

The result was that parties that wanted to destroy the system were in a position to block any positive measures to repair it. The radicals on both ends outnumbered the moderates in the middle. The result was absolute deadlock, as the German economy ground to a halt.

Part of the Nazis' appeal was attributable to its message of national solidarity against enemies: the outside world,

The Nazis adopted new technology to paint themselves as the party of the future: Film was a vital tool, as were the airplanes Hitler used to fly around Germany to political rallies.

communists, and Jews. Part of it was promising good things for every social group. And part of it was masterful use of propaganda: mass rallies, popular slogans, and Hitler's personal magnetism in front of crowds.

THE NAZI TAKEOVER

By 1932, the German political system was in deep crisis, paralyzing its efforts to deal with the Great Depression. At this point, the German right wing decided that its best path was a deal with the devil. Their leaders decided to bring the Nazis into the German government. This would allow the use of Nazi votes to pass needed legislation. They also mistakenly thought the Nazis might moderate their behavior.

The second half of 1932 revealed an intricate dance between Hitler and Germany's mainstream right-wing parties over the terms of the Nazis joining the government. The right wing was itself split over who would get to be the puppet master pulling Hitler's strings.

All pieces fell into place at the end of January 1933. The office of the German presidency didn't have a lot of power in the system, but it did get to choose which party leader would become the prime minister, or chancellor, who actually held power and ran the government. The German president was Paul von Hindenburg, who had been the military's commander-in-chief at the end of World War I.

He offered the job of chancellor to Hitler, whose conditions for joining the coalition included the chancellorship as well as two other key jobs for Nazis: interior minister for Germany as a whole and interior minister for Prussia, the largest German state. Those jobs came with control over police.

The Nazis now controlled law enforcement and the management of elections. Hitler's right-wing allies saw this as a great victory. Hindenburg declared that "we have boxed Hitler in." Another opponent said, "We have hired him." They were dead wrong.

ELIMINATION OF OPPOSITION

The Nazis now moved with breathtaking speed to eliminate opposition and consolidate power. Almost immediately after taking office, Hitler convinced President Hindenburg to dissolve the Reichstag (the parliament). Emergency decrees followed to limit the freedom of press and assembly. Nazi thugs engaged in systematic intimidation. Less than a month Hitler took office, the German parliamentary building was gutted by a fire on February 27, 1933. Everyone agrees it was arson.

In early March, tainted and fixed elections gave the Nazis enough power to expel communists and socialists from the German parliament and to suspend the German constitution. Hitler no longer needed to have his actions approved by the president. He could rule by fiat. German states lost their elected governors and were now run by Nazi appointees. Anti-Nazi government personnel were kicked out of their jobs.

By the beginning of May, trade unions had been outlawed. Within six months, Hitler had removed all potential political opposition, including the communist party, the socialist party, and even the Catholic Center Party—right after Hitler signed an agreement with the Vatican.

Hitler also created a network of concentration camps for his political enemies. This step was not yet aimed at Jews. The only remaining threats Hitler perceived were within the Nazi Party itself and in the German army.

He decided to cut a deal with one player—the generals of the army—to deal with the other. With the generals' tacit support, he could make sure the Nazi Party never challenged him.

However, one problem for Hitler was that some elements in the Nazi Party had been around almost as long as he had, particularly the Brownshirts leader Ernst Röhm. In response, Hitler organized a purge of political

opponents, both past and potential.

At the end of June 1934, elements in the Nazi party were arrested or simply murdered. This action neutralized some 200 political figures and became known as the Night of the Long Knives. The Brownshirt head Ernst Röhm was shot dead. Hitler also murdered the leaders of the right-wing (but non-Nazi) parties who had assisted in his rise to power.

A month later, the president—Paul von Hindenburg—died, and Hitler added this title on top of his existing roles as Nazi party leader and German chancellor. The army now swore loyalty to Hitler personally. He had absolute power in Germany.

SUGGESTED READING

Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*.

Kershaw, *Hitler*.

Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What were the key factors in bringing the Nazis to power?

2. Are there parallels between the Nazis and political movements today?

6

THE FALL OF FRANCE, SPRING 1940

Hitler's rapid success against Poland in September 1939 tempted him with the prospect of subsequently trying to do the same thing against France. Even as the Germans were mopping up the last Polish resistance, Hitler ordered preparations for the new campaign. However, the German army needed time to regroup, and wet fall weather meant its tanks and aircraft could not be used to full effect. Renewed war would have to wait until spring 1940.

DENMARK AND NORWAY

Hitler's next big step would not be in France. Instead, the führer decided to turn north against Denmark and Norway. This might seem puzzling: Neither Denmark nor Norway was at war against Germany. However, Germany's essential concern was the availability of supplies to its own war economy, which depended on imports of iron ore from northern Sweden.

In the summer, Swedish iron ore was delivered south through the Baltic Sea, out of reach of the royal navy. When the Baltic Sea froze over in the winter, though, Swedish iron ore went out to the west—through Norway—and then south down the Atlantic Coast.

If the British and French grabbed a foothold in sparsely populated northern Norway, they could cut off resources that Hitler absolutely had to have to fight this war. Because the British and French were both working up plans and possibilities to do just that, Hitler decided he had to move first.

Germany's new offensive began on April 9, 1940. As Denmark wasn't capable of much resistance, it fell quickly, giving Germany useful air and naval bases. Norway was much tougher, but by the beginning of June, Germany had stamped out the last of the resistance. Norway's King Haakon VII left for exile in Britain.

Germany's rapid campaigns in Denmark and Norway had three key consequences for later developments. First, the initial invasion of Norway, which was followed by British efforts to land and support troops there, was extremely costly in planes and ships. Britain's navy possessed the fleet and shipyards to absorb those losses, but Germany did not.

Second, Hitler became paranoid about the Allied threat to his iron ore in Sweden and remained so for the rest of the war. Consequently, he maintained a huge garrison of German soldiers in tiny Norway. During the war, that added up to 400,000 soldiers who were unavailable to keep the

Americans or the Russians out of Germany.

The most important consequence was what it did to the British government. Britain made half-hearted and badly managed efforts to defend Norway. This was the last straw for Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's government. Chamberlain had to resign, and King George VI turned to Winston Churchill as the new prime minister.

GERMANY'S PLANS FOR FRANCE

The delay in attacking France gave time for thinking about war plans. German initial plans set up the conditions for a long war. However, a number of German generals—including, most importantly, Erich von Manstein—pushed for a more ambitious plan, which Hitler eventually approved.

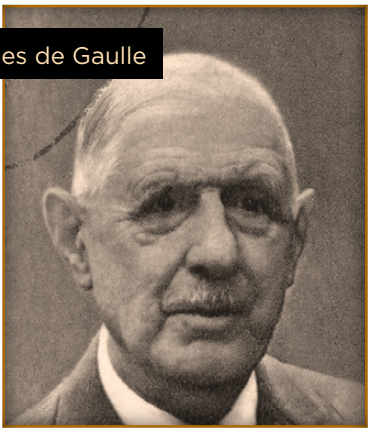
Some German troops would feint against the Maginot Line of fortifications on the French-German border to keep French troops there pinned down. Another contingent would occupy the Netherlands and attempt to convince the French and British that the main German attack was still in the north. The biggest share of German troops was stationed neither in the north against the Netherlands, nor in the south against the Maginot Line, but in the middle.

Expecting that the French and the British would push north into Belgium, once shooting started on the Western Front, the Germans planned to push through the narrow roads of the Ardennes Forest with 1,000 tanks and then sprint west just south of the French-Belgian border. The goal was to cut off and isolate the main French army as it advanced in Belgium.

CHARLES DE GAULLE

Charles de Gaulle would become central to the later French role in the war. By the late 1930s, de Gaulle had emerged as one of France's foremost advocates of tanks and mechanized warfare, and he argued for a central and independent role for tanks.

British and French thinking generally took a different approach from Germany's, seeing tanks as best


Charles de Gaulle

distributed widely among the infantry and used to support ground troops. As events proved, German thinking—seeing tanks as best acting as an independent striking arm—was much more effective. De Gaulle's thoughts ran along similar lines, but he had no chance to see his policies implemented on a large scale.

THE GERMANS ATTACK

Shortly after the Germans shocked the British with their quick seizure of Denmark and Norway in spring 1940, they launched their fateful attack to the west. On May 10, 1940, the Germans opened the fighting with airstrikes, parachute drops, and tank advances throughout Holland, Belgium, and France. Holland lasted less than a week. German airborne assaults grabbed key airfields and bridges, disrupting defenses.

To speed the process of Dutch surrender, the German Luftwaffe, or air force, bombed the undefended city of Rotterdam, killing 800 people. On May 15, the Dutch surrendered. Queen Wilhelmina left the country for exile in England.

Meanwhile, the Belgian fortress between Liège and Maastricht—Fort Eben-Emael—commanded key bridges. An assault by a few dozen German airborne troops seized the fort and opened key roads for the Germans to take the rest of the country.

Belgium had been neutral prior to the German attack, so the British and the French initially stayed on French territory, waiting for the invasion before rushing to cooperate against Germany. As fighting began, the allies sped north into Belgium, not realizing that the German plan was to slam the door shut behind them.

Germans tanks pushed through the Ardennes Forest—something the French had not suspected was possible—and broke through onto French soil. Here, the Germans tried to force a wedge between the French and British troops to the north in Belgium and their supplies and high command to the south in France.

ACROSS THE MEUSE RIVER

The key moment came when the Germans fought their way across the Meuse River in the middle of May. Erwin Rommel—later known as the Desert Fox for his exploits in North Africa—was a tank division commander at the time. He personally took charge of building a pontoon bridge to get his armored units across.

Once the Germans made it, the battle was essentially over. Allied air attacks on the advancing Germans took terrible losses from the German Luftwaffe, and the French failed to counterattack and eliminate the Germans' small bridgeheads.

Once past the Meuse, the Germans rolled through open country. The speed of German advance—chasing thousands of French refugees ahead of them—made it impossible for the French to organize a coherent defense. Within a week, the Germans had pushed 200 miles across northern France, wrecking allied communications as they went.

The Germans would have been extremely vulnerable if the French had been in position to counter, but they simply were not. In 10 days, the Germans made it all the way to the English Channel, trapping the British Expeditionary Force and half the French army in Belgium. Now, the French government and military high command fell into backbiting and recrimination.

Still, a well-coordinated pincer assault could easily have broken that thin German fence, but the Allies simply did not have it in them. The morale of the French army was broken, and a British attempt to coordinate a breakout went nowhere.

It wasn't for lack of brave fighting, though. Charles de Gaulle—commanding a tank division for France—carried out a number of attacks to try to break through the German ring. Though he had some limited success, it was nowhere near enough to change the course of events. Meanwhile, Germany's tank commander Erwin Rommel personally led the fight to blunt a British counterattack.

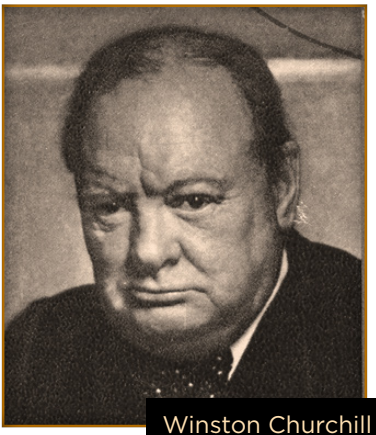
SALVAGING A DISASTER

At this point, the question became whether the British could salvage anything from this disaster. The British had nearly 500,000 soldiers with their equipment stranded on the European continent. If Hitler managed to grab the men, the British Isles would be essentially undefended, and the war would likely be over.

If the Germans had moved immediately to squeeze that pocket of Allied troops in Belgium, Hitler might have won World War II right then in 1940. However, it seems the Germans did not want to push their luck.

The Germans decided to let air power—and time—soften up the trapped Allies rather than risk Hitler's precious panzer divisions in an expensive attack. That delay turned out to be critical. The British threw together an improvised flotilla of evacuation craft—including

The escape at Dunkirk preserved British fighting forces. It also rescued Winston Churchill's political career. He was able to portray Dunkirk as a British triumph.



Winston Churchill

British naval vessels and private boats—to pull British and Allied troops off the beaches at Dunkirk and get them to relative safety in Britain. More than 300,000 escaped from Dunkirk to fight again. They may have left their tanks and heavy equipment behind, but the core of the British army got away intact.

THE FRENCH FIGHT CONTINUES

While the battle for France was over for the British army, it was not for the French. Individual French units continued to fight hard and well; however, the brave resistance was hopeless. Most of France's aircraft and tanks had been chewed up along with France's best troops in the fighting up north. French morale was devastated.

After two weeks of rest, the Germans reopened the offensive, moving south toward Paris. They occupied the French capital after 10 days, and France surrendered in another week. At the end, the French would beg the British for more fighter squadrons to help, but the British had by then written off France as a lost cause. Britain needed those fighters for itself when—in the immediate future—it would be fighting Germany alone.

Italy's Benito Mussolini now took advantage to bring Italy into the war alongside Germany. Indeed, at the very moment when the French government lost Paris, Mussolini declared war and invaded France across the Italian frontier. He didn't get very far, however. Even as France was collapsing, French resistance to the Italians remained quite robust.

Mussolini hadn't expected that he would add much to Hitler's war effort. Instead, he thought that German victory was close, and he hoped to make at least a token contribution to the winning side.

THE FRENCH CHOICE

The French government was caught in a difficult position: Should French leaders evacuate to Britain or to France's African colonies? Alternatively, should they simply accept defeat?

Most of the French government was resigned to fate. Charles de Gaulle urged continued resistance, but even though de Gaulle been promoted to a position in the French government, he could not sway its leaders.

French premier Paul Reynaud resigned, handing power over to Marshal Philippe Pétain. Pétain presided over the French surrender. The peace terms the French government signed surrendered about two-thirds of national territory—in the north and on the western seaboard—to German occupation.

Meanwhile, unoccupied French territory in the center and southeast became home to the new French capital: the spa town of Vichy, which gave its name to the new right-wing regime. Vichy France governed the remainder of the country under German sufferance.

Meanwhile, as things were collapsing for the French, de Gaulle escaped to Britain, and met with British Prime Minister Churchill. Starting on June 18, de Gaulle gave a series of radio addresses that called on the French to continue fighting—and not to give in to the Germans.

There was little the French inside France itself could do. De Gaulle's appeal was really to French troops stationed abroad around the French Empire, and to the French soldiers and sailors who—like him—had escaped to Britain.

Only a tiny fraction of the French military and political elite wanted to fight on. Still, the small number who did, led by de Gaulle, proved enormously important. They served as the core of a new allied force—the Free French—and, after the war, as a means of restoring French self-respect.

SUGGESTED READING

Horne, *To Lose a Battle*.

May, *Strange Victory*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What gave Hitler his successes: luck, skill, or British and French blunders?

2. Should Britain have ended the war after the loss of its French ally?

7

THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN– AND THE BLITZ

From the second half of 1940 through most of 1941, the British Royal Air Force (RAF) and its German equivalent, the Luftwaffe, waged a desperate struggle for control of the skies over England. This test—which Winston Churchill coined the Battle of Britain—was one of the most dramatic chapters in the human drama of World War II.

DESPERATE BRITAIN

It wasn't obvious that Britain could, or should, keep on fighting after the fall of France. The British foreign secretary, Edward Wood, known as Lord Halifax, argued that the best option was to take a reasonable deal from Hitler—that is, accepting French defeat but leaving the British Empire intact.

The key figure involved in keeping Britain in the war was Winston Churchill. After becoming prime minister on May 10, 1940, Churchill inspired the British public to keep fighting despite the odds appearing to be hopeless.

The Germans thought the British were beaten and that they had won the war. They were taken aback when Britain kept fighting. Hitler expected the British would come to him with a deal, but they never did. After the fall of France, Hitler's fundamental problem was how to force Britain to give up.

HITLER'S OVERCONFIDENCE

Even before France was beaten, Hitler had ordered planning for one possible next step: Operation Sea Lion, a waterborne invasion of Britain via the English Channel. However, the German military had little experience in amphibious operations, which are difficult to pull off. Additionally, the German surface fleet had been devastated by the invasion of Norway in April 1940, so there was no way for it to seize control of the English Channel and get troops across by naval means.

In terms of large warships, the Germans had only three cruisers available. They had nothing that could stand up to the Royal Navy. The only way to get the Royal Navy out of the way was to sink its vessels with air power. It appeared control of the air was the sole path forward.

Hitler was led into severe overconfidence about his ability to achieve air dominance. His close associate Hermann Göring, head of the German air force and a notorious blowhard, gave Hitler wild overestimates over the prospects of a bombing campaign. Hitler

decided to complete his conquest through air power.

THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN BEGINS

Göring opened the Battle of Britain in July 1940 with a decent general plan: first, eliminate the RAF, and then focus on breaking British civilian morale. However, the German Luftwaffe had not done a good job of thinking through what that would involve: Because pilots can fly away if they don't want to fight, the Germans would have to find a way to force a battle.

The first step was directing Luftwaffe attacks on shipping along Britain's east coast. The chief goal was to force the RAF to come out and fight. However, the British and the Germans were fairly evenly matched in these initial skirmishes.

Things didn't go according to plan. The Germans did find out that their Stuka dive bombers, which were terrifying against ground troops without protection, were very vulnerable to competent enemy fighters and had to be pulled out of action. In the middle of August 1940, the Germans shifted to a new strategy: to go after the RAF by attacking its bases and radar stations in southeastern England.

BRITISH ADVANTAGES

The British had thought carefully about what victory in the air would mean, and they had built a system designed to achieve that. This had a number of elements. It included some very good fighter planes: the Hawker Hurricane and particularly the Spitfire. The British had also built an integrated air-defense system, which combined radar stations, fighter bases, and centralized control to identify German attacks and concentrate fighters to meet and break up those assaults.

The Germans were handicapped by the very nature of their air force. Germany, given its expectation of doing a lot of hard fighting on land, had built the planes it needed to support ground operations. However, Germany lacked a heavy strategic bomber, which it needed to knock Britain out of the war. It also

lacked a good understanding of how the British air-defense system worked.

After a brief initial stage of attacking radar stations, the Germans shifted to focusing on British air bases. In late August and early September 1940, a desperate struggle ensued in the skies over the air bases around London and in eastern England, with terrible losses on both sides.

As attrition mounted, maintaining a ready supply of planes and pilots was essential. Here, the British had a real advantage. Once British industry was rolling, more planes weren't hard to produce. Max Aitken (also known as Lord Beaverbrook) had been put in charge of British aircraft production. He built British aircraft as fast as Germans shot them down.

Pilots turned out to be harder to come by. A skilled and experienced fighter pilot was almost impossible to replace. However, because the fight was taking place over Britain, a British pilot who bailed out or crash landed very possibly would be able to fly again. A German pilot who bailed out over Britain spent the rest of the war in a POW camp. Still, the margin of available pilots was very, very thin.

In total, Britain had a little more than 2,000 fighter pilots available to keep Britain in the war. In addition, there were around 500 foreign pilots flying with the RAF.

THE BOMBING OF CITIES

By late August 1940, the RAF was on the verge of breaking under the German onslaught. In the midst of this horrible struggle, a German bomber got lost and dropped its bombs on central London. It seems this was an accident, not design. The Germans weren't yet deliberately bombing British cities. However, it was hard for the British to know that.

The British responded with a long-range bombing attack on Berlin. The damage was not especially serious, but Hitler found it absolutely infuriating. Because the war against RAF fighters was proving costly, Hitler and Göring decided on something else.

Germany shifted its focus away from the RAF to bombing British cities and their civilian populations, which appealed to Hitler's desire to make Britain suffer. However, this took the pressure off the RAF's fighter squadrons just when they were on the verge of collapse.

THE BLITZ

On September 7–8, 1940, the Germans unleashed a massive bombing attack on London that did not even pretend to be going after the RAF. Instead, this was the start of the Blitz, the bombing of British cities—especially London—that eventually killed 40,000 people.

A week later, another massive daylight-bombing raid turned into an epic struggle. The results of the September 15 air assault showed that Germany could not sustain daylight bombing. Bombing during the day left Germany's bombers too vulnerable to interception by the RAF.

Bombing at night was hard, and the Luftwaffe couldn't manage the concentrated attacks it would have needed to really damage the British economy. The campaign continued through bad winter weather. But by November–December 1940, the worst of the Blitz was over.

AMERICAN SYMPATHY

British determination under attack played very well in the United States. The Blitz built enormous solidarity and sympathy for the British in America. If Britain were to survive, it needed American help, and Hitler's actions promoted that.

In a new age of mass media, technology allowed live radio broadcasts to be relayed across the Atlantic. The CBS radio correspondent Edward R. Murrow electrified the American public with nightly broadcasts from London under siege. Americans slowly but steadily shifted away from isolation and increasingly identified themselves with the British cause.

The Battle of Britain showed that Hitler didn't always win and that there was still a great deal of fight left in the British. US President Franklin Roosevelt was desperate

to help the British by any means short of war, and their heroism gave him the political cover he needed.

In March 1941, Congress passed the Lend-Lease Act, empowering Roosevelt to lend, lease, sell, or pass along in some way military material if the president determined it was in the interest of American national security. Under the Lend-Lease Act, Britain received the food and raw materials it needed to keep its war machine going until the moment—which seemed increasingly likely—that the United States joined the war as an active partner itself.

SUGGESTED READING

Bungay, *The Most Dangerous Enemy*.

Overy, *The Battle of Britain*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How close did Germany come to winning the war through the Battle of Britain?

2. Should the United States have done more to aid Britain in 1940?

8

BRITAIN AND GERMANY'S STANDOFF AT SEA

World War I made it clear that sea power had enormous military potential. Britain, in particular, depended on ocean-borne trade to feed its population. It needed the English Channel and water-borne routes to bring the war to Germany. In World War II, control of the sea was a matter of life and death.

NAVAL STRATEGIES

When World War II began, the head of the German navy was Grand Admiral Erich Raeder. Raeder fundamentally misunderstood the strategic use of a navy for Germany. He was influenced by the American theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan, who had pushed the importance of a big battleship fleet intended to find and defeat the enemy battleship fleet. Raedar wanted to pursue a similar strategy.

The other key German figure was Karl Dönitz, head of the country's U-boat fleet. Dönitz saw that Britain—an island nation—was dependent on seaborne trade. If Germany could cut Britain's sea lines of commerce, it could win the war.

Raeder outranked Dönitz. In preparing for war, the German navy was looking primarily at confronting the Royal Navy directly—not at commerce raiding. That had big implications during the first years of the war.

PLAN Z

The prewar initiative that Raeder worked from to shoot for parity with the British Navy was called Plan Z. It projected that the Germans would achieve parity sometime around 1945, or six years after war actually began. That was a problem both for Germany's naval chief and his country. The Kriegsmarine—the Nazi Germany naval fleet—had only a handful of modern capital ships when World War II commenced.

Raeder was forced to improvise a naval campaign against Britain. More important in the long run was the fact that Dönitz, commanding Germany's U-boat fleet, had only about two dozen long-range submarines capable of going after British shipping.

Raeder initially thought that fast surface ships designed as commerce raiders would be the most effective way to threaten vital British trade. By the time war broke out, Raeder had already scattered German ships into position to attack British shipping.

THE *GRAF SPEE*

One of these, the pocket battleship *Graf Spee*, made it out of European waters and headed for the South Atlantic, while its sister ship the *Lützow* moved into the North Atlantic. The *Lützow* didn't accomplish much, but the *Graf Spee* began taking and sinking Allied merchant ships.

In enormous response, the British and French dispatched an armada of Allied ships to the South Atlantic to track down the *Graf Spee*. In the running battle that followed, the German pocket battleship inflicted serious damage on the British cruisers, but it didn't shake them.

When the *Graf Spee* made port at Montevideo in Uruguay for repairs, British ships converged on the spot. The *Graf Spee* was caught. Its captain decided to scuttle her—that is, deliberately sink his own ship. He shot himself shortly after. Though bad news for Germany, the *Graf Spee*'s destruction was good news for the British who needed it.

U-BOATS

In the early stages of the war, U-boats were far less of a threat than they later became. The most serious damage that German subs did in the first few months of the war was not to British commercial shipping, but instead to British capital ships.

In September, a German sub operating off Ireland managed to sink a British aircraft carrier, the *Courageous*, which was on anti-submarine patrol. Now, the British reversed course, deciding that aircraft carriers were too valuable and vulnerable for such a role.

The most dramatic feat of German subs was a special humiliation of the Royal Navy. The main British wartime base in World War II, as in World War I, was at Scapa Flow, a sheltered anchorage surrounded by islands at the northern end of Scotland. In mid-October 1939, the German sub U-47 penetrated Scapa Flow under the cover of darkness and torpedoed the battleship *Royal Oak*, which went down with almost 800 men.

BRITISH ADAPTATIONS AND CHALLENGES

Through a combination of surface ships, air attacks, submarines, and mines dropped by air into British coastal waters, the Germans did manage to wreak serious damage to British shipping in the North Sea—that is, off Britain's east coast. The British could adapt, though, and did so. This necessitated expanding harbors in the west and building more rail capacity.

A COSTLY VICTORY

To invade Norway in April 1940, the Germans had to essentially put their entire surface fleet at risk. The British lost the campaign to defend Norway but nevertheless inflicted serious damage on the German Navy in the process.

The fall of France in May and June 1940 made the British position much more dangerous, and not just because of the loss of its most important ally. For one, the Allies' evacuation from the northern France seacoast town of Dunkirk was costly. The British lost several valuable destroyers in getting their troops out.

Additionally, the surrender of France made submarine warfare much more dangerous to the British. When combined with the German conquest of Belgium and the Netherlands in May 1940, Germany's occupation of northern and western France gave it naval and air bases all along Europe's Atlantic seaboard. British shipping was now more exposed to German air attack. Additionally, German fast-attack craft, the E-boats, could harass coastal shipping off the English east coast and also lay mines in the shipping lanes and outside British ports.

German submarines started using French bases almost as soon as the Nazi campaign in France triumphed. Germany also moved quickly to improve the French port infrastructure.

A DIFFICULT DECISION

While the German submarine threat was quite serious for the British, the surface ship implications were dire as well. The French defeat forced British prime minister Winston

Churchill to make a harrowing decision: turning British arms against a former ally.

Although Germany had not preserved much of its surface fleet after the invasion of Norway, conquered France's navy remained the fourth largest in the world. Hitler promised the French that Germany would not use French ships against Britain, but how much could Churchill and the British trust Hitler's promises?

Furthermore, Germany held 1.5 million French prisoners as hostages. So, Hitler could have tried to seize the French fleet directly, or he could have used his French prisoners to compel Vichy France to hand those ships over. In the end, Churchill came to a difficult decision that was opposed even by substantial elements of his own government. That was to destroy the French fleet.

A substantial chunk of the French Navy was in Toulon on the Mediterranean coast of southern France. Those ships were out of the immediate reach of the British navy. However, a smaller portion had fled to British-controlled ports. The British could, and did, seize control of those without much trouble.

The ships still in play—where the Germans might seize them, and the British might destroy them—were in French North Africa. Here, the French had seven modern battleships. Five were in North Africa, and four of those were at the French naval base of Mers el Kebir in Algeria.

Churchill dispatched a British fleet from Gibraltar that carried an ultimatum to the commanders of the French fleet in northern Africa. These French ships must join the British, be disarmed and interned out of German reach, or be destroyed. When the French refused to surrender their vessels, the British opened fire.

One of the four French battleships in Mers el Kebir, the *Bretagne,* was completely destroyed. Two others were sunk, though they could eventually be raised and repaired. A fourth escaped to Toulon. The Vichy French navy was now much less of a potential threat to the

British than it had been. But 1,300 French lives had been lost—that is, 1,300 men who'd been British allies only weeks before. In turn, Vichy France was now much more hostile to its former friend and engaged in some half-hearted military actions against the British.

In November 1942, the Germans tried to seize the remaining French ships at Toulon as part of their general occupation of Vichy France. When German forces reached the French base, though, French commanders ordered the ships to be scuttled. The French sank three of their own battleships, seven cruisers, and dozens of smaller vessels.

ITALY ENTERS THE PICTURE

A final consequence of the fall of France was that Italy now entered the war against Britain, and the Mediterranean became a theater of conflict in a way it hadn't been before. The British had been counting on the French to keep Mussolini's navy—the fifth largest in the world—under control. Now, the French navy was unreliable or out of action. The British found themselves stretched thin.

In early July 1940, British convoy escorts clashed with Italian convoy escorts in the Battle of Calabria, just off the coast of southern Italy. The forces were evenly matched, with a number of heavy ships and more than a dozen destroyers on each side, plus shore-based aviation. The outcome was inconclusive, with ships damaged on both sides, but the Italians came off slightly worse. This was only the beginning of a long-running struggle for control of the Mediterranean.

THE MEDITERRANEAN SITUATION

The basic strategic situation was now clear. The British could, if they needed to, bypass the Mediterranean at great expense of fuel and time, and move men and supplies around Africa to Egypt or the Far East. The Italians had no choice. Unless they abandoned their territory and men in Libya, they had to keep convoys running south across the Mediterranean, making those convoys their most vulnerable point.

The most vulnerable point for Britain was the island of Malta, only 50 miles from Sicily and in easy reach of Italian air power. The pending battle for the Mediterranean would center on two key developments that tilted the outcome.

First, in November 1940, the British carried out a daring and unprecedented attack on the Italian naval base at Taranto. The British aircraft carrier *Illustrious* launched 21 Swordfish bombers against Italy's battleship fleet. This was a tiny force. These Swordfish were biplanes, essentially obsolete.

Their main weapon was air-dropped torpedoes, and there was a real fear that the torpedoes they dropped would hit the bottom of Taranto harbor before rising up to make their run. Still, and despite a flood of anti-aircraft fire, this incredibly audacious attack of Swordfish bombers sunk three Italian battleships with a loss of only two planes. Two of the three sunken battleships would be back in service by mid-1941, but the British raid gained an edge at a moment when things looked bleak.

A second key development came in March 1941 when the Italians found themselves short-handed at the Battle of Cape Matapan, off southern Greece. At the time, the British were engaged in an ill-fated effort to bolster Greece against an Italian invasion. British signals intelligence picked up traffic suggesting a large Italian fleet was on its way to intercept British convoys. The British advantage in intelligence gave them a chance to turn the tables and intercept it.

The first day of fighting at Cape Matapan was an inconclusive series of chases and counter-chases by surface vessels. A British torpedo bomber did manage to damage an Italian heavy cruiser, the *Pola*, and leave it dead in the water. Then, under what the Italians assumed would be the cover of darkness, the Italians sent a detachment with two heavy cruisers and a force of destroyers to assist the *Pola*. This played directly into British hands. Radar—which

the British possessed, unlike the Italians—allowed British battleships to close on the Italian cruisers and open fire at point-blank range with the element of surprise.

The Italian squadron was annihilated, losing all three heavy cruisers. This was a major blow to Italian naval capability. It also convinced Mussolini that it was too risky for him to take on the British at sea. The larger war in the Mediterranean would continue, but the Italians never again made a serious effort to confront the British ship-to-ship.

SUGGESTED READING

Porch, *The Path to Victory*.

Symonds, *World War II at Sea*.

Van der Vat, *The Atlantic Campaign*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Did Britain have better options for striking at Germany using its naval power?

2. Did Germany have better options for striking at Britain using its land and air power?

9

HITLER, STALIN, AND OPERATION BARBAROSSA

In August 1939, Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin had signed a non-aggression pact and, in effect, an alliance. By the spring and summer of 1940, though, the pact was under real strain, despite the fact that it had served both sides very well. They had cooperated in the dismemberment of Poland. On one side, Hitler had endorsed Stalin's absorption of the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as well as a large chunk of Romania. On the other side, Stalin was supplying Germany with essential raw materials that Britain's Royal Navy had sought to cut off. Nevertheless, in June 1941, Hitler embarked on a massive campaign known as Operation Barbarossa to invade and conquer the Soviet Union.

HITLER'S MOTIVATION

After his failure in the Battle of Britain in late 1940, when German air raids failed to bring the English to submission, Hitler believed—more or less correctly—that Britain hoped the Soviet Union would come to its aid. Conversely, if Germany crushed the Soviet Union first, then Britain might give in as well. Furthermore, because the London Blitz was failing, he saw attacking as his best option.

Stalin's foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov went to Berlin in November 1940 to try to settle a number of problems in the German-Soviet relationship. However, his diplomatic mission to Berlin was so unpleasant that when he returned to Moscow, Hitler ordered full-scale preparations to invade the Soviet Union.

A DIFFICULT TARGET

Russia is large and cold. France had already invaded Russia under Napoleon, and that campaign went badly. These factors raise a question: Why did Hitler and his generals believe that Germany's pending invasion of the Soviet Union would succeed?

Several factors played into their optimism. German successes early in the war produced a high level of confidence in its military capabilities. Additionally, exercising dictatorial power, Joseph Stalin had transformed the Soviet state into an industrial power—but at the cost of millions of lives. Stalin's growing paranoia made him acutely vulnerable to the Germans.

During the 1930s, Stalin became increasingly convinced that the Soviet Union had been infiltrated by traitors and saboteurs, working to overthrow him and destroy the communist state. Most importantly for the Germans, Stalin's hunt for supposed traitors in the Soviet Army had led to the arrest or execution of 40,000 military officers, including some of Stalin's best.

THE WINTER WAR

At the end of November 1939, the Soviet Union had invaded Finland with nearly half a million men, during what became known as the Winter War. It was a disaster. Stalin and his high command then instituted a series of crash reforms and assembled even more manpower.

Soviet forces reopened their offensive in February 1940 and began to wear down the Finns by sheer weight of numbers. By March, the Finns were running out of men and had to accept Soviet terms. The Finns kept their independence but were forced to evacuate a large chunk of the country and turn it over to the Soviets.

Meanwhile, in Berlin, Hitler and his high command took their own lesson from this campaign: The Soviets couldn't fight. This encouraged Hitler to take the offensive. However, just as Germany was preparing for its attack on the Soviet Union, Hitler was distracted by the need to settle some other scores in the Balkans. This diversion delayed Germany's assault on Stalin for a few vital weeks.

Elsewhere, Italy was bogged down in Greece. Hitler feared that British air bases in Greece would be available to interrupt Germany's impending invasion of the Soviet Union. He concluded he had to bail out his sidekick, Benito Mussolini, by assisting in closing out the Greek problem. At the same time, Hitler faced an unexpected complication next door in Yugoslavia.

YUGOSLAVIA UNDER PRESSURE

Like the other states of the Balkans, Yugoslavia had been under constant pressure to accept German domination and align itself with Hitler. Its government was run by a regent, Prince Paul of Yugoslavia. The king, Peter II, was only 17 and did not yet hold power.

Under intense German pressure, Prince Paul agreed at the end of March 1941 for Yugoslavia to join Germany in the Axis alliance and assist in Italy's war against Greece. This decision was terribly unpopular in Yugoslavia.

Two days after Prince Paul signed on with the Germans, a military coup expelled Paul and made young King Peter the new head of state.

In a fit of anger, Hitler ordered his military to treat Yugoslavia as a hostile state. In less than two weeks, the German army organized the invasion of Yugoslavia. This attack, on April 6, opened with a massive bombing campaign that killed several thousand civilians and wrecked much of Belgrade.

German troops then streamed into the country while the Yugoslav army fell apart. It took only 12 days of fighting for the Yugoslav army to surrender and for young King Peter to fly into exile.

At the same time, Germany also joined Italy's renewed attack on Greece. Within a month, Greece was defeated. The German campaigns in Greece and Yugoslavia represented tactical triumphs, but they came at great strategic cost. Hitler was required to delay his attack on the Soviet Union by a month to divert his forces to the Balkans. While that seemed of little importance at the time, Hitler would soon badly want that month back.

OPERATION BARBAROSSA

For Operation Barbarossa, Germany assembled some 3 million men, 3,000 tanks, and 3,000 aircraft. Hitler told his generals and soldiers this was no ordinary battle but rather a race war to be waged without mercy.

While the bulk of Hitler's forces were ethnic German, there was also a large contingent of German allies in this campaign, including the Finns, whom the Germans considered to be militarily capable.

The Finns saw their role in the conflict as quite limited. They didn't see themselves as full-fledged allies of the German Nazis. Still, the stakes were high. If the Finns wanted to take back their territory and keep it, then the Soviet Union had to be defeated. Conversely, if the Soviets prevailed over the Germans (and Finland), then the Soviet Union would almost certainly seek broader revenge.

Hungary, Italy, and Romania also supplied troops for the German invasion. However, these proved not especially effective.

THE OPERATION BEGINS

On the morning of June 22, 1941, the armed forces allied with Hitler's Germany exploded across the Soviet border and found the Red army almost completely unprepared. The Luftwaffe caught thousands of Soviet planes on the ground, wrecking the Soviet air force in the first few hours of the war. Hitler sent armored spearheads in three directions.

Army Group North raced toward Leningrad. Army Group Center advanced on Moscow. Army Group South grabbed the grain and coal of Ukraine. One key military principle is to focus all effort on the key objective, but Hitler felt he could pursue three aims at once.

German tanks and mechanized formations drove rapidly through Soviet defenses, leaving slower infantry and artillery to mop up the fragments of enemy formations left behind. The job of the panzers was to strike deep, aided by German aviation, to destroy command centers and supply dumps.

Germans isolated and surrounded huge pockets of Soviet soldiers—men who were under strict orders from Stalin not to retreat. Cut off from communications and supplies, they lost the ability to fight and gave up in huge numbers. In the first week of the war, the Germans trapped 400,000 Soviet soldiers just west of Minsk. Even though the Soviets had begun fighting with more men, tanks, and planes than the Germans had, that advantage quickly melted away.

SOVIET AND GERMAN REACTIONS

The Soviet and German leaders reacted very differently to the initial results. While Hitler was euphoric, Stalin initially suffered a breakdown. The capital of Soviet Belarus—Minsk—fell to the Nazis early on, at which time Stalin fled the Kremlin to his dacha outside Moscow.

Once he had pulled himself together, Stalin oversaw the evacuation of Soviet industry in areas threatened by the Germans. Entire factories were dismantled, sent thousands of miles east, and reassembled to churn out weapons and ammunition. Incompetent generals were fired or even executed, and men who could fight were promoted in their place.

In turn, Soviet military organization was simplified to make it easier for inexperienced officers to manage inexperienced troops. To replace the millions of captured Soviet soldiers who were now starving to death in German prison camps, Stalin pulled every able-bodied Soviet man and many women into his army. Factory workers were given hasty training, handed rifles, and sent out to be slaughtered by skilled German soldiers. Stalin even pulled people out of prison camps.

Over time, Stalin grew to rely on—and trust—the professional judgment of many of the military men under him, particularly after they'd proved themselves in battle. Foremost of these was General Georgy Zhukov.

At the same time as Stalin was placing more trust in the judgment of his professional officers, Hitler went in exactly the opposite direction, believing himself to be far superior in military acumen to those around him. Hitler never trusted his generals' judgment as much as his own.

HITLER'S NEXT MOVES

In August 1941, two months into the invasion, Hitler felt so confident of victory that he took the panzer divisions of Army Group Center—the key units spearheading the drive toward Moscow—and diverted them both north and south to assist Germany's two other attacking groups. The panzer divisions diverted south cut off Kiev, the capital of Ukraine, and trapped more than 600,000 Soviet troops.

Hitler's action clearly delayed the drive on Moscow. Every day counted. People often think that German forces were racing against the onset of Russian winter, but that's not quite true. The biggest

obstacle was instead Russian mud. German forces made astounding gains during the first months of war, but they had to pause in autumn because of the realities of Russia's climate and geography.

Most roads were dirt, and the Russian climate has lots of thawing snow in the spring. There is also a large amount rain in the fall. Roads predictably became mud twice a year. When the fall rains hit in 1941, the German mechanized advance ground to a halt. This gave the Soviets a valuable pause to gather new recruits, train units, produce more weapons and ammunition, and prepare for the next stage of battle.

The muddy-road season ends when the weather becomes cold enough to freeze the ground. In early October, the Germans began Operation Typhoon—that is, the final drive on Moscow. By mid-October, Stalin ordered government ministries and foreign embassies evacuated from Moscow, and relocated hundreds of miles to the east.

Stalin himself remained in the capital. Still, the evacuation provoked panic and rioting. By early December, the Germans were very close to their goal.

SUGGESTED READING

Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad*.

Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Did Hitler have better options available in June 1941 than the invasion of the Soviet Union?

2. If the Germans had been less overconfident and better prepared, could they have achieved victory?

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ROOSEVELT, ISOLATIONISM, AND LEND-LEASE

After World War I, the United States rejected the idea of a permanent role in European politics. The country turned inward, or at least away from direct involvement in European affairs. This period of time is often called isolationist in the sense that the United States rejected an active role in great power politics.

However, the war and the tough terms imposed on Germany under the Treaty of Versailles set up a badly unbalanced world economic system. Germany owed reparations and indemnities to Britain and France. Britain and France, in turn, owed war debts to the United States. That created a system in which cash piled up in the United States. As long as the flow kept going, the world economy was in balance. However, while the United States was isolated, it was isolated only in some ways.

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Even if Americans had wanted their country to play a major international role—which they didn't—the possibilities for doing so changed radically at the end of the 1920s. At the end of October 1929, the US stock market crashed. The market crash popped a speculative bubble, and that had a series of spillover effects in other sectors of the economy.

Paper losses in financial assets soon led to bank failures and a liquidity crisis in the rest of the economy. With that, the United States and world markets plunged into general misery. Recall that the European economy depended on US money flowing in. Once that flow stopped after 1929, the resulting depression brought Hitler to power.

Widespread economic problems in the United States had deep political consequences. US President Herbert Hoover, although a successful businessman, seemed out of his depth. In the 1932 presidential election, the Republican Hoover lost to the Democratic candidate Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), who came to define an era in American politics.

FDR'S BACKGROUND

FDR came from old money and a Republican family. He was Theodore Roosevelt's fifth cousin. A promising political career was cut short by a health crisis in 1921—likely polio, though there has been some dispute. While he was left permanently crippled, the encouragement of his wife Eleanor—who was also his cousin—and his own ferocious will brought him back into politics.

FDR's approach to the Great Depression, summed up as the New Deal, was to try anything and see what worked. He slowly and painfully pulled America out of the depths of the Great Depression. The last thing on his agenda was foreign policy, and for the first five years of his presidency, he could largely forget about foreign affairs. However, foreign affairs didn't forget about the US.

THE NEUTRALITY ACTS

As Hitler rose to power and world peace seemed under increased threat, Congress took steps to prevent the United States from being drawn into war. It passed five different Neutrality Acts in all, aimed at tying the hands of the president to avoid getting involved in foreign conflicts.

The first Neutrality Act in 1935 set the tone for the rest. It required the president to establish an arms embargo on both sides in the event of war. A test case immediately arose: Italy invaded Ethiopia in October 1935. Ethiopia was the victim of unprovoked aggression and lacked the industry to provide its own weapons for self-defense. However, the Neutrality Act was clear: the Ethiopians were on their own.

As fascist aggression marched forward, Congress doubled down on keeping the US out of any potential fight. While the initial Neutrality Act was temporary, Congress made it permanent in 1937. Congress also overwhelmingly voted to extend the act to Spain, where a legitimately elected left-wing government was fighting a rebellion by right-wing and fascist forces.

EFFECTS OF NEUTRALITY

More and more Americans—in particular communists, socialists, and others on the left— decided that the world's democracies would do nothing to stand up to fascism, and so they turned to the Soviet Union, which seemed willing to fight. This had two effects. For one, individual Americans volunteered to fight fascism. In the Spanish Civil War, around 3,000 Americans volunteered to fight in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade on behalf of the Spanish Republic against the Nationalists, their right-wing opponents.

The other effect of the democracies' failure to stand up to fascism was to make it easier for the Soviet Union to recruit spies. In the United States and in Britain, when it seemed that home governments were not willing to stand up to Hitler and Mussolini's aggression, working for the Soviet Union and the communists became much more palatable.

A WORSENING SITUATION

Matters became worse when Japan restarted its long-simmering war against China in 1937. Now the US faced aggressive action by expansionist regimes in Asia and in Europe, while the American public was committed to staying out of war at almost any price.

As Hitler's persecution of the Jews in Germany grew worse, there was public pressure in the US to allow in more refugees. However, this sentiment was far, far outweighed by hostility to immigration, and particularly to Jewish immigration. Only a trickle of immigrants from Germany—and only a fraction of them Jews—were permitted into the US prior to the outbreak of war.

Taken together, the Neutrality Acts and the political attitudes that they represented made it extremely difficult for FDR to push American foreign policy toward opposition to Hitler.

WAR IN EUROPE

The outbreak of war in Europe in September 1939 made Roosevelt's life easier in one specific way: It allowed US rearmament to gear up to full

Conscientious Objectors

The Selective Service Act included a specific category—IV-E—for conscientious objectors: those who on religious or moral grounds refused to bear arms. There was a great range of outlooks and experiences among conscientious objectors. Some were willing to wear uniforms and serve in combat zones as medics; others refused to do any military service but did civilian work.

speed. Lawmakers passed the Two-Ocean Navy Act, an astoundingly ambitious plan to more than double the size and combat capability of the Navy.

The Army received its share as well. In September 1940, Congress passed the Selective Service Act to lay the groundwork for a draft. It initially registered men aged 21 to 35, though once the war began, registration was extended up to age 65—without ever coming close to touching that older age limit.

BRITISH BANKRUPTCY

At the end of 1940, three key developments collided, producing monumental consequences for the war. The first was American rearmament, the second was US isolationism, and the third was British bankruptcy.

Under the Neutrality Acts, countries at war could buy American arms, but they had to pay cash. By the end of 1940, Britain was running out of cash. It had to have American supplies to keep fighting but couldn't pay for them.

At the close of 1940, FDR pushed hard for something new: Lend-Lease. The idea of Lend-Lease was that the British wouldn't be paying cash. The US wouldn't be providing credit, either. Instead, the US would loan military equipment, with the expectation it would be returned after the war. After much politicking and arm-twisting, it passed by a comfortable margin in March 1941. Additional US aid flowed to Britain.

THE PLAN DOG MEMORANDUM

While the US was preparing materially for war, American strategists were also thinking through their options. In November 1940, Admiral Harold Stark, the head of the US Navy, put together a series of concepts explaining to FDR how the US should fight if it came to that. He laid out five scenarios for war with lettered code names, A through E. The fourth one, called Plan Dog (for D), gave the best chance for success in the worst conditions, and so the whole effort has been called the Plan Dog Memorandum.

Stark's conclusion was clear: The US needed to help defend the British Empire to ensure its own security. Stark's recommendation—Plan Dog—was to hold in the Pacific against Japan to focus resources on the defeat of Germany in Europe. Stark got many details of the coming war wrong, but his vision for how to fight—devote the bulk of American power to defeat Germany while keeping Japan as a secondary theater—guided American policy for the rest of the war.

Early the next year, American, British, and Canadian military officials gathered for secret discussions that produced a joint report called ABC-1. In effect, it took Stark's general themes and made them concrete.

The United States, Britain, and Canada agreed that Germany was the more dangerous enemy. ABC-1 showed how to do that: support resistance to the Axis inside Europe, knock out Italy as a weak partner, bomb Germany, and prepare for an ultimate invasion of Europe to destroy the Nazi regime. As with Stark's Plan Dog, it didn't get everything right, but it was fairly close to what actually happened in the war.

THE FINAL STEP

The final step in laying out a joint British-American strategy before the United States actually entered the war came in August 1941. Roosevelt and British prime minister Winston Churchill met aboard a British battleship in Newfoundland to agree on the general strategy that Stark and the ABC-1 meetings had come to.

It went well beyond that, though. Roosevelt and Churchill presented a vision intended to inspire their people and the people of the world. While it's easy to criticize the very real shortcomings of the British and the Americans in how they conducted the war, it's important to recognize the very real moral content of what Roosevelt and Churchill were trying to do. The Western democracies were not the Nazis, and their statement of principles made that clear.

In the Atlantic Charter, which they jointly issued, they proclaimed that they sought no territorial conquest, they promised self-determination for the peoples of the world, free trade for mutual benefit, the promotion of general prosperity, and a just, secure, and peaceful international order after the defeat of Nazism. It was a vision worth fighting for.

LATE IN 1941

By late 1941, the United States was arming for war, and most observers expected it at some point. The US Navy was shooting at German U-boats in the Atlantic, and vice versa. The actual outbreak of hostilities was quite unexpected, however.

On December 7, 1941, planes from six Japanese aircraft carriers launched a devastating attack on the US naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, sinking or badly damaging all eight battleships there and killing more than 2,000 American soldiers, sailors, and civilians. Franklin Roosevelt asked for—and easily got—a declaration of war against Japan.

However, the declaration was not against Germany. FDR had been maneuvering for years to prepare the United States for war against Germany, the country he rightly saw as the most dangerous enemy. Instead, Hitler declared war on the US on December 11, 1941, doing FDR an enormous favor.

There is a good case for arguing that Hitler's choice to get into the war against the US was his biggest mistake. It gave FDR the space he needed to devote serious resources to the European theater to keep Britain and the Soviet Union in the war, and to prepare the US for an eventual showdown.

Once the US was at war, FDR's priority was Germany first. There were real constraints on that. Protecting key footholds and bases in the Pacific like Hawaii and Australia required major commitments of manpower and equipment.

In the early going, the resource balance between Europe and Asia was close to even. However, FDR was clear:

His attention and US power would be primarily focused on Germany until that threat had been ended. American policy for the next four years was firmly set.

SUGGESTED READING

Kaiser, *No End Save Victory*.

Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*.

Larrabee, *Commander in Chief*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why was the United States so reluctant to get involved in European affairs?

2. Did Roosevelt do too much or too little to get the United States involved in the war in Europe?

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NORTH AFRICA AND THE BATTLE OF EL-ALAMEIN

This lecture traces the Mediterranean and North African campaigns through 1943. In particular, the lecture focuses on Benito Mussolini's ambition to create a new Roman Empire and how that collapsed into ignominious failure.

BACKGROUND ON MUSSOLINI

Mussolini came to power in 1922 with a program of restoring Italy's greatness, but he didn't have the economic and military means to deliver. Still, by the mid-1930s, Mussolini was ready to throw his weight around in European politics. Until 1935, he had been an opponent of Germany's Adolf Hitler. For instance, in July 1934, Hitler tried to seize Austria through a coup d'état, but Mussolini put Italian troops on the Austrian border to keep it independent. And in April 1935, Mussolini aligned with Britain and France to oppose German rearmament.

That changed in autumn of 1935 because of diplomatic clumsiness on the part of the British and French. Mussolini believed that his help to Britain and France in standing up to Hitler had earned him a free hand at building up his own empire. In October 1935, Italy invaded Ethiopia, then called Abyssinia. However, Ethiopia was a member in good standing of the League of Nations and appealed to the league for assistance.

In turn, the British and French engineered economic sanctions on Italy. At the same time, they were completely unwilling to use force, and even their sanctions were half-hearted. Most importantly, oil—the one thing Italy absolutely needed to import to sustain its economy and its invasion of Ethiopia—was omitted from the sanctions. As a result, Italy was able to conquer Ethiopia with great brutality. It was alienated from Britain and France, and grew close to Germany instead.

The Spanish Civil War, which broke out in 1936, brought Mussolini and Hitler into alignment. They cooperated in backing the right-wing Spanish nationalists against the Spanish left, and that laid the groundwork for closer cooperation once World War II began.

MUSSOLINI JOINS HITLER

When Hitler invaded Poland in September 1939—opening World War II in Europe—Italy was not ready for armed

conflict. As a result, the Mediterranean and North Africa were quiet for the first year of combat.

The situation changed, however, in June 1940. As France was falling to German attack, Mussolini grabbed the opportunity to join the war on Hitler's side. He did so in part to seize territory at French expense but primarily so he could go after the British and French empires in the Mediterranean.

British shipping had to take the long way around the Cape of Good Hope to avoid the Italian navy. Making matters worse, the British commander in the region, Archibald Wavell, had been stripped bare of troops to support the fighting in Europe. His force in Egypt was vastly outnumbered by Italian manpower in Libya and Ethiopia.

Still, the British forces in Egypt had a huge advantage in quality and morale over the Italians. British mobile forces kept up a constant harassment of the Italians they faced on the Egyptian-Libyan border. In addition, Churchill rushed reinforcements to Wavell: tanks from Britain and troops from Australia, New Zealand, and India. At the same time, it took months for the Italians to begin a slow and cautious advance from Libya east toward Cairo and the Nile.

BOLD MOVES FROM WAVELL

Most population and commerce in North Africa was limited to a narrow strip of land along the Mediterranean coast, and the Italians anticipated a direct British frontal attack along the coastal road. Instead, in December 1940, British armor looped well south, moving across open desert to swing around Italian defenses and attack from behind.

This was a bold stroke by Wavell. In this first battle at Sidi Barrani, Egypt, the British captured 40,000 Italians. Follow-up attacks on Bardia, Libya, in January 1941 captured 45,000, and at Tobruk, Libya, another 30,000 were captured.

With very limited reinforcements, Wavell's men pushed on. The British caught the Italians in the midst of evacuating the Libyan city of Benghazi, using another desert march to get ahead of them on the coastal road and block their retreat. British prisoner-of-war camps now had taken custody of 120,000 Italians in less than a month.

SETBACKS FOR WAVELL'S FORCES

At a time when Churchill and the British public badly needed good news, Wavell's force of British, Australian, New Zealand, and Indian soldiers delivered good news to spare. However, that run of success came to a crashing halt for several reasons.

One of the reasons was inflicted on the British by themselves. Winston Churchill had come to have a highly inflated view of the military significance of the Balkan Peninsula. This led him to repeatedly push the idea of armed intervention in the Balkans as a key to victory. Churchill saw Greece as an anti-German foothold, and, at the beginning of 1941, he convinced the Greek government to accept British troops.

In response, Germany invaded Greece that April, and the British were forced to hastily evacuate to the island of Crete. In the meantime, the diversion of men and supplies meant that Wavell had to halt his pursuit of the fleeing Italians. Tripoli, in western Libya, had been open for the taking if only the resources were there. Instead, the British wasted those resources in Greece.

The second reason British luck changed was of Germany's doing. Hitler saw Mussolini's failures in North Africa as endangering the entire war effort. To stiffen Italian resistance, a new Afrika Korps of German troops was dispatched to Tripoli. Hitler put Erwin Rommel in command there. Rommel soon earned his new nickname: the Desert Fox.

THE DESERT FOX

Erwin Rommel had been an astoundingly successful World War I commander, leading a company of 150 men in mountain warfare against the Italians. He once captured 9,000 Italians in a single battle.

ROMMEL'S CONQUEST AND PROBLEMS IN CRETE

In April 1941, Rommel—with just a handful of men and supplies at his disposal—began his own march of conquest, undoing what the British had accomplished only months before. Using British tactics of cutting across open desert, he forced the British back across Libya and into Egypt.

To add to the bad news, the Germans now attacked Crete, where 30,000 British and imperial troops had taken up positions. An additional 10,000 Greeks were there as well. Because the Royal Navy still dominated the Mediterranean, the British had discounted the danger of such a German attack. In doing so, they completely missed the possibility of invasion from the air.

On May 20, 1941, the Germans launched a paratroop assault on the island. After desperate fighting, German paratroopers seized an airfield, and German reinforcements flowed in by plane. Within a week, the British decided further resistance was hopeless and evacuated. Only about half of the British and imperial troops managed to escape, and the Royal Navy took additional losses during the evacuation.

CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES

In June 1941, Churchill shipped Wavell off to India and replaced him with a new commander, Claude Auchinleck. For the second half of 1941, Rommel and Auchinleck exchanged attacks around the Egyptian-Libyan border, moving back and forth for hundreds of miles across empty desert. The British funneled tanks and aircraft to Egypt as quickly as they could.

Rommel, unlike the British, didn't have a safe route for supplies. He had to depend on his own creativity and dash. In January 1942, he began a new offensive which chased the British out of Libya and most of the way across Egypt. Auchinleck managed to finally stop the German advance perilously close to Cairo and the Nile River. Rommel was out of supplies, especially fuel, and couldn't make the final push to get the British out of Egypt. He had to wait.

By late 1942, the pieces were falling into place for the final resolution of the North Africa campaign. At the eastern and western ends of Mediterranean, the British and Americans were mustering forces to clear the Axis once and for all.

FIGHTING AND RETREAT

From July 1942 forward, the German-British front line had stalled 60 miles west of Cairo at the desert town of el-Alamein, which saw a series of battles over the second half of the year. El-Alamein marked one of the few points where armies couldn't just bypass defenses by swinging south into the open desert. A big stretch of sunken ground—the Qattara Depression—lies about 35 or 40 miles south of the seacoast, and that makes the approach to Cairo and the Nile much narrower.

The British built defensive zones there and held on against Rommel's initial attacks. Despite Auchinleck's competence, Churchill thought Auchinleck was too passive. He turned to Bernard Montgomery in August 1942 as the head of the British 8th Army in Egypt.

Churchill now wanted a quick offensive against Rommel. Montgomery gave him exactly the opposite. Montgomery was cautious to a fault, and he had no intent of striking back against Rommel until he had built up absolute material superiority. This gave Rommel one last chance to seize victory.

Toward the end of August, Rommel tried a tank assault between the southern end of the British line and the

Qattara Depression. German tanks ran into minefields much deeper and more elaborate than expected, and then attacked directly into the teeth of a dug-in tank brigade. Short on fuel, Rommel had to pull back. Rommel's panzer army survived to fight another day, even though he had lost tanks, men, and fuel that he could not afford. All of this created the conditions for a climactic encounter at el-Alamein.

THE THIRD BATTLE OF EL-ALAMEIN

The battles that took place near el-Alamein are sometimes called the First Battle of el-Alamein, Second Battle of el-Alamein, and Third Battle of el-Alamein. The third occurred in late October 1942.

Montgomery's patience and caution ensured that he had overwhelming force ready when the fight began. The British had almost three-to-one superiority in overall manpower and tanks, and British tanks were generally much better than those Rommel commanded.

Montgomery's plan was to take advantage of his huge material superiority and give Rommel little opportunity for clever maneuvers. Even so, the British operation almost failed. They were saved by desperate German counterattacks as they fought their way through minefields. The German armor was chewed to piecemeal, and Montgomery kept slogging forward.

After 10 days of hard fighting, Rommel finally ran out of resources and had to withdraw. Hitler ordered him to stand fast, and in the momentary confusion, British armor worked its way through a gap in Rommel's lines, threatening to cut off his retreat and supply lines. Now, Rommel truly did have to run. Montgomery's pursuit was slow, so Rommel escaped with the bulk of his forces.

The German threat to Cairo had ended, but Rommel's manpower was largely intact. Still, he had to flee a long distance west before coming to a defensible spot.

NOVEMBER 1942

In the second part of a gigantic pincer movement against German-controlled North Africa, an Anglo-American landing force went ashore at Morocco and Algeria in early November 1942. The American president, Franklin Roosevelt, believed that US troops needed to enter combat against the Germans for domestic political reasons—specifically, to show the American public that something was being done to remove Hitler as a threat. It was also important to reassure Soviet leader Joseph Stalin that the Americans were doing something to take the pressure off Soviet troops.

In summer 1942, when the Allied invasion of French Morocco and Algeria—known as Operation Torch—got the go-ahead, Rommel was enjoying great success against the British. It looked as though applying more pressure on the Germans in North Africa would help to relieve German pressure on the British in Egypt. Dwight Eisenhower was put in command.

Operation Torch became a major feat of coordination, combining British and American troops with an international naval force to carry and protect them. All arrived simultaneously. However, the landing would not hit the Germans directly but instead enter into French North Africa, colonial territory controlled by the Vichy French under German domination.

When the invasion of French Algeria began on November 8, 1942, French troops shot back, at least at the start. However, French resistance ceased quickly. To make that happen, the Allies used a high-ranking official in the collaborationist Vichy regime: Admiral Francois Darlan, who happened to be in North Africa when the invasion began. Eisenhower felt he needed Darlan's help, and Darlan was slippery enough to agree. Previously, he had also cooperated with the Germans.

When the French in North Africa stopped shooting, Hitler wasn't happy. His troops now took over French Tunisia and rolled in to take direct control of the parts of

southern France that had so far escaped Nazi occupation. By mid-November 1942, the British and Americans were firmly planted in the western extreme of North Africa.

EARLY 1943

Starting in early 1943, the British in Libya and the Anglo-Americans in Algeria launched new offensives to clear North Africa. The Germans and Italians rallied in Tunisia, relying on Rommel's brilliant leadership to delay the inevitable. In turn, Hitler and Mussolini threw good money after bad, reinforcing North Africa though their odds of success were low.

In February 1943, one of Rommel's offensives wreaked havoc on green American troops at the Kasserine Pass. However, Rommel faced growing British and American strength. Steady attrition of German armor left the commander unable to contend with the methodically advancing forces to his east and west. By April 1943, the Germans and Italians were running out of ammunition, fuel, and even food.

By May, mass surrenders were underway, and at the middle of the month, Axis resistance collapsed. How many men the Axis lost is in dispute, but the Allies took around a quarter of a million prisoners. These men would have been very useful to the Axis defense of Sicily, Italy, and France. Their loss meant that Mussolini was now living on borrowed time.

SUGGESTED READING

Buchanan, *American Grand Strategy in the Mediterranean during World War II*.

Porch, *The Path to Victory*.

Symonds, *World War II at Sea*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Was the Mediterranean campaign a distraction or an important theater?

2. Was Hitler's decision to back his ally Mussolini a bad one?

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THE BATTLE OF STALINGRAD, 1942–1943

The Battle of Stalingrad is one of the epic struggles of World War II and of world history. This lecture aims to put the Stalingrad campaign into broader context. Then, the lecture provides a sense of the drama at its core and discusses what it meant to the outcome of World War II.

GERMANY'S SITUATION

At the start of 1942, things looked bleak for Germany. By the turn of the year—the winter of 1941–1942—Germany had suffered about 1 million casualties. Hitler had invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, but by early spring 1942, the Nazi regime was feeling the strain of trying to find able-bodied soldiers. It was also low on tanks.

Contrary to Hitler's expectations, the Soviet Union had not collapsed. Instead, it fought on stubbornly. To make matters worse, Germany's unsuccessful air campaign earlier in the war—at the Battle of Britain in summer and fall 1940—had failed to compel Britain to surrender. Furthermore, the United States was now in the war against Germany.

One short-term priority for Hitler in spring 1942 was oil. By far the biggest source was at Baku on the Caspian Sea. Getting oil out of Baku and back to Germany would have been a major task. It wasn't a problem for the Soviets: They could send tankers north from Baku across the Caspian Sea and up rivers to central Russia. For Hitler, it wouldn't be that easy, but he had no choice if he hoped to win the war.

That was how Stalingrad ended up becoming a decisive battle of World War II. Stalingrad, a regional industrial center in the southeastern section of European Russia, was important because it stood in the way of Hitler's drive to seize Russian oil fields. As spring 1942 rolled on, Hitler assembled the troops he needed and built up an armored strike force at the southern end of the Russian front, ready to push southeast to Baku and the Caspian Sea.

SOVIET MISTAKES

The Soviets made Hitler's job easier with an ill-advised offensive of their own. In May 1942, the Soviets tried to retake the major industrial city of Kharkov in eastern Ukraine. They were eventually encircled, cut off, and eliminated. The Soviets lost a quarter of a million men.

The Soviets also fell victim to a German deception.

Stalin expected that the main German effort in spring 1942 would be in the north against Moscow, finishing off what Hitler had almost accomplished in December 1941. The Germans sent enough deceptive signals that they'd be attacking Moscow that Stalin held his reserves in the north, making the German southern offensive easier.

THE GERMANS ADVANCE

The Germans, after defeating that initial Soviet offensive, now launched their own. At the end of June, Hitler's forces pushed east from the Donets River, clearing the space between the Donets and the Don River. While the Germans moved quickly, taking only a month to push forward, they found that the Soviet army was getting better—it was retreating.

During the initial stages of Operation Barbarossa—the code name for the Axis invasion of the Soviet Union—Stalin's men had generally not retreated when they were danger of being surrounded. Instead, they'd held in place, and ended up being encircled and destroyed. Stalin had learned.

The German offensive in June 1942 was grabbing territory, but territory wasn't what Hitler needed. He needed to get to the oil or wipe out Soviet soldiers. He wasn't able to do either one.

By late July, the problem of Russia's vast distances was becoming quite serious. German troops had more than 1,000 miles to go to get to Baku to the southeast. East of them, on the Volga River, were numerous Soviet forces.

If German soldiers kept on going to Baku, they would have Soviet soldiers sitting on their left flank to stop them. The Germans had no choice but to do what military theorists and theories say not to do: divide their efforts.

Hitler used two army groups to do two different things. Army Group A was in charge of pushing southeast to the Caucasus and oil. Army Group B would push east to the Volga River to protect the flank of that long German drive to grab Soviet oil fields. Sitting on the

west bank of the Volga—just where the Germans needed to set up a defense for their long push to the Caucasus—was the city of Stalingrad.

STALINGRAD

Today known as the city of Volgograd, Stalingrad was not the primary German objective, but geography meant that the Germans needed to do something about it. The Germans could not let Stalingrad remain in Soviet hands. It was much too big a threat to the flank of their push to grab Baku.

In late August 1942, Hitler ordered the German Sixth Army under General Friedrich Paulus to take Stalingrad as part of the broader campaign to reach the oil fields of Baku. The Germans began with savage bombing, followed up with a ground assault to take the city.

The bombing began August 23 and leveled much of city. Ironically, this created rubble and debris that would make the Germans' task much more difficult. At the same time, Paulus's troops moved almost fast enough to take the city before the Soviets could set up their defenses.

Still, Stalin's men managed to get established just in time to save it from immediate loss. Meanwhile, by the middle of September, German spearheads had reached the Volga River north and south of Stalingrad, isolating it on the west bank.

The Soviet commander Vasili Chuikov was given the task of holding the city with his 62nd Army, no matter the cost in lives. However, the only way for the Soviets to get in or out of Stalingrad was by ferry across the Volga, under constant fire. All the Germans had to do was to oust the Soviet force from the city itself, pushing them into the Volga River, but that turned out to be much harder than expected.

THE SOVIET DEFENSE

Once the Soviets were defending inside the city of Stalingrad with their backs to the river, there was no open ground for the Germans to use to maneuver. The Germans couldn't get around the Soviets to attack from the flank or from the rear. All they

could do was slog forward through city streets that quickly turned into rubble. That meant the Germans would be trading soldier for soldier, which they could not afford to do for very long.

Furthermore, the Soviet soldiers at Stalingrad turned out to be excellent urban fighters. While the Germans actively used tanks in urban warfare, the Soviets became experts at channeling the armored vehicles into kill zones with anti-tank guns, mines, and Molotov cocktails to disable them. Additionally, Soviet industry was also starting to kick in with supplies needed to wage war.

Because of the Soviets' tenacious defense, the German advance made very slow progress. By late September, the Germans had captured the center section of Stalingrad, and they then turned to taking the factory district in the northern part of the city. All that fighting chewed up the elite German formations that General Paulus needed for fighting in cities.

NOVEMBER 1942

By the beginning of November, Hitler was channeling combat engineer battalions from throughout the Wehrmacht into Stalingrad, thereby spending the lives of highly trained soldiers—who were very difficult to replace—in an ongoing effort to seize the city. Still, the Germans were getting close. By the middle of November 1942, the Soviet Army had been pushed back into a few tiny pockets on the bank of the Volga, and the Germans controlled all but about 10 percent of the city. Chuikov's troops could not hold out much longer, but things were about to change dramatically.

As the Germans became bogged down in Stalingrad, the Soviets began to see the potential for a counteroffensive that might do the invaders some serious damage. The Germans simply didn't have the manpower to hold the lines on the flanks of their thousand-mile offensive toward Baku. As a result, while the Germans were losing elite troops in the effort to clear Stalingrad, they also

had to turn to their allies and satellites to hold their lines north and south of the city.

In particular, the Germans relied heavily on Romanians to hold quiet sectors of the front: the Third Romanian Army northwest of Stalingrad and the Fourth Romanian Army south of Stalingrad. The Romanians, however, were poorly equipped, and many Romanian soldiers had trouble seeing why their interests were at stake. Furthermore, those quiet sectors outside would not stay quiet much longer.

THE SOVIET ATTACK

The months that Chuikov's troops had stood and fought in the ruins of Stalingrad bought valuable time. Aleksandr Vasilevsky, the Soviet army's chief of staff, used the time to build up enormous reserves of men and tanks and assemble them in secrecy north and south of Stalingrad.

On November 19, 1942, the Soviets rolled across the snow and smashed the poorly equipped Romanians around Stalingrad. Four days later, Soviet pinchers trapped the German Sixth Army and 300,000 troops inside the city.

Germany's General Paulus asked Hitler's permission to break out of the city to escape west to German lines. Hitler refused. He couldn't accept the blow to his prestige. Instead, he tried two things. The first was to support the Stalingrad pocket by air. Second, while he was not willing to let Paulus and the Sixth Army break out from inside Stalingrad, he was willing to let his other troops break in from outside Stalingrad.

THE GERMAN SUPPLY PROBLEM

Hitler now had 300,000 men inside Stalingrad who needed food, fuel, and ammunition. The Sixth Army required a bare minimum of 300 tons of supplies a day. Hermann Göring, head of the Luftwaffe, promised that supplies would be no problem. That was a lie, and Göring had to know it. The Germans simply didn't have enough of their Junkers Ju 52 cargo aircraft available. The Soviets also used everything they could against that airlift: fighters,

anti-aircraft guns, bombs, and artillery strikes.

The Germans steadily lost aircraft to accidents from flying in bad weather. On a good day, the Germans would be lucky to get 100 tons into the Stalingrad pocket. It simply wasn't enough.

The other option was breaking in. On December 12, Hitler sent two panzer divisions under Hermann Hoth—one of his better tank commanders—to push through to Stalingrad. They quickly stalled. Hoth wanted Paulus to meet him halfway with any soldiers who could get away, but Hitler vetoed this. Hoth had to retreat.

DEFEAT FOR THE GERMANS

By the end of 1942, Hitler had no choice but to accept defeat. The Soviets were pushing west past Stalingrad. As they neared the Don River and the Black Sea, the German forces heading south to Baku were in danger of being cut off and destroyed like the Sixth Army. Hitler gave the order to pull back at the very end of 1942. German troops raced north to escape before the Soviets slammed the gate shut. That meant no Soviet oil and no chance of waging a global war on to victory.

Meanwhile, the Soviets waged an operation to squeeze that German pocket in Stalingrad tighter and tighter. The German Sixth Army, trapped there, couldn't pull back. The German troops slowly starved and froze as the Soviets methodically pounded them with artillery.

When Stalin's men took the last airfield in the German Stalingrad pocket, the trap was complete. No more Germans could get out. Hitler promoted General Paulus to field marshal, hoping he would take the hint that no field marshal had ever surrendered. It didn't work. In February 1943, Paulus surrendered. Some 91,000 German troops—the remnant of the Sixth Army—marched into captivity. Only about 5,000 ever came home.

THE MEANING OF STALINGRAD

Given the resources lined up against Nazi Germany,

victory was going to be tough under any circumstances. But prevailing at Stalingrad—which might have enabled the Germans to make it to Baku—could have made the difference for them. Failure at Stalingrad meant failure to get the oil Germany needed for victory.

After Stalingrad, Germany was never again able to carry out an offensive on the scale equal to its campaign of spring 1942. It did launch major offensives, but those were aimed at more limited objectives. Because of German losses of manpower at Stalingrad and the army's failure to secure the necessary resources, it's hard to see how Germany could have won the war.

For the Allies, Stalingrad also meant a great deal. The years 1939, 1940, and 1941 had been bad ones for the coalition against Hitler, punctuated by humiliating defeat after humiliating defeat. Even Allied successes had been matters of survival, not victory.

By the second half of 1942, however, things clearly started to change. The Axis powers, to take a term from the military theorist Carl von Clausewitz, had gone beyond their culminating point of attack—that is, they pushed beyond what they could sustain. The further they went, the more soldiers they lost, the longer their supply lines got, and the more ammunition and fuel they expended. By mid-1942, they had culminated. Now, the human and material resources of the Grand Alliance finally began to kick in.

Stalingrad mattered particularly for the people of the Soviet Union. The German attack had put about a third of the Soviet population under German rule. After Stalingrad, though, it was clear that Stalin and Soviet rule were coming back.

SUGGESTED READING

Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*.

———, *Stalingrad*.

Hayward, *Stopped at Stalingrad*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Was the decision to try to get to the oil fields of the Caucasus Germany's best plan in 1942?

2. If Hitler had listened to his generals, would the outcome at Stalingrad have been any different?

13

RESISTANCE IN NAZI-OCCUPIED EUROPE

In the European countries occupied by Nazi Germany during World War II, people had a difficult choice between collaboration and resistance. For millions of Europeans, this question was a matter of life or death. Much depended on what people thought about the outcome of the war. If Hitler was unbeatable, then resistance meant suicide. If the Allies were destined to win, then resistance made more sense.

COLLABORATION IN NORWAY

The situation in Norway gives examples of both collaboration and resistance. King Haakon VII of Norway refused to surrender to the Germans, going instead into exile in Britain. The German occupiers were left to try to run the country, and they needed a local figurehead to do it. The man they chose was Vidkun Quisling.

Before the war, Quisling had been the head of a small, obscure, and unpopular far-right fascist party. Quisling believed himself to be defending Norwegian interests even though his government became increasingly authoritarian as time passed. Perhaps the blackest mark on him is the Holocaust in Norway.

Norway's Jewish population was roughly 2,000 people. About a third of them were sent to concentration camps with the cooperation of Quisling's government, and almost all died there. Most of the rest of Norway's Jews escaped the country, many to spend the war in relative safety in Sweden. After the war, Quisling was put on trial and shot as a traitor.

RESISTANCE IN NORWAY

Norway also offered examples of heroic resistance. The Norwegian government and royal family in exile oversaw a small army, air force, and navy made up of almost 30,000 volunteers. Special operations inside the country presented a unique aspect of Norwegian resistance related to heavy water.

Water is H_2O: one oxygen atom and two hydrogen atoms. Almost all hydrogen atoms have a single proton. About 1 in 5,000 hydrogen atoms, though, has a neutron as well, and is called deuterium. Those 1-in-5,000 hydrogen atoms weigh twice as much as regular ones. Water that has a higher proportion of heavy hydrogen atoms is called heavy water. Production of heavy water is not cheap or easy.

Heavy water is essential to the operation of certain types of nuclear reactors—those that use natural uranium instead of enriched uranium.

In particular, the German nuclear program needed heavy water as a potential route to an atomic bomb.

Germany's source of heavy water was a production facility attached to a hydroelectric plant in Norway. Before the war, French intelligence had managed to smuggle the existing stock of heavy water out of Norway to keep it away from German hands. Once Germany was in physical occupation of Norway, though, it had access to the plant and ongoing production.

The British Special Operations Executive came up with a plan involving Norwegian and British special forces. First, in October 1942, a small Norwegian team was parachuted in to scout the area and prepare for a larger force to follow.

Disaster struck the next month: A large British team arrived via two gliders, but both of them crashed. The Germans captured all survivors, then tortured and executed them. The Germans now knew the heavy water plant was a target and made security much tighter. The British had not given up hope, however.

The initial team of Norwegians remained in place inside the country. In February 1943, more Norwegian commandos parachuted in. Thanks to information from a Norwegian spy inside the hydroelectric plant, the combined team infiltrated the plant, ran into a sympathetic caretaker who showed them around, and blew up the production facility. Everyone involved in the raid got away.

The Germans repaired the plant and resumed production after several months of delay. An American bombing raid in November 1943 again damaged the facility. The Germans now decided to abandon the Norwegian plant and take the rest of their heavy water to Germany.

In February 1944, the Germans began their shipment. Because the production center was attached to a hydroelectric plant, the first step was ferrying the drums of heavy water across Lake Tinnsja.

Norwegian resistance slipped a bomb onto the ferry, which blew up and sank the heavy water. Fourteen innocent passengers were killed to deliver another blow to Nazi Germany's atomic bomb project.

VICHY FRANCE

One of the most iconic examples of collaboration is the case of Vichy France, which takes its name from the spa town of Vichy in central-southern France. When the Germans conquered the country in 1940, they occupied Paris along with large swaths of territory along the German border and the Atlantic coast. France's new regime wanted to move its capital outside of German occupation, so they shifted the seat of government to unoccupied southeastern France.

The French people responded in complex ways to their defeat at the hands of the Germans. Some joined the resistance. They came disproportionately from the political left, particularly communists, who were fighting as much for the Soviet Union as for France.

In contrast, the collaborators were largely from the political right. They held the old French regime in contempt and saw defeat as a chance to build a new France. Most of the population, as throughout Europe, chose neither option and tried instead to do their best to survive.

The head of state was Marshal Philippe Petain, a hero of World War I who was well into his 80s now. He was dragged from retirement to preside over the last days of the French Third Republic, and he then became the prime minister and head of state under German domination. He led a regime that wasn't quite fascist but certainly was on the far right and anti-Semitic.

Vichy France made some token gestures at independence from Nazi Germany. It never joined the Axis and never joined the war against the Allies. In most other ways, it fully participated in Hitler's war effort, including by providing hundreds of thousands of men for labor in German war industries.

Vichy France's most shameful chapter was its participation in the Holocaust. Starting in 1942, Jews—especially non-French Jews—began to be arrested and deported to death camps in Eastern Europe. In the areas under German occupation, local French police—at German direction—rounded them up for relay on to the extermination camps.

A large of number of Jews escaped to safety or found refuge with sympathetic neighbors. France's Jewish population, native and foreign, was about 300,000. A quarter of them, 75,000, were sent to the extermination camps, where almost all of them died.

FRENCH RESISTANCE

Thousands of French joined or supported the French resistance, which was sometimes called the Maquis. Its name means "the bush" or "the brush," which signified its largely rural nature.

It was hard to sustain much of a resistance movement in cities. There were too many eyes around. Large-scale resistance took place largely in the countryside. This became much more significant in 1943, when the Vichy regime started imposing a draft to send people to forced labor in Germany.

For most of the war, the French resistance involved very little fighting. The price to be paid for armed resistance to the Germans was simply too great: The Germans responded to assassinations of occupying troops by executing civilians.

Instead, the resistance focused on other things. It provided intelligence to the Allies and carried out sabotage to undermine France's economic value to the Germans. It also provided an important escape route for Allied soldiers who found themselves in German-occupied Europe.

Once the Allies invaded France on June 6, 1944—D-Day—the resistance emerged from underground. Fighting in the open was no longer hopeless, and the French Forces of the Interior

(FFI) played an important role in the rest of the war.

Still, some of the worst Nazi crimes took place in response to resistance activities after D-Day. Less than a week afterward, a German SS unit wiped out the village of Oradour-sur-Glane, shooting all the men and burning the women and children alive. More than 600 civilians died.

YUGOSLAV PARTISANS

Of Europe's smaller states, Yugoslavia produced the most important partisan movement. Prior to World War II, Yugoslav politics had been deeply split along ethnic and religious lines. At the end of World War I, a sense of common ethnic identity among the Slavic populations of the Balkans produced a new kingdom of Yugoslavia. Very quickly, though, the hoped-for south Slav solidarity was overcome by differences.

It was characterized by a fundamental division between the Orthodox Christian Serbs—who held the Yugoslav monarchy, and dominated the army and government—and the Roman Catholic Croats, who resented their second-class status in the kingdom.

When Germany invaded Yugoslavia in spring 1941, the country collapsed so quickly that lots of military equipment was simply absorbed into the population, creating the means for serious violence. The country was placed under Italian and German occupation, and three political trends emerged.

The Ustasha—an extremist Croatian nationalist group that had existed before the war—was put in charge of an Axis puppet state in Croatia. Horrifically brutal, the Ustasha regime murdered several hundred thousand Serbs in an effort to ethnically cleanse Croatia.

Other parts of the country were annexed by Germany or its allies, or under military occupation. In those regions, two competing resistance movements emerged. The Chetniks were a Serbian-dominated and monarchist movement led by Draza Mihailovic. It was aimed at cooperating with the Allies

to eventually restore the Yugoslav kingdom.

The other resistance movement—the Partisans, or National Liberation Army—eventually won the struggle. It was dominated by the Yugoslav communist party and its charismatic leader, Josip Broz Tito.

Josip Broz Tito

The Partisans enjoyed several advantages. Unlike the Ustasha or the Chetniks, they were explicitly multiethnic in focus, not limited to a single group or a single region. In addition, the Partisans were fully committed to the fight against the Axis.

CHOOSING SIDES

The UK, like the Chetniks, had one eye on the future safety of their empire in the Mediterranean, and were resistant to backing the communist Partisans. In contrast, the United States was not especially interested in propping up the British Empire and was most concerned with winning the war quickly.

Because Tito was clearly most interested in fighting the Germans, the US backed Tito. The Soviets also were firmly behind the communist Tito. In September 1944, King Peter of Yugoslavia, living in exile, called on all Yugoslavs to put their support behind the Partisans. By this time, the British had come around as well.

Yugoslavia soaked up a large number of Axis troops. The combined forces of Germany, Italy, and their allies doing occupation duty in Yugoslavia was generally more than 30 divisions. As the Allies closed in, 30 divisions would have been useful on other fronts. Eventually, with Axis defeat, the Chetniks and Ustasha were doomed as well.

The Partisans liberated much of Yugoslavia without direct involvement of the Soviets, Americans, or British. Mihailovic was arrested after the war, tried, and executed for treason. Many Chetniks and Ustasha troops were killed in mass executions.

Yugoslavia suffered among the highest losses as a proportion of population as any state in World War II. It counted from 600,000 to 1 million dead, out of a prewar population of 15 million.

THE SOVIET PARTISAN MOVEMENT

In terms of sheer numbers, the Soviet partisan movement was probably the largest of the resistance movements against the Axis and had the greatest military significance. When the Germans initially rolled through the western territories of the Soviet Union, their advance was so rapid that large numbers of armed troops were left behind. Many surrendered, but at least some melted into the civilian population, where they were joined by communist functionaries who saw surrender as tantamount to a death sentence.

Through 1941 and 1942, the Germans seemed on a sure march to victory, and the partisan movement stayed relatively quiet. Over time, though, the situation shifted.

Nazi occupation policy was so murderous that lying low didn't seem like a safe option. Fighting wasn't that much riskier. As the Soviet Union held on and then looked like it might actually win, people behind German lines had to calculate that the communists might come back. When they did, they would want to know how people spent the war.

The heart of the Soviet partisan movement was instead in Belorussia (today's Belarus), where a terrain of woods and marshes was perfect for hiding. The key transportation links that connected the German heartland to the fighting fronts in Russia ran through Belorussia. And that issue—transportation—was one of two key contributions the partisans made to the Soviet

war effort. They could cut telephone and telegraph wires, blow up railroad bridges, or ambush truck convoys.

The other key contribution that Soviet partisans made was political. They provided heroes for the Soviet people back home: defiant young communists dying bravely for their motherland. They also had a more cynical purpose. They reminded Soviet subjects—who had seen a great deal of suffering from communist rule—that the communists were coming back and that they shouldn't hope for liberation from Moscow.

SUGGESTED READING

Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*.

Paxton, *Vichy France*.

Slepyan, *Stalin's Guerrillas*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How serious was resistance to the Nazis?

2. What were the ethical choices faced by populations under Nazi rule?

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THE HOLOCAUST

Despite serious persecution of Jews in the first years of the war, violence against the Jews took an enormous step forward in June 1941. Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union was accompanied by Nazi special-purpose groups—the *Einsatzgruppen*—shooting Jews en masse.

In the second half of 1941, Hitler seems to have made the decision to escalate violence against the Jews even further, with the decision to murder every Jew in Europe. There is some debate as to when, precisely, Hitler decided on this. Regardless, even by the standards of the Nazi regime, it was a choice of breathtaking evil.

MASS MURDER

Hitler seems not to have issued a formal written order, instead communicating his instructions verbally to trusted subordinates. Still, there is no doubt that he was aware of—and directed—the mass murder of many of Europe's Jews.

The people under Hitler acted with common understanding towards a common goal, and they used Hitler's authority to get things done. There appear to have been two decisive moments.

The first was in summer 1941. Rudolf Hoess, commander of the death camp at Auschwitz, was told by the commander of all of Germany's police, Heinrich Himmler, that Hitler had put the SS paramilitary force in charge of the "Jewish problem."

At about the same time, the powerful Nazi figure Hermann Göring told Reinhard Heydrich, head of the secret police, that he had been ordered to oversee a "final solution" of the Jewish question. Clearly, some decision had been made. That is part of the context for the mass shooting of Soviet Jews that went along with the German invasion.

At the end of 1941 and beginning of 1942, there seems to have been a second step to accelerate the measures already underway. By now, the Nazis had run into problems in their invasion of Soviet Russia. It is possible that this—or the United States' entry into the war after Pearl Harbor—made Hitler decide he needed to accelerate the murder of Europe's Jews.

A CHILLING OPERATION

In January 1942, Reinhard Heydrich convened a meeting of top German officials in Wannsee, a suburb of Berlin, to work out the administrative procedures for the destruction of millions of people. After the Wannsee Conference, the Germans built extermination camps. These installations were designed to hold prisoners in terrible conditions and carry out systematic mass murder.

In mid-1942, they launched Operation Reinhardt, the systematic murder of all the Jews of Poland. It was the first step toward exterminating all the Jews of Europe. Whereas the Einsatzgruppen had brought murder to where Jews lived, the new camp system would bring the Jews to the place of murder. By mid-1943, the Nazis had murdered almost all Jews of Poland.

The Germans didn't operate alone. For example, when the Nazis deported hundreds of thousands of Jews from Hungary to die in Auschwitz in 1944, only about a hundred German officials were needed. Hungarians did the rest.

DIFFERENT CAMPS

Different camps had slightly different purposes and different trajectories. For example, Treblinka operated solely as an extermination camp. Essentially no Jews were sent there as forced labor. Instead, they were gassed on arrival. It operated for a for a relatively short time, opening in July 1942—to dispose of the Jews being cleared from the Warsaw ghetto—and closing down in fall 1943. In that short time, almost a million Jews died there.

Auschwitz—the deadliest complex—was different. Its location near the major city of Krakow had excellent railway links, and it operated much longer than other major death camps. Auschwitz was not a single camp but instead a complex of camps, sometimes called Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Part of the complex was intended for the immediate execution of Jews deported to Auschwitz from around Europe. A network of factories also sprung up to employ the forced labor of Jews who were healthy enough and possessed specific skills, enabling them to survive immediate execution. IG Farben, the chemical company, had a factory at the Auschwitz complex. Krupp, the German arms manufacturer, also operated there.

AUSCHWITZ'S DEADLY PROCEDURES

Because of the camp's dual function as an extermination camp and an industrial center, the first step for Jews arriving at Auschwitz was division into those who would live a while longer and those slated for immediate execution. Those who were relatively healthy and able-bodied were pulled aside for use as slave labor. They were poorly fed and clothed, kept in crowded barracks, and worked mercilessly. They died in large numbers, but the system was not designed specifically to kill them, at least not at the beginning.

For children, the elderly, and the sick, however, arrival instead meant being immediately marched to what was marked as a bathing and disinfectant station. They were instructed to strip and march into what looked like a giant shower room. Once they were inside, the doors were sealed and locked. The camp attendants then gassed everyone inside.

Not all of the camps employed gas chambers; Chelmno in central Poland used special vans and carbon monoxide. After experiments with various killing methods, including the use of carbon monoxide from engine exhaust, the Nazis largely settled on Zyklon B, a commercial insecticide using cyanide. After 15 or 20 minutes, everyone in the chamber would be dead.

Roughly 1 million Jews were murdered at Auschwitz, and perhaps 3 million were murdered at all the extermination camps. Because Auschwitz operated nearly until the end of the war, it had some survivors. Chelmno, by contrast, completed the bulk of its work by spring 1943. Fewer than 10 escaped or survived.

THE ALLIES

During the time when millions of Soviet and Polish Jews were killed from 1941 to 1943, the Allies were in no position to try to stop the process. By 1944, though, Allied victory was in sight, and word had begun to leak out about the nature of the camps in the east.

Franklin Roosevelt, as the American president, had received enough information from multiple sources to know that Jews were being murdered. He considered their executions an appalling crime against humanity. It seems, though, that for Roosevelt, the best way to protect the Jews was to win the war as quickly as possible.

Over the course of 1943, however, increasing knowledge of Nazi crimes brought a groundswell of calls in the United States and Britain to do something to rescue the Jews of Europe. The question is what the Allies could have done. Many Jews were trapped in Hitler's Europe, confined to ghettos and out of reach of the Allies.

The Allies repeatedly told the German and Axis leadership that they would be held responsible after the war for their crimes, including specifically their crimes against the Jews. But that didn't seem to have much effect.

RESCUE EFFORTS

There were some ways to get Jews out of Europe in relatively small numbers, mostly across neutral borders. Jews in France could be smuggled to Spain. Sweden, Switzerland, and Turkey, as neutral powers, also offered an escape hatch. However, no option was enough to save large numbers of lives. Hitler and Nazi Germany shut down any large exit when they found it.

Another possibility was commercial: ransom. Paying a ransom for Jewish lives was explored with Romania, which had a large number of Jews in its territory. The deal on offer was US cash to Romania's leadership in return for shiploads of Jews out of Hitler's control. Nazi Germany shut this down as soon as it found out.

The murder of Hungary's Jews brought all this to a head. Hungary, as Hitler's ally, had been able to provide some protection for its large Jewish population. Jews were treated as second-class citizens and discriminated against, but they had not been deported to death camps. By 1944, there were still several hundred thousand

Jews in Hungary. They represented the last large population of Jews in Europe under Hitler's control and available for Hitler to murder.

ENDING THE HOLOCAUST

Allied victory is what finally ended the Holocaust. Majdanek was the first concentration camp to be liberated by the Allies. The Soviets reached it late in July 1944.

The Soviets and Western journalists saw the camp, and what they found—a few thousand prisoners still alive, and the ghastly traces of the murder of many more—made *TIME* magazine in August 1944. Hitler was unhappy, and he put Himmler in charge of efforts to evacuate other camps from Poland and hide the evidence of mass murder.

This evacuation created another chapter of horror in the history of the camps. The German SS was charged with cleaning up the mess. For camps in the path of Soviet advance, that meant shooting or gassing prisoners too sick to walk and marching the starving remnant west, just ahead of pursuing Soviets. Without food, water, or shelter, the inmates dropped dead on the march or were shot and left beside the road when they couldn't keep up.

Despite the horrific conditions, many camp inmates—particularly those transported by train—did make it alive to camps further west. This meant that quite a few Jews who had spent the bulk of the war in Eastern Europe ended the war in the west, where they were liberated by the Americans or the British. The Americans found 20,000 at Buchenwald. The British found 60,000 at Bergen-Belsen, along with 10,000 unburied bodies.

The Soviets reached Auschwitz at the end of January 1945 and found several thousand prisoners still alive; the rest had been evacuated in death marches west. The Americans also liberated a number of concentration camps.

CONCLUSION

Even after liberation and the end of the war, the Holocaust story wasn't over. Many

inmates were in such bad shape that they died after liberation and the provision of food and medical care.

Many Jews who survived the Holocaust wanted no part of returning home, particularly if they felt that home was no longer safe. They wanted to find another refuge, perhaps in Palestine—what would become the state of Israel.

Even Jews who did want to return home could find getting there to be difficult. It became clear over time that the Nazi destruction of Jewish life throughout much of Europe had made it impossible for many Jews to get home or remain there.

At the end of 1945, hundreds of thousands of Eastern European Jews released to return home ended up coming back to Germany. They found the displaced-persons camps in postwar Germany, with basic food and shelter, preferable to conditions at home. Sporadic violence against Jews in Poland led even more to flee west in mid-1946.

As time passed, and the immediate problem of daily survival was solved, Jews organized themselves. This started in the American Landsberg displaced-persons camp in southern Germany, and at the British displaced-persons camp at Bergen-Belsen. The Jews began to plead their case to the Allies for better conditions, for not being treated like other refugees, and for the possibility of emigration to Palestine.

This issue led to tension between the Americans and the British. After the death of Franklin Roosevelt in April 1945, his successor in the White House, Harry Truman, was quite sympathetic to the plight of the Jews and particularly to their desire to emigrate to Palestine.

The British controlled Palestine as part of a UN mandate, and from the British point of view, Palestine was a headache. They had to keep the long-running tensions between the small Jewish population and the larger population of Arabs, Muslims, and some Christians from boiling out of control.

More Jews from Europe might upset that delicate balance and inflame Arab opinion. In November 1945, the new British foreign minister, Ernest Bevin, gave a speech in which he made it clear that the British government opposed any increased Jewish emigration to Palestine.

Still, many Jews immigrated to Palestine illegally. Some Jews had gone to Palestine before World War II, but violence of the Nazi regime and the sense of no longer having a home in Europe dramatically accelerated Jewish immigration to Palestine.

As the Jewish population of Palestine increased, tensions between Jews and Arabs increased as well, and the British found themselves caught in the middle. Exhausted by the expenses of war, tired of refereeing the Arab-Jewish conflict, and facing an American government sympathetic to Jewish desires, the British finally decided to abandon Palestine, opening the door to the creation of a new state of Israel.

SUGGESTED READING

Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews*.

Hilburg, *The Destruction of the European Jews.*

Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*.

Wiesel, *Night*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Could and should the Allies have done more to try to stop the Holocaust?

2. Given the overwhelming evidence for the Holocaust, why is Holocaust denial still a phenomenon?

15

U-BOATS AND THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

German submarines—known as the *unterseeboots* or U-boats—that targeted British shipping had the greatest potential to knock Britain out of the war. If Britain had been starved into surrender by a German submarine campaign against Britain's vital maritime lifelines, then the entire war would have looked very different.

This lecture looks at what became known as the Battle of the Atlantic by examining how the U-boat war developed, how Germany caught the United States off-guard, and how the Allied struggle was finally won.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE SUBMARINE

The fundamental advantage of a submarine is that when it is underwater, it is hard to spot. Therefore, it is hard to hit before materializing to ambush surface ships.

Diesel-Electric War Machines

World War II submarines were diesel-electric boats. When they were on the surface or close enough to the surface to use a snorkel, they burned diesel fuel rather than running on electrical batteries.

During World War II, serving on a submarine had one of the highest mortality rates of any branch of service, along with air bomber crews. Subs were deadly yet also terribly vulnerable if caught on the surface by planes or warships.

EARLY NAVAL FIGHTING

Because the German Navy had not expected to fight as early as 1939, German U-boat leader Karl Dönitz initially lacked the boats he needed to conduct a serious submarine campaign. U-boats had only a limited impact on the early course of the war.

At the time, Britain was losing only about 100,000 tons of merchant shipping a month. That sounds like a great deal, but the level of losses was quite manageable. It helped that the British had learned some valuable lessons from World War I, including the importance of convoys to protect vulnerable merchant ships.

Matters became more serious after the fall of France in June 1940. With much of the French coast now under occupation, Nazi forces could move their sub bases forward, much closer to the vital British sea lanes. In addition, the failed British campaign in Norway in spring 1940 chewed up a number of the destroyers needed for escorting convoys. Consequently, British shipping

losses jumped dramatically in the second half of 1940, climbing above a quarter of a million tons per month that autumn.

Several developments allowed the British to get this danger under control, at least temporarily. To begin, the vital flow of supplies into Britain resumed with the formation of new escorts and convoy formations. This was thanks to US president Franklin Roosevelt. While keeping the United States formally neutral, he cut a deal in September 1940 to swap 50 World War I vintage American destroyers for the right to put American bases on British territory in the Western Hemisphere.

In addition, the British turned to a new kind of ship, a miniature destroyer known as the corvette. It did so because full-sized destroyers were too expensive and took too long to build. The miniature destroyers were designed specifically for convoy escort and anti-submarine warfare. Small, awkward, and slow, they were punishing for the crews. However, they were essential to keeping Britain fed and fighting in the desperate years from 1940 to 1943.

THE THREAT REMAINS

The threat to the British remained very serious. One of the biggest problems in British defenses was a gap in air cover. As the war went on, it became clear that air cover would be central to defeating the U-boat threat.

A large stretch of the central Atlantic was out of reach of ground-based air. In 1941, the British lost some 3 million tons of shipping—meaning ships, not cargo. By comparison, Britain managed to build slightly more than 1 million tons. That rate of loss was not sustainable.

CODE BREAKING

Also important were the role of codes and codebreaking. Enigma was the German cipher system, and Bletchley Park was the British effort to break German code. Enigma started as a system for confidential business communication, but the German military grabbed it for use in their own ciphers.

The encoding device looked like a typewriter. Typed messages were encrypted with a series of adjustable rotors that took the original message and encoded it for radio transmission. If the recipient knew the proper rotor settings, the encrypted message could be converted back into plain text.

Polish intelligence had done extensive work on the German communications system. They passed their knowledge on to the British along with a model Enigma machine.

It wasn't enough, though, to know how the machine worked. Code breakers also needed to know the proper daily settings of the rotors. Sometimes, one could get lucky and capture those. If not, it was necessary to watch for an operator error. For instance, if an operator always ended or started a message with the same phrase, that would provide codebreakers with an enormously useful head start.

The British set up an enormous organization, Bletchley Park, to deal with German ciphers. The material they found was so valuable that it was essential the Germans not discover their codes had been compromised. A new level of classification—ultra—was created for this intelligence. Elaborate methods were used to disguise the origins of the information and misdirect the Germans about where any leaks might have been.

PLAYING INTO BRITISH HANDS

In the context of the U-boat war, Enigma intelligence told the British Royal Navy where German wolf packs—concentrated groups of U-boats—were located so that convoys could sail around and warships could target them. Perhaps more importantly, the Royal Navy could target the long-range supply vessels the U-boats used to stay on station.

The intelligence truly began to pay off in mid-1941. Admiral Dönitz, Hitler's U-boat commander, played right into British hands. He stayed in constant contact with his fleet, which allowed for devastating coordination. However, the

constant flow of messages gave British code breakers an enormous supply of raw material with which to work.

FLASHY SPECTACLES

While the U-boat struggle was the most serious threat to Britain, it was constant and relatively unglamorous. In contrast, a pair of incidents in 1941 offered much more flashy spectacles to draw the attention of the British and German publics.

The overall commander of the German navy, Admiral Erich Raeder, was eager to see a triumph for his surface fleet. Raeder sent Germany's capital ships—cruisers and battleships—on raiding missions that preyed on commercial ships in the Atlantic. However, this is not what cruisers and battleships are best suited for.

In 1941, the pocket battleships *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* swung through the Atlantic and returned safely to home port in France in their first major outing. The most significant such raid, though, was a cruise by the battleship *Bismarck*, escorted by the heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen*. This was more a publicity stunt than a sensible military mission.

The British easily spotted the *Bismarck* when it left home in May 1941 and tracked it steadily across the North Atlantic, including pursuit by the battleship *Prince of Wales* and battlecruiser *Hood* between Greenland and Iceland. The *Bismarck* got the better of this. A lucky shot from one of the *Bismarck*'s main guns set off the *Hood*'s ammunition storage and blew it apart. The ship and its 1,400 men were sunk in three minutes, with only three survivors.

The British got their revenge, though, when torpedo bombers from the aircraft carrier *Ark Royal* caught the *Bismarck* in the central Atlantic. A lucky torpedo jammed the battleship's rudder. The weight of the Royal Navy came down on the German vessel and pounded it into destruction.

AMERICA'S ROLE IN THE U-BOAT WAR

American ships escorted merchant convoys as far

as Iceland prior to formally entering the war. In July 1941, the United States actually occupied neutral Iceland to keep it out of German hands. Then, in October 1941, German subs torpedoed two US destroyers: the *Kearny* and the *Reuben James*. Neither side wanted to make that clash into grounds for open war just yet. That would await the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

The United States formally joined the war in December 1941. Until now, the American president Franklin Roosevelt had been reluctant to ask too much on the American people related to German aggressions and the European conflict. As a result, the East Coast was left terribly vulnerable to German attack.

The American admiral Ernest King was brusque and abrasive, and he was particularly hostile to the British. As a result, the US Navy made no serious preparations for convoys in US waters and refused to take advantage of Britain's extensive experience in anti-submarine warfare. It would be four months before the US managed to sink a single German sub.

However, the US did slowly manage to adapt to new circumstances. Its navy was dragged kicking and screaming to focus on convoys and anti-submarine warfare. In turn, much US commercial shipping shifted away from the East Coast. Some of it moved to the Intracoastal Waterway of the US southeast.

One other way in which the United States dealt with the U-boat threat was with sheer numbers. The American economy went into full-speed production of escort craft. Merchant ships had previously been built like tailored suits—each one a little different. Now, it was all about mass production: standardized vessels churned out at top speed. Key to this was the Liberty ship, which was a cargo vessel designed to be quick and easy to produce.

STRUGGLES IN 1942 AND 1943

After December 1942, America was building ships faster than Germany could

sink them. Still, the continued losses of ships—and particularly of men—in 1942 and early 1943 threatened the Allied war effort. The air gap in the middle Atlantic continued to have deadly consequences for Allied shipping. Furthermore, German U-boat production was ramping up at the same time as America produced more Liberty ships.

In early 1942, the Germans added a fourth rotor to the three-rotor Enigma machine, making code breaking more difficult and erasing the intelligence advantage the British had enjoyed. After a peak in losses in summer 1942, the low point was probably later in the year.

In just two months—October and November 1942—German U-boats managed to sink more than 200 merchant ships, representing 1.3 million tons of capacity. At about the same time, Hitler became so enamored of his U-boats—and appalled by the German surface fleet's lack of success—that he screamed at his navy chief, Admiral Raeder, for a full hour. Raeder resigned, and Hitler promoted his sub guru Dönitz to replace him.

Dönitz now decided to throw everything he had—300 U-boats—at the key theater in the North Atlantic. This was to be the climactic showdown. The British were able to solve the four-wheel Enigma cipher, regaining their access to German message traffic. Dönitz never accepted the possibility that his communications with sub captains might be compromised.

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS

The effectiveness of Allied escorts grew steadily as larger escorts carried more punch and better sonar and radar with which to find enemy subs. They also developed the hedgehog: a forward-firing battery of depth charges.

Both sides in the Battle of the Atlantic—the Germans and Allies alike—developed acoustic torpedoes about roughly the same time, and put them into action in summer and fall of 1943. Acoustic torpedoes are

homing devices, tracking the sound of their targets. These were extremely effective.

For the Allies, Fido, the Mark 24 mine, was actually a torpedo. It was only called a mine to be deliberately misleading, and it gave the Allies a weapon that could track even submerged submarines. More importantly, it could be dropped from aircraft.

The most important factor in the momentum shift from German to Allied advantage was the amount and quality of air cover available to protect convoys. From air bases in Canada, Iceland, and Britain, Allied heavy bombers designed to attack Berlin could now fly long hours over the Atlantic: hunting subs and ready to drop the new acoustic torpedoes.

In addition, the Allies developed a new class of ship: small aircraft carriers known as escort carriers, each equipped with a small squadron of planes. This meant that convoys could now carry their air cover with them.

As a result, the situation immediately started to look better, beginning in 1943. Some terrible losses continued. March 1943 was especially bad, but the U-boats were taking losses, too. Ultimately, for the Germans to win the war at sea, they had to kill many more freighters than they incurred in lost U-boats. Those numbers were starting to look bad for the Germans.

Dönitz eventually gave up hope. In May 1943, he lost more than 40 subs and called off the Battle of the Atlantic.

SUGGESTED READING

Montserrat, *The Cruel Sea*.

Symonds, *World War II at Sea*.

Van der Vat, *The Atlantic Campaign*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How dangerous was the submarine campaign to Allied victory?

2. What are the ethical implications of waging war by cutting off food?

16

THE ALLIES INVADE ITALY: SICILY TO ANZIO

The war for North Africa—with Britain and America on one side, and Germany on the other—ended in May 1943 as the last remnants of Germany's forces and its Italian allies surrendered in Tunisia. After that, an Allied decision to embark on an extended campaign in Italy—beginning with Sicily—would cost hundreds of thousands of lives.

A DISAGREEMENT

There was deep disagreement among the Allies in spring 1943 about the proper course to take. Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union continued to lobby the west for a direct attack on Nazi-dominated Europe.

Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt weren't convinced that this was the best course. The two Allied leaders had met at Casablanca in North Africa at the beginning of 1943 to determine the main goals of Allied policy. The Americans wanted to move as quickly as possible to directly confront Hitler's war machine. That would mean landing on the European mainland in 1943.

The British, by contrast, thought that was a terrible idea. Britain had been fighting for two and a half years longer than the Americans and were starting to run short of able-bodied men. They were desperate to minimize their loss of manpower. If an invasion of France failed, there was a real possibility that the British wouldn't have the capacity to undertake it again.

INVADING SICILY

The result of this collision at Casablanca was that the British and Americans were forced into a reluctant compromise. The Americans agreed to delay a landing in France, though that left the Soviets deeply unhappy. In part to satisfy the Americans and in part to not let months pass by without some initiative, the western Allies agreed to focus on Italy, starting off with a summer invasion of the island of Sicily.

EISENHOWER'S GIFT

Preparing for Sicily allowed General Dwight Eisenhower—the American commander of the European theater—to show off his gifts as a commander. Eisenhower's job was to organize and coordinate. He had air, sea, and land forces from the United States, the United Kingdom, and a host of smaller allies. His straightforward and diplomatic nature made him perfect for the job of making those moving parts function together under one command.

Dwight Eisenhower

Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily, commenced on July 10, 1943. Delays in organizing the landings gave the Germans time to organize their defenses, but growing Allied air and naval superiority meant that the success of the invasion was more or less guaranteed.

While great confusion characterized the Allied troops' ability to get ashore, Italian resistance was half-hearted at best. Once the Allies were safely on land, they were sure to conquer the island. However, the way that took place caught everyone by surprise. It also pointed to a source of tension between the Allies that would last the remainder of the war.

The British Eighth Army under Bernard Montgomery was to play the dominant role in the invasion plan, while the American Seventh Army under George Patton was to support to the main British effort. This was a terrible match. Montgomery was slow and methodical. General Patton was by contrast fast and reckless. The two were congenitally incapable of getting along.

A TROUBLED CAMPAIGN

Montgomery's job was to land at the southern point of Sicily and then move across the eastern side, aiming at the harbor city of Messina on the northeast corner of the triangle. Messina would let the Allies cut off an avenue of retreat for the German and Italian troops on Sicily. Montgomery's methodical advance allowed the Germans to create tenacious defenses to bog him down.

As Montgomery crawled toward Messina, Patton refused to take a subordinate role. He raced to take the

port of Palermo and east along the top of Sicily, using amphibious landings along the way, to get to Messina before Montgomery did.

The Americans had decided that Montgomery was too stodgy to seize opportunities, and they were right. The British, however, decided that Patton was a glory hound. They were right as well. Patton made matters worse for himself when he met and berated two American GIs who were in treatment for battle fatigue, which is now called post-traumatic stress. It nearly ended his career.

Eisenhower had to replace Patton with the thoroughly reliable Omar Bradley. In the bigger picture, his job of getting these personalities to work together had become much harder. The invasion of Sicily gave the Allies additional combat experience, but it did not inflict serious damage on the Axis. However, organizing and coordinating the invasion—which involved more than 150,000 men—and keeping troops supplied after landing provided vital

experience for the D-Day landings a year later.

The Allied invasion also paid some larger dividends. For example, Hitler called off his summer offensive at Kursk on the Eastern Front as a result of the Allied invasion of Sicily. The Mediterranean islands of Corsica and Sardinia were liberated, neither of which had seemed important enough in 1943 to justify an invasion on their own.

AFTER SICILY

After the Sicily operation, there was a deep disagreement about strategy between the British and the Americans. Churchill wanted an invasion of mainland Italy before any attack on France. Politically, for the US public and for relations with Stalin, it was impossible to imagine a year without any major developments in the war against Germany. This political imperative made it seem like something had to be done, and the only reasonable possibility was an invasion of Italy itself.

However, plans for the invasion of Italy were coming to fruition at the same time as the invasion of Sicily had driven Italy out of the war. The Grand Council of Italian dictator Benito Mussolini's fascist party, which had been purely a ceremonial body, completely lost confidence in him and voted him out of leadership after the Allies invaded Sicily. Italy's King Victor Emmanuel then removed Mussolini from office.

He was replaced by Marshal Pietro Badoglio, who assured the Germans of his continuing loyalty while negotiating secretly with the Allies to get Italy out of the war. He proved utterly incompetent at both tasks. Even while Badoglio was trying to cut a deal, the Germans had begun preparing the seizure of Italy. At the same time, the Allies were speeding ahead with their plan for invading Italy.

INVADING ITALY

The Allied invasion of Italy took place in early September 1943, essentially simultaneously with Italy's surrender to the Allies. It was a fiasco. The first British landings, intended to distract German attention, took place

on the toe of the Italian boot. The main British and American invasion under US General Mark Clark followed about a week later. These landings occurred at Salerno on the west coast of Italy just after Eisenhower announced the Italian surrender.

These landings met with much more serious opposition than the Allies were expecting. US General Clark was close pulling his troops off the beach before direct fire support from naval heavy guns helped the operation to succeed. The Italians then quickly gave up, but the Germans put up ferocious and effective resistance.

The Italians were unsure of what to do in response to the surrender and German occupation. However, Italian soldiers who fought the Germans were massacred, including several thousand on the occupied Greek island of Cephalonia.

After a week of resistance at the landing beaches, the German commander, General Albert Kesselring, decided that the Allies were on the Italian mainland to stay. He withdrew German troops to carefully prepared defensive positions, the Gustav Line, stretching all the way across the Italian Peninsula and blocking the Allied advance. The Allies hit the Gustav Line at the end of 1943. They were roughly 100 miles south of Rome, and they were there for the next six months.

MONTE CASSINO

Two key battles illustrate the incredible tenacity of Allied soldiers fighting in Italy as well as the enormous waste in lives produced by uninspired generalship in bad conditions. These battles were Monte Cassino in early 1944 and the amphibious landing at Anzio in January 1944.

Monte Cassino was a hilltop monastery at the western end of the Gustav Line, commanding the routes to Rome from the south. It was a superb natural defensive fortress. It seems as though the Germans initially held back from using it because of the monastery's historical significance.

However, the Allies came to believe the that site was being used by the Germans. They bombed the monastery into rubble in February 1944, creating excellent defensive positions for the Germans, who then occupied the ruins. From February through May 1944, Allied troops pounded away on German defenses, taking terrible losses.

ANZIO

Winston Churchill hoped that Italy might get the Allies out of the necessity of a landing in France. Clark agreed to try to break the German defensive line across Italy by going around it. His plan was an amphibious landing on the Italian west coast at Anzio, roughly halfway between the Gustav Line and Rome.

As a distraction, Clark ordered frontal assaults on German defenses in January 1944 that succeeded only at costing Allied lives. The attacks were such failures that they petered out before the Anzio landings, providing no distractions at all.

American and British troops went ashore at Anzio on January 22 and found themselves facing essentially no German resistance. They had managed to take the Germans entirely by surprise. However, the American commander, John Lucas, failed to press inland and cut the German supply lines south to the Gustav Line.

Although the Germans were surprised, they responded effectively by rushing troops to the Anzio perimeter, creating yet another expensive deadlock for the Allies. For four months, the Allies were penned inside of a tiny beachhead and pounded by German artillery.

The deadlock was broken by a months-long buildup of massive materiel and manpower superiority, including the addition of French colonial and Polish manpower. Starting on May 11, a huge artillery bombardment finally produced a breakthrough, unhinging the German defensive line. Now, the Allies could push north.

Even then, however, Clark's command led to poor outcomes. Presented with

a choice of cutting off retreating German troops or heading straight to Rome and the publicity bonanza it offered, Clark chose Rome. The German Tenth Army managed to escape north to continue the fight.

LATER EVENTS

When the Gustav Line finally broke, the Germans made a deliberate decision not to defend Rome, declaring it an open city. No fighting took place during the liberation.

The Americans rolled into Rome on June 4, 1944, just two days before the D-Day invasion. For all of Rome's symbolic value, northern Italy's Po River Valley—the industrial heartland of Italy—continued to work for the German war effort.

The Germans repeated the tactics they used in southern Italy, setting up what they called the Gothic Line in northern Italy to match the Gustav line they had used earlier. Allied forces in bad terrain pounded themselves against German defenses, losing lives without much point.

By this time, the Allies were ashore in France, and so Italy became an even more marginal part of the war. Nonetheless, the US, British, and Canadian divisions in Italy continued to slog north for nearly a year. At last, as Germany approached defeat, the Allies launched a final offensive in April 1945, and the front collapsed. It had taken the Allies 22 months to get from Sicily to the Alps.

THE FATE OF MUSSOLINI

After Mussolini was deposed during the Allied invasion of Italy, he was imprisoned by the Italian government itself. Italy then changed sides, creating a very real possibility of Mussolini facing an Allied trial for war crimes.

Hitler didn't want to see his former partner in Allied hands. Otto Skorzeny, Hitler's go-to man for impossible tasks, led German SS commandos on a mission to spring Mussolini from his comfortable internment at a ski resort in the northern Italian mountains. Hitler then installed Mussolini as head of an Italian puppet regime, the so-called Italian

Social Republic, made up of Italy north of the front lines against the Allies.

Mussolini didn't have much power. He did, however, manage to organize trials and executions for some of his old political enemies.

Still with Mussolini at this point were many fanatics, who now took out their frustrations on the left wing and industrial workers of the north. Occupied northern Italy devolved into a vicious civil war. On one side were the Germans and Italian fascist militias, who carried out ferocious reprisals. On the other side were Italian partisans, mostly communist or socialist, alongside escaped prisoners of war. They carried out guerrilla attacks. This war behind the front lines killed as many as 150,000 people—predominantly civilian bystanders.

At the very end of the war, Mussolini finally met his own richly deserved reward. As the Germans rushed to evacuate Italy, Mussolini and his mistress tried to escape across the border to Switzerland. They were caught, along with about a dozen other members of Mussolini's puppet government. The partisans shot them and hauled their bodies to Milan, where Mussolini's body was hung upside down at a gas station.

CONCLUSION

The Italian campaign cost the Allies 300,000 men killed, wounded, or captured, while costing the Germans 450,000 or 500,000, though the precise figures are murky. Meanwhile, the Allied landings in Italy were not a total waste of resources better used elsewhere.

Holding southern Italy meant taking control of air bases that could be used for strikes against southern Germany and oil fields in Romania. The US 15th Air Force operated from southern Italy, providing some capabilities that were not otherwise available to the Allies.

SUGGESTED READING

Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*.

Porch, *The Path to Victory*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Were there better options for the Allies than an invasion of the Italian mainland?

2. Was the Italian campaign a waste of resources for one side or both sides?

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STRATEGIC BOMBING OVER GERMANY

In World War II, the costs of the military conflict were fully brought home to civilian populations, unlike in World War I. Strategic bombing took a terrible toll on lives that armies never reached.

The cost was also high for air crews. The US Eighth Air Force—which carried out the strikes against the German homeland—suffered 26,000 dead. In turn, the Royal Air Force Bomber Command lost 55,000 men. Yet no European country was driven to surrender by air power. War economies continued to function. This raises the question: Were the benefits of strategic bombing worth the costs?

A PARADOX

When World War II broke out, an odd paradox emerged in thinking about how air power would be used. On the one hand, air theorists had assumed that bombing cities was a war-winning weapon. On the other hand, political and military leaders viewed attacks on civilian populations as immoral and unacceptable.

Until September 1939—when Germany bombed Warsaw during its invasion of Poland, killing several thousand people—there had been a mutual deterrence in place in much of Europe. That had temporarily restrained attacks on major cities. However, in May 1940, Germany bombed the Dutch city of Rotterdam, killing nearly a thousand people and destroying the city center. After that, neither side showed much restraint about bombing civilian targets.

Meanwhile, the British Royal Air Force had only limited capacity to attack German cities during the early part of the war. It took time to build a stock of heavy bombers capable of inflicting serious damage. Given these limitations, the Royal Air Force Bomber Command couldn't inflict much damage on German industry from 1940 to 1942. It lacked the precision to go after particular targets.

The only way for British planes and crews to safely bomb Germany and get home again was to attack at night. Night bombing protected air crews, but it prevented even the pretense of going after factories. The only targets the British could be reasonably sure of hitting were entire cities, and that meant bombing civilians.

STRIKING GERMANY BY AIR

The British began with cities in western Germany and on the northern coast, within relatively easy reach of the British Isles. The first thousand-bomber raid hit Cologne in May 1942, followed by strikes on the industrial Ruhr area and the city of Hamburg. The damage was still not especially severe, but it showed what might be coming soon.

Churchill and the American president, Franklin Roosevelt, met at Casablanca in January 1943 to coordinate strategy. They hammered out a number of agreements on wartime cooperation. One of the most important was on the Combined Bomber Offensive against Germany. The pieces were falling into place for a serious effort to destroy Germany from the air. The British would continue bombing Germany at night, while the Americans would bomb during the day.

For the British, the campaign was led by Arthur "Bomber" Harris, who had taken over the RAF's Bomber Command in February 1942. The British and the Americans also now had four-engine heavy bombers in sufficient numbers to do serious damage to Germany. The British relied on the Lancaster, perhaps the best bomber of the war. They also had a two-engine light bomber, the Mosquito, which was extremely effective in more specialized roles.

The Americans had two key planes: the slightly older B-17 Flying Fortress and the B-24 Liberator. Both had four engines and could carry four tons of bombs, at least on short-range missions.

BRITISH LOSSES

Despite their varying approaches—with the British Bomber Command attacking at night and the American Eighth Air Force attacking during the day—both forces suffered terrible losses in return for mixed results.

On the British side, Harris was cautious, focusing his efforts on western Germany. That limitation was not necessarily a problem. Though Berlin lay far to the east, key industrial centers in the Ruhr Valley and at Hamburg were in easy reach. In spring and early summer 1943, Bomber Command hammered the Ruhr, shifting in late summer and fall to Hamburg and Hanover, somewhat deeper inside Germany. These raids were quite successful.

At Hamburg in July 1943, a Royal Air Force raid set off a firestorm: a horrible phenomenon set off by a chain of events in a bombing raid. Some 46,000 people died.

Early successes made Harris overconfident, and he moved from the successful and damaging Ruhr and Hamburg campaigns to deep attacks against Berlin. This was much less effective and more costly for the British.

British fighters lacked the range to accompany the bombers all the way to Berlin. This meant the bombers were without escort. And German night fighters were deadly. British losses climbed to unsustainable levels. In March 1944, bomber losses hit 20 percent in a single raid, and it was clear that Bomber Command could not continue.

AMERICAN LOSSES

The US air force, which at this time operated under the Army as the Army Air Corps, took an entirely different conceptual approach than the British, but it ended in much the same place. The American philosophy was to pursue the precision bombing of key military targets and industrial bottlenecks to shut down the German economy. Those included submarine pens, which were too heavily armored to allow for much success, but also ball-bearing plants and oil and petroleum facilities. (Many of the moving parts in machine such as tanks and planes rely on ball bearings to function.)

The US military had a great faith in the power of technology to overcome obstacles. In particular, the United States possessed the Norden bombsight, which it believed to be an instrument of extraordinary precision, automatically compensating for an aircraft's speed, heading, altitude, and wide speed. However, the Norden bombsight turned out to not be much more effective than other ways of guiding bombers. On average, US bombers could put only about 30 percent of their bombs within 1,000 feet of their target.

In the second half of 1943, having finally built up large numbers of heavy bombers, the Americans tried to put their philosophy of precision targeting of key sectors into practice, going after a ball-bearing complex at Schweinfurt and Romanian oil wells at Ploesti.

It was a disaster. In an extraordinarily complex mission, 370 B-17s attacked Schweinfurt, and 60 were lost—that is, one in six on a single mission. Ploesti was worse. Of the roughly 160 American B-24 bombers that hit Ploesti in August 1943, a third were shot down on that single mission and another third were damaged.

EISENHOWER STEPS IN

In the first half of 1944, Bomber Command and the Eighth Air Force alike were saved from themselves by the US general Dwight Eisenhower.

In preparation for the impending D-Day landings, Allied aircrews were redirected away from the terribly dangerous missions against urban and industrial targets deep within Germany, and instead directed to focus on targets on Europe's west coast to prepare for the Normandy invasion. This took much of the pressure off the shattered bomber crews.

It was a tragedy, though perhaps a necessary one, for the peoples of occupied Western Europe. The civilians of France, Belgium, and the Netherlands were the victims of Nazis. Allied bombs fell on them nonetheless.

A DIFFERENT SITUATION

When Eisenhower was convinced that the Allies were safely lodged in France after D-Day, he released the bombers of Bomber Command and the Eighth Air Force to return to the bombing of Germany. By now, the situation had fundamentally changed.

Long-range fighters, capable of escorting heavy bombers all the way to their targets, were a key development in the Allied war effort. These helped more bombers reach their targets and also steadily whittled away at the Luftwaffe.

The Americans designed and built the P-51 Mustang fighter, which came from an excellent design. To reach its full capabilities, though, the P-51 needed a British Rolls-Royce engine. Finally, to protect bombers attacking throughout Germany, the Allies needed a relative simple piece of technology: disposable fuel tanks, which were equipped on the P-47 Thunderbolt fighters as well as the Mustangs. By spring 1944, P-51s could accompany heavy bombers all the way to Berlin and back.

Additionally, Allied bombers were hitting areas that Germany could not afford to leave defenseless: the western coast of Europe and German cities. Beginning in 1944, as Allied bombing raids were accompanied by fighters, German fighter planes flew up to meet Allied bombers as they always had. This time, though, they met Allied fighters and died.

Finally, the Americans began hitting economic targets that were both vital and vulnerable. American bombing established new priorities, going after

Germany's transportation network and fuel production. By the beginning of 1945, the German train network stopped functioning under Allied attack. At long last, airpower was finally revealing its potential to achieve victory.

CONCLUSION

The costs of strategic bombing, in terms of dollars and of human lives, was enormous. German bombing killed 60,000 people in Britain. Roughly 500,000 were killed in Germany, with another 7.5 million left homeless. Germany's major cities were devastated. In addition, thousands of French civilians were killed by British and American bombing as part of the preparation for the D-Day landings. This raises the question: Was it all worth it?

Critics of strategic bombing certainly have a point. The German economy kept producing war material right up to the end of the war. The hopes of American air-power theorists—that precision bombing would wreck the German economy—proved unfounded.

However, strategic bombing had important effects on the outcome of the war that are often underappreciated. The German economy, despite all the pounding it took, continued to run. But German arms production stopped growing in mid-1943 and remained flat for the rest of the war.

While strategic bombing consumed Allied resources on a colossal scale, it forced the Germans to do the same. Some 40–50 percent of German war production was devoted to aviation. Much of that was not for ground support or for Germany to bomb its enemies, especially late in the war. It was for building fighters to combat Allied bombers. Without those Allied bombers, there would have been much more German war production sent to the front lines.

These factors leave aside an important angle: the moral one. Before the outbreak of World War II, most political leaders felt it was illegitimate to target civilians. Bombing cities meant killing many people who had nothing

to do with the war. Yet it's striking how little questioning there was of urban mass-bombings. There were some isolated voices in opposition, but not many. Roosevelt and Churchill would likely say that the evil of Hitler's Nazi regime justified a great many morally questionable acts to destroy it.

SUGGESTED READING

Crane, *American Airpower Strategy in World War II*.

O'Brien, *How the War was Won*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How do you assess the morality of the indiscriminate bombing of civilian populations?

2. Were the payoffs from strategic bombing worth the enormous costs?

18

ALLIED INDUSTRY, SPYING, AND WONDER WEAPONS

This lecture examines intelligence efforts—such as spying, espionage, and assassination—as off-battlefield contributors to the Allies' ultimate battlefield success. It also looks at the development of wartime technology.

HUMAN INTELLIGENCE

There are two basic kinds of intelligence, and they had very different effects on the course of the war. The first is human intelligence, or HUMINT. It's fundamentally about gathering information through agents who are in position to have access to knowledge not available through other means.

Axis and Allied agents spied on one another while recruiting informants. Allen Dulles, who later became head of the CIA, worked for its predecessor, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), in Switzerland during World War II. He cultivated a network of Germans and Swiss who travelled back and forth between the two countries, gathering information that he couldn't obtain otherwise. Turkey and Spain were also hotbeds of spy activity.

Spain served as a conduit to get information into and out of France. The Allies relied on networks of sympathizers in France to smuggle Allied pilots who had been shot down over France. Those pilots were smuggled across the Pyrenees into Spain, from where they could return home.

After the defeat of France in June 1940, British prime minister Winston Churchill was desperate for anything he might be able to do to strike back against Germany. He created a new Special Operations Executive.

The Americans followed suit. The American system was new and bore the imprint of its founder: William "Wild Bill" Donovan. Donovan brought enormous energy and creativity to the OSS.

The problem—and the ugly secret of the OSS during World War II—is that it didn't actually accomplish very much. The same was true of Britain's Special Operations Executive. Wild Bill was something of a cowboy, lacking discipline and administrative skill.

There was one assassination of a major Nazi official, Reinhard Heydrich, who was killed by British-trained assassins in Czechoslovakia, leading to massacres of the Czech population.

The successes of these intelligence networks was in getting Allied pilots and escaped prisoners back home and—to some degree—carrying out sabotage prior to Allied invasions.

Tension
While there was cooperation between the British and the American intelligence services, there was also a great deal of tension.

RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS

Issues of principle divided British and American approaches. While intelligence involved gathering information, another big part was assisting local resistance to the Nazis. That was not simple. Resistance was often divided between right-wing and left-wing movements.

For example, in Greece and Yugoslavia, resistance movements came in two flavors. In Yugoslavia, the Chetniks were ethnically Serb and right wing; the Partisans were multiethnic and left wing. The Americans, as newcomers, were not especially concerned with postwar politics, and simply wanted to back those who were most effective at killing fascists. And that tended to be left-wing movements.

The British were playing a long game. They had a Mediterranean empire that they fully intended to reestablish after the war. It might make sense to back communist resistance to the Nazis, but they wanted to be very careful.

Americans would happily make contact with the Partisans in Yugoslavia and smuggle them arms from Italy, even though the British were supposed to be managing that relationship. Regardless, all of their maneuvering did neither the British nor the Americans any good. As soon as Yugoslavia was liberated by the advancing Soviet army, the Partisan leader Tito expelled British and American agents from the country.

GERMAN INTELLIGENCE

The main German intelligence organization was the Abwehr. Created as a counterintelligence service, it expanded before the war under its director Wilhelm Canaris, a slippery and devious political operator.

When the Nazis came to power, Canaris supported them, seeing them as a tool for restoring Germany's place in the world. When Hitler eventually turned his sights to Czechoslovakia, though, Canaris got nervous. He thought Hitler was pushing too far, too fast. He started working behind the scenes to organize Hitler's overthrow. This never went anywhere.

German espionage against the United States and Britain went nowhere, either. The FBI quickly rounded up German espionage teams sent to the US. German spies arrested in the United States were treated as soldiers fighting out of uniform, subject to execution.

The British were able to work something even more effective. Because they were on an island, the British had excellent control over entry and exit. When war broke out, the British rounded up the entire German spy network. In what became known as the double-cross system, the British turned those German agents. This created the impression among German intelligence that the spies were still active and operating while the British used them to send back false or misleading information.

SOVIET INTELLIGENCE

The most successful human intelligence operations were run by the Soviets. However, those operations were run as much against Soviet allies as against the Axis.

The Soviets use money and sex—the ancient methods of the spying trade. They also employed communist ideology. Committed Marxists might be more dedicated to their ideology than even to their own government. Those ideological recruits were often more reliable than people who spied for money or sex.

By far the most important Soviet human intelligence came from Richard Sorge,

a German communist operating as a journalist in Japan who was closely tied to the German embassy. He gave Stalin early warning of Hitler's attack, as did other Soviet agents inside Germany. Unfortunately, Stalin ignored those warnings.

Stalin did pay attention to Sorge's follow-up intelligence that Japan was going to war with the US in December 1941. That allowed the Soviets to pull troops from their eastern frontier to help defend against the Germans.

The Soviets also enjoyed success at breaking into the US and British government. Pulling in committed communists, the Soviets recruited a remarkable haul of agents in the United Kingdom: the so-called Cambridge Five, who provided valuable information from high levels of the British government for decades to come. In the United States, State Department official Alger Hiss was also a reliable conduit of inside information about US policy.

SIGNALS INTELLIGENCE

The biggest impact on the war came from the other type of intelligence: signals intelligence, or SIGINT. Especially important was the British breaking and reading of German radio traffic. At the time and ever since, it has often been called Ultra because it was so valuable and so important that it needed a new level of classification above top secret: ultra-secret.

German radio traffic was encrypted using a variant of a prewar device used for business communications. In 1939, the Germans made their operations even more secure. The Polish—who had made substantial progress on breaking the German cipher—handed off their work to the British and French, who had better resources.

The British brought the top British mathematicians to work on the problem at a special facility called Bletchley Park. To be useful, the British had to be able to read German messages more or less in real time. By late 1941, remarkable feats of

mathematics and engineering were producing tens of thousands of deciphered intercepts of German messages every month.

Alan Turing—more or less the founder of modern computer science—was a key figure in Bletchley Park's achievements. However, after the war was over, he was driven to suicide by persecution for being homosexual.

Ultra was especially important when and wherever Germany relied on radio communications, like in the war at sea and the war in North Africa. Once the war moved onto mainland Europe in 1944, where Germany used land lines, Ultra was less advantageous.

TECHNOLOGY

Technology also played a role in the war in the Europe, but its value is easy to overstate. Most of the important technical achievements were common across all the major powers.

There were exceptions: some new technologies were more one-sided. In fact, it was Germany that made many of the real technological breakthroughs, but Germany lost the war.

As the conflict turned increasingly against Germany and Hitler became increasingly delusional, he put his faith in wonder weapons: high-tech miracles that would save Germany. German engineering did produce some remarkable systems.

TERRIFYING WEAPONRY

World War II saw the first cruise missile: the German V-1. A cruise missile is essentially a flying bomb. From 1942 until the Allies captured the launch sites in 1944, the Germans launched about 10,000 V-1s against Britain, killing 6,000 people. After Britain was out of reach, V-1s were redirected against key ports on the European Atlantic coast to hit Allies supply shipments. The V-1 was intended purely to kill people and cause terror, which it did very well.

The German follow-up to the V-1 was even more terrifying: the V-2, which was the first ballistic missile. Some 1,400

missiles directed at London killed nearly 3,000 people. Despite being a remarkable technological achievement and far ahead of its time, the V-2 illustrates one of the fundamental problems with the German approach to technology: It didn't fit into a strategy aimed at achieving Germany's goals.

The V-2 was far more expensive than the V-1 to build. It consumed fuel that Germany desperately needed for other goals. It did all of this to deliver the very same payload—a ton of explosives—as the much cheaper V-1.

German tanks show the same problem. German designs—the Panther, the Tiger, and the Tiger II—were remarkably sophisticated. That elaborate engineering, however, meant that manufacturing was expensive and slow. Complexity also made those systems remarkably prone to mechanical breakdown.

Additionally, the Germans built the first jet fighter: the Messerschmitt 262. Once more, it was a great technical achievement. It was, however, expensive, and it came much too late in the war to make much difference. It was also so fast that weapons and tactics hadn't advanced enough to allow it to be used effectively.

THE ALLIED INDUSTRIAL MIRACLE

The real miracle weapon of World War II wasn't a weapon at all. It was mass industrial production. The Allies won the production war against the Axis powers.

Each year the United States was in the war from 1941 to 1945, Americans produced more aircraft than all the Axis powers combined. Britain also outproduced Germany in terms of aircraft each year from 1941 to 1945, as did the Soviet Union.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Natural resources also had an effect. A mechanized economy can't run without oil. Germany, Japan, and Italy had no oil. Much of their war effort was driven by desperate efforts to try to get the oil that they needed to fight. For instance, in the winter of 1942–1943, Hitler lost an entire army fighting at

Stalingrad. The only reason he had an army there was to get to Soviet oil fields on the Caspian Sea.

It wasn't hard in 1941 to get a rough idea of national industrial capacity, access to resources, and available manpower. Knowing that, Adolf Hitler chose in 1941—when he was already at war with the British Empire and its worldwide resources—to also engage the Soviet Union and then the United States. He entered a succession of resource-intensive conflicts that the numbers said he couldn't win. Even so, the German military performed well enough on the battlefield to almost make up for Germany's terrible strategic position.

SUGGESTED READING

Budiansky, *Battle of Wits*.

Milward, *War, Economy, and Society*.

Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why do we pay more attention to spies than to the more important sphere of signals intelligence?

2. If the Allies enjoyed such overwhelming material superiority, why was their victory so long in coming and at such high cost?

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SOVIETS, GERMANS, AND THE EASTERN FRONT

For two years—beginning in the summer of 1943—the Soviet Red Army bore down on Berlin. German soldiers on the Eastern Front knew what was coming. German civilians were familiar enough with Nazi crimes to want to escape Soviet revenge. All who could flee west to escape the Soviets did so, even as Hitler's generals tried to hold off the onrushing tide.

AFTER STALINGRAD

In the aftermath of the Battle for Stalingrad in late 1942 and early 1943, the Soviets pushed the retreating Germans back several hundred miles to central Russia before running out of momentum in late spring 1943. From that point on, the dynamic of the war looked quite different. Until Stalingrad, the Germans took initiatives, and the Soviets had to respond.

Starting in 1943, things began to change. The Germans were depleting their reserves of men and material while the Soviet war machine was hitting its stride, producing tens of thousands of tanks and planes. In addition, Soviet commanders were mastering their trade.

It didn't help the Germans that Hitler had increasingly taken direct and personal control of the military campaign. The command organization for the war effort—the OKW—was itself run by Hitler's reliable lackey, Wilhelm Keitel, who was noteworthy for his total subservience. The army high command itself was in Hitler's personal control.

OPERATION CITADEL

The Soviet offensive after Stalingrad left a giant bulge in the front line around the city of Kursk, Russia, about 300 miles south of Moscow. Both sides recognized it as a natural target for a German counteroffensive. Hitler now pulled together his scarce reserves of tanks, aircraft, and men in what became known as Operation Citadel. It was a pincer movement designed to attack the Kursk bulge from the north and south, cutting it off along with the Soviet troops inside it.

The Soviets devoted enormous resources—artillery, tanks, infantry, mines, and

A POINTLESS BATTLE

Operation Citadel showed how strategically bankrupt the German war effort had become. There was little sense of how that battle might be used to achieve some bigger purpose. It was, essentially, a battle for battle's sake.

barbed wire—to create deep, elaborate defensive belts north and south of the city, ready for the German attack.

Operation Citadel began on July 5, 1943, and it went off the rails almost immediately. On the northern flank, the German attack ground to a halt. On the southern flank, the Germans advanced farther, but the Soviets committed an entire tank army to halt their progression.

This led to a clash of as many as 1,000 tanks in perhaps the largest such battle in history. Known as the Battle of Prokhorovka, the Soviets took significantly more losses than the Germans but blunted the German attack. Hitler ultimately called off Operation Citadel, blaming slow progress and the British and American landings at Sicily. It was the last major German offensive on the Eastern Front.

AFTER OPERATION CITADEL

The Soviets had started the next stage of their plan: attacking north and south of the bulge with overwhelming force. The Germans couldn't hold and had to retreat.

The Germans were giving up territory they could never regain. In turn, the Soviets scooped up fresh manpower as they went through liberated peasant villages. The political significance of their advance was enormous. The more the Soviets won, the more that populations under German occupation knew that cooperation with the Nazis spelled a death sentence once the communists came back.

Through the summer and fall of 1943, the Germans simply found no point at which to stop, turn, and hold back the Soviet onslaught. Any German stand would be bypassed and cut off by Soviet tank formations and left to be crushed by Soviet infantry and artillery.

OPERATIONS IN UKRAINE

Soviet offensives liberated southern Russia and raced on into eastern Ukraine. By September 1943, the Soviets had reached the Dnieper River in central Ukraine. The German high command

hoped that the Dnieper River would serve as a geographical barrier that they could use to break Soviet momentum, at least for a brief time. But it was not to be.

The Soviets captured some small footholds on the west bank of the Dnieper north of Kiev—the Ukrainian capital—and then liberated Kiev itself at the beginning of November 1943.

Most German forces retreated another 200 miles west, letting the Soviets retake western Ukraine. Hitler ordered his troops at Korsun—near the mouth of the Dnieper—to hold onto this isolated position, defying military logic. The Soviets, accordingly, pinched off and destroyed them in January and February 1944.

The Soviet advance finally ran out of steam only when it got to Romania in early spring 1944. However, on balance, momentum was clearly on the Soviets' side.

GERMANY'S ALLIES

Germany's smaller allies—Hungary, Finland, and Romania—needed to get off Hitler's sinking ship before drowning themselves. As the tide of war turned, Hungary's dictator Miklós Horthy replaced the most pro-German members of his government and sent out secret feelers to the Allies to explore the possibility of breaking with the Nazis and surrendering. Hitler caught wind of this, invaded Hungary, and installed a puppet regime, thereby ensuring that Hungary would fight to the bitter end. Once Hungary was under German occupation, 400,000 Hungarian Jews were shipped out of the country to die at Auschwitz.

In the north, Finland found itself in a similarly difficult position. From the Finns' point-of-view, they were just trying to take back what they'd lost to the Soviets in 1940 in fighting now referred to as the Continuation War.

From 1941 through early 1943, the Finns had cooperated with the Germans in surrounding and besieging Leningrad. As the tide of war turned, the Soviets broke the siege of Leningrad in

January 1944 and signaled to the Finns that it was time to reconsider their place in the war. In an armistice agreement signed in September 1944, Finland lost territory while keeping its independence.

THE SUMMER OF JUNE 1944

June 1944 saw the largest and most momentous operation of World War II: the Soviet summer offensive in Belorussia (today's Belarus). Among the Germans and Western historians, it's usually called the Destruction of Army Group Center. To the Soviets, it's Operation Bagration, named after the imperial Russian prince and general Pyotr Bagration who died heroically fighting against Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Russia in 1812.

Fighting on the Eastern Front in the winter of 1943–1944 had pushed the German back in the north, breaking the siege of Leningrad. In the south, the fighting had liberated most of Ukraine. Remaining was a vast German bulge in the center, stretching 200 miles north to south, and almost another 200 miles forward. It was a tempting target for a Soviet offensive.

The Soviet offensive began on June 22, 1944, three years to the day after the German invasion of the Soviet Union. Soviet deception was so effective that it took the Germans several days to realize what they were faced with. By that point, it was too late.

The relentless Soviet advances in the south had pulled Germany's scarce tanks there, leaving the German infantry in Belarus without sufficient tanks to meet Soviet armored offensives and without sufficient trucks to escape Soviet pursuit. Army Group Center in Belarus had almost no armor and very little in the way of motorized transport.

The Soviets, by contrast, had thousands of tanks and other armored vehicles, supported by Lend-Lease trucks from the United States. Soviet armor ripped through German lines and headed west to destroy headquarters, supply dumps, and transportation links.

Still, Hitler instructed German Field Marshal Ernst Busch—the commander of Army Group Center—that retreat was not acceptable. Busch dutifully passed that order onto his troops, dooming them to death or years in Soviet prison camps. In just two weeks, Army Group Center was wiped out, tearing a 200-mile gap in the German front line.

AFTER OPERATION BAGRATION

Operation Bagration left little doubt that German defeat on the Eastern Front was now inevitable. However, because Hitler showed no signs of wanting to end the war, a number of German officers decided that Germany's best chance was to get rid of him and then cut a deal with the Allies.

As German losses mounted, more Germans began to think about getting rid of Hitler and getting out of the war. Because Hitler had already killed, imprisoned, or driven into exile most of his left-wing opposition, the remaining dissidents were on the German right wing or from the military.

Bill Donovan, head of the OSS intelligence service, brought a number of secret German proposals to Roosevelt. However, Donovan and Roosevelt were always fundamentally skeptical. Any German offer of a separate peace might just be a fake, designed to sow division. Even if an offer were genuine, the danger of alienating Stalin was too great.

THE PLOT AGAINST HITLER

The German opposition to Hitler didn't know that a separate peace with the US was impossible. The German officers plotting against Hitler got their chance on July 20, 1944. While Hitler was visiting the Eastern Front, a conservative officer and wounded combat veteran named Claus von Stauffenberg planted a bomb under a meeting room conference table. When the bomb went off and shattered the building, Stauffenberg was certain that no one could have survived. He now raced to fly to Berlin to seize power.

Hitler survived the blast, however—protected by the heavy conference table—and once word got out that he was alive, the coup fell apart. Those directly implicated were arrested and shot. The Gestapo began rolling up those involved in planning and even those who had known about the plot but not participated. The ultimate death toll was as high as 5,000. And the war dragged on another year, killing millions.

THE WARSAW UPRISING

One final tragic element of the Soviet drive west was the Warsaw Uprising. The Soviet advance in June and July 1944 had succeeded beyond all expectation, and it eventually began moving into more disputed ground, beginning with the eastern Poland territory that Stalin had taken as part of his prewar deal with Hitler.

The Soviet advance presented the Polish resistance and the Polish government-in-exile with a terrible problem. They knew that Stalin had already massacred tens of thousands of Polish officers and officials. Stalin had even set up his own puppet Polish government in the liberated city of Lublin. Cutting a deal with Stalin would mean surrendering national sovereignty and accepting the massacre of their citizens.

On the other hand, the Polish resistance in Warsaw—known as the Home Army—had some 40,000 fighters but a terrible shortage of weapons and ammunition. An uprising against the Germans—with the Soviets still far away—was doomed to failure, but waiting too long could enable the Soviets to take credit for the liberation. It wasn't clear how the Soviets would relate to a successful Home Army effort.

As Soviet advance units finally entered Warsaw's suburbs on the east bank of the Vistula River, the Home Army began its revolt on August 1, 1944. It did so on the river's west bank, in Warsaw itself. Against all odds, the Home Army seized control of much of the city, but it could not hold out for long against the Germans.

Stalin's troops made it to the east bank of the Vistula River—but they stopped. Ever

since, an argument has raged about Stalin's intentions. The Soviet troops had advanced some 300 miles in a month and a half, and badly needed reinforcements and supplies to get across the Vistula in the face of German resistance.

On the other hand, Stalin certainly had incentive to let the German army exterminate Polish resistance. Stalin made it more difficult for aid to get to the Polish rebels. The British and the Americans wanted to fly one-way missions from the west to drop supplies in Warsaw and then land inside the Soviet Union. Stalin refused.

As Soviet troops watched from the east bank of the Vistula, Hitler's forces ground down the Polish Home Army, systematically levelled Warsaw, and massacred the civilian population. It would take the Soviets another six months to cross the Vistula and liberate the shattered remains of Warsaw.

SUGGESTED READING

Erickson, *The Road to Berlin*.

Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. To what degree do the Soviets deserve credit for winning World War II?

2. What was the balance in Stalin's mind between winning the war and assuring his gains after the war?

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D-DAY, JUNE 1944

For the Allied powers to end Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime in Germany, they needed to get to Berlin. To do that, the British and the Americans had to open a second front. Until that point, the Soviets had been fighting the Germans alone on the Eastern Front.

A NEW FRONT

The question of exactly when and where to open a second front became a bitter and hard-fought question. The Soviets, having handled the overwhelming majority of German manpower since June 1941, wanted to see the second front opened as soon as possible. The US Army likewise wanted to move quickly, pushing for a landing in France as soon as 1942.

Winston Churchill and the British military saw things differently. Britain had been fighting for two and a half years longer than the Americans had. Churchill could envision the point at which he would run out of able-bodied men. Bill Donovan—the head of American intelligence, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS)—concurred in a US decision to delay opening a second front.

The final decision came in the second half of 1943. Roosevelt and Churchill met at the Quadrant Conference in Quebec, Canada, to hammer out strategy for the rest of the war. The Americans endorsed an invasion for the late spring of 1944, and the British did so with resignation.

In November, Roosevelt and Churchill travelled to Tehran to meet Stalin. Roosevelt and Churchill promised a major amphibious landing in France for May 1944. Stalin, in turn, dedicated himself to a Soviet offensive in summer 1944 to draw off German forces. Now even more serious preparations could begin.

A DIFFICULT TASK

The amphibious invasion of France would be an astoundingly difficult feat. The Allied intention had become clear to Nazi Germany. From early 1944, Germany actively prepared along the entire Atlantic coast—wherever beaches might allow the landing of Allied troops.

The Germans debated the proper strategy for meeting the coming invasion. German general Erwin Rommel argued for fighting hard at the water's edge. The alternative was to allow the Allies to get ashore, saving Germany's major reserves for a counterattack.

Hitler wasn't willing to make up his mind. He defended the beaches and kept a reserve of tanks under his personal control, not available to theater commanders.

Roosevelt, Churchill, Eisenhower, and everyone on down knew that the Allied landings would be horribly difficult and costly. They wanted overwhelming force to give them the best odds of success. Failure at the first attempt might mean there would never be another.

PREPARING FOR THE INVASION

Initial planning called for three divisions in the landing force and one airborne division to drop behind the beaches. Eisenhower rejected that absolutely: Five divisions on the beaches was the least he would accept.

The task involved assembling more than a million men and an enormous fleet of warships and transports. In particular, large numbers of highly specialized landing craft were needed to put men and equipment ashore.

The hope was to quickly grab a port and do away with the complicated procedure of hauling supplies across a beach. The Allies had to scrape together landing craft wherever they could find them, including ships at war in the Mediterranean.

In terms of men and equipment, the narrowest bottleneck—threatening to choke off any hopes of a 1944 invasion—was in the big and specialized LSTs, or landing ship tanks, needed for the transport of heavy equipment.

A DEADLY REHEARSAL

Invasion required rehearsal. In April 1944, American troops carried out a landing exercise at Slapton Sands in Devon in southwest England. The exercise was attacked by small German attack craft known as E-boats. In the ensuing confusion, 750 Americans died. More Americans were killed at Slapton Sands than in the actual invasion of Utah Beach two months later.

A FULL MOON AND LOW TIDE

The window of opportunity was quite narrow and involved many constraints. The Allies could land only on beaches, not on rocky coasts. They wanted to be close to a port that they could capture and subsequently use to offload supplies. They needed to be in range of air cover. It had to be during a full moon to operate at night.

They needed to land at low tide to spot and avoid German beach obstacles. That was all predictable, but then they also needed good weather to deliver soldiers to shore and use Allied air superiority. The troops had to be able to defeat the German shore defenses and get inland far enough to create space for follow-up troops to arrive.

Knowing how hard this was going to be, the Allies did everything they could to ensure success. They temporarily halted their strategic bombing campaign against Germany and instead turned their air forces loose on the territory behind the landing beaches.

The bombing was broad enough to tell the Germans what they already knew: An invasion was coming. Tens of thousands of French civilians as well as and Dutch and Belgians were killed by bombing in the Allied campaigns. It is a cost worth remembering.

D-DAY BEGINS

D-Day was planned for early May. That date was then pushed back to June 5 allow for more landing craft. The fleet was so enormous and the demands so great that some ships left harbor as early as June 3. Weather forced Dwight Eisenhower, the supreme commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force, to delay landings by another day. When told he could expect a brief interval of good weather on June 6, he gave the order to go ahead. Doing so went against the advice of a number of his top commanders.

The Allied fleet assembled on the night of June 5 to 6: some 300 warships, 2,000 landing craft, and a swarm of tiny Higgins boats for the last dash to the beach. A massive air and sea bombardment of

the landing sites waited until the final minutes so as not to give the Germans warning to reinforce the beaches. Some 12,000 aircraft were prepared to drop paratroopers, ferry supplies, patrol the skies, and pound roads and bridges to keep the Germans away.

June 6, 1944, was D-Day. (The D in D-Day simply stands for *day*, meaning the precise day when everything would happen.)

At dawn, soldiers representing the United States, Canada, and Britain raced ashore to start the liberation of France and, ultimately, the destruction of Nazi Germany. Five divisions of soldiers were preceded by three airborne divisions—two American and one British—deployed by parachute and glider well behind the beaches to disorganize German resistance.

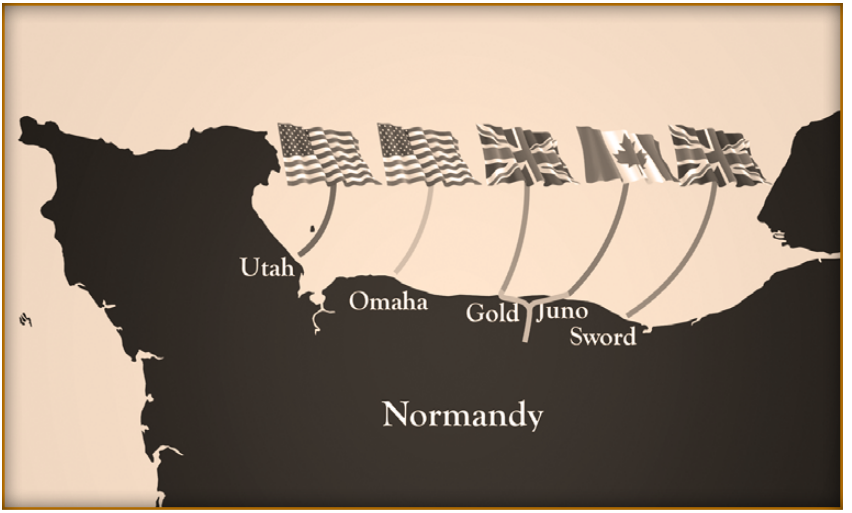
FIVE BEACHES

Allied airborne troops began landing soon after midnight. Clouds confused pilots and led them to miss their landings zones, and German antiaircraft fire brought down gliders. The paratroopers arrived as widely scattered individuals, not as coherent units. The chaos wasn't entirely a bad thing: From the German point of view, it was impossible to figure out any pattern of where British and American soldiers were coming from.

Within a few hours of the first paratroopers, the landing boats also approached five beaches of the Normandy shore. From west to east, these were named Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno, and Sword. Americans took the first two. The British came in at Gold and Sword, and the Canadians at Juno. The British and Canadian landings were made at relatively low cost—perhaps 1,000 killed and wounded at each. The Gold and Juno groups linked up and pushed seven miles inland.

At Utah, US troops obtained their initial objectives relatively easily. In all, four of the five beaches were taken relatively easily.

Omaha Beach was different. Geography worked against the Americans there, as the area featured wide sands and



high cliffs. German guns were dug in, and the Americans became pinned down as soon as they hit the beach. American warships offshore shelled the Germans while the Americans struggled up the beach to establish a foothold. Omaha was a fantastically tough objective, yielding the least progress and producing the most casualties.

ON FRENCH SOIL

Perhaps half the Allied soldiers killed on the beaches on D-Day lost their lives at Omaha Beach. Yet by nightfall, 150,000 Allied troops were fighting on French soil. Within a month, that number was up to 1 million.

The French resistance seized the moment, directed by Eisenhower's high command to accelerate their efforts to sabotage the German war machine. They were assisted and coordinated by several hundred OSS and special operations agents who dropped into France to provide liaison.

Judged by getting ashore and staying there, D-Day was an undoubted Allied triumph. Americans and British were on the ground in Western

Europe, and they wouldn't be dislodged.

Rommel had not anticipated the invasion at that particular moment, and he was home visiting his wife. Though he raced back to take command, it was too late to stop the Allies at the water's edge. Ten days later, Rommel's car was hit by an Allied fighter plane. Rommel was badly injured, and he was out of commission for the rest of the Normandy campaign.

As for the German tank reserve that Hitler kept under his control, the German leader was asleep when the invasion began, and his deputy Alfred Jodl refused to wake him. Even once Hitler was awake, he refused to fully commit his available tanks to strike the Normandy beachhead.

GENERAL PATTON'S DECOY

The Germans were confused because the Allies had engaged in extensive deception to mislead the Germans about where the landings would take place. US general George Patton played an important role in this deception.

He was put in command of a fictional formation in England, the First United States Army Group, that generated press clippings and fake radio traffic to fool German intelligence into thinking that a massive American force was preparing to invade France at the Pas de Calais, where the distance across the English Channel is shortest.

The Germans were thoroughly persuaded that the landings would take place at the Pas de Calais. Even after the landings at Normandy were underway, German commanders held back from a full-scale counterattack, expecting that a more substantial attack was still to come. The German Fifteenth Army defended the Pas de Calais against a phantom enemy.

ALLIED TROUBLE

Though the British and Canadians made it ashore relatively easily on the northeast sector of the landing beaches, they did not manage to make it to the city of Caen, where they

were to hold the left flank of the Allied beachhead. Instead, two German tank divisions used Caen as a base for counterattacks against the beach, and then they led stubborn resistance to keep the Allies penned in.

The Allies also faced serious supply problems. Normandy had significant limitations as a landing zone. Most importantly, access to ports was tricky. For short-term use, the Allies devised mulberries: two artificial harbors of enormous complexity. These were to be hauled in pieces across the English Channel and sunk into the waters off the coast to shelter ships from sea waves and provide unloading facilities.

Assembly of the mulberries began a few days after the invasion. Soon, the two artificial ports were working at top capacity. They were intended as temporary workarounds until the Allies seized a real port. However, a storm wrecked one of the mulberries a week after it was built, and hopes of grabbing a port failed in the face of fanatic Nazi resistance.

German fighters frustrated the Allies for two months before a port could be taken: Cherbourg. The Germans had so thoroughly wrecked Cherbourg, however, that it was essentially unusable. Fortunately, the surviving mulberry worked longer and harder than its creators had dreamed. American supply officers managed wonders in getting supplies across the open and relatively accessible Utah Beach. There, giant LSTs ferried the men and supplies to keep the war moving.

CONCLUSION

The Allies were ashore, but winning that battle would not do any good unless it led to winning a war. The British and Americans found themselves hemmed in onshore. They were seemingly no closer to Berlin, let alone Paris. Unless they could break out of Normandy, all the risk and sacrifice of D-Day would amount to nothing.

SUGGESTED READING

Ryan, *The Longest Day*.

Winik, *1944*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Should the western Allies have tried to make a landing in France earlier?

2. If the D-Day landings had failed, did Hitler have a path to survival or even victory?

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HITLER RUNS OUT OF OPTIONS, FALL 1944

In June 1944, the British and Americans went ashore in France. The Soviet Union's troops devastated Adolf Hitler's soldiers fighting in the east. Within a month after D-Day, though, the Allies were already frustrated. Stubborn German resistance and tough terrain around Normandy meant that the Allies paid dearly for every piece of ground they took.

IN A TOUGH SPOT

Stuck in a small beachhead, the British and the Americans engaged in backbiting and recriminations about who was responsible for the lack of faster progress. The northeastern half of the beachhead was held by the British. Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery had built up troops and firepower, and tried to methodically smash his way through German lines. This was ineffective.

In the American sector to the southwest, US general Omar Bradley wasn't doing much better. Dwight Eisenhower, the supreme Allied commander in Europe, was stuck trying to manage two commanders who weren't doing much and—in the case of Montgomery—a commander who thought he deserved Eisenhower's job.

However, that unglamorous groundwork in June and July laid the foundation for what ultimately would prove to be a huge Allied success. The Allies were steadily grinding down the best German formations, while Allied air power ate away at the reinforcements and supplies that the Germans desperately needed.

A NEW APPROACH

Eventually, Americans devised a new approach to break out of their confined beachhead in Normandy. On July 25, 1944, Operation Cobra began with a massive air attack, bombing a German tank division on a very narrow sector of the front lines.

By July 28, the Nazis were no longer able to organize a coherent defense. Two American armies, one under Omar Bradley and the other under George Patton, raced across France in giant fishhook maneuvers. Patton's Third Army was headed for Paris as fast as his troops could go. Bradley navigated a smaller move.

While the Americans broke out of the southwestern end of the Normandy beachhead, the British and Canadians slugged it out with the Germans at the northeastern end. Bradley's troops now came up behind the Germans, trapping them between Allied forces.

Hitler, however, refused to allow his generals to retreat. Instead, he told his troops to attack west toward the English Channel, away from safety. Montgomery and Bradley saw their chance and took it. As many as 100,000 German troops were surrounded inside what came to be called the Falaise pocket. They were cut off from reinforcements and supplies, and pounded by the Allies from every point of the compass.

CHAOS

At this point, the Germans saw they had no choice but to try to break out. In a desperate attack at the eastern boundary of the pocket, the Germans opened a narrow corridor through Canadian and Polish units long enough to get a number of their troops out. They left their tanks and heavy equipment behind, however.

The situation was so chaotic and confused that it is hard to say just how many Germans got out. At the upper end, perhaps 50,000 German soldiers escaped. Even so, the Normandy campaign was devastating to the German army in the east. It cost the Germans almost 500,000 men killed, wounded, or captured.

EVENTS IN AUGUST

Matters became worse for the Nazis in August. This is when any hope of holding on in France disappeared. Operation Overlord's initial plans had included a landing on the French Mediterranean coast called Operation Anvil. That concept fell apart because of a lack of landing craft.

The idea was revived two months later, however, this time as Operation Dragoon. After Overlord and once their supply problems were under control, the Allies had plenty of landing craft to spare for other jobs. This was the case by August.

American intelligence—the Office of Strategic Services—had extensive networks of agents in southern France to pinpoint German positions. The Germans had been forced to weaken their defenses in southern France to fight in Normandy. As a result, the Allied landings

on August 15, 1944, were an enormous success.

Huge numbers of German troops were taken prisoner, removing them from battle before they could withdraw north to fight again. The invasion also gave the Allies the enormous port of Marseilles to support their troops on the ground in France. Additionally, the rail connections from Marseilles north to Paris remained intact.

THE LIBERATION OF PARIS

The culmination of Operation Overlord and the Allied landings in the south would be the liberation of Paris. This began on August 19. As German troops withdrew, the French resistance proclaimed a general uprising, and scattered fighting against German occupation troops broke out.

The Germans didn't make Paris a major center of resistance. Eisenhower had the luxury of choosing who carried out the ceremonial retaking of the city. He gave this honor to the French. Charles de Gaulle had become leader of the Free French, a government in exile and an army fighting alongside the allies. One of de Gaulle's units, a tank division, led the liberation of Paris.

THE ALLIED ADVANCE

As the Allies passed through Paris and approached the Rhine River—and the German border—their advance became tougher. The biggest problem was supply.

The only thing that kept soldiers at the front going was a supply line improvised around a wrecked rail system. The so-called Red Ball Express used 6,000 trucks around the clock to push supplies to the soldiers.

This was also a spotlight moment for African American soldiers. While racial segregation in the military kept them out of most combat roles, they were instrumental in support roles. The truck drivers who kept the war going were overwhelmingly African American.

The question for the Allies was what to do now. Dwight Eisenhower understood

the material and political realities of war better than any of his subordinates. One task was to free up passage from the Allied port at Antwerp, Belgium—which the Germans had occupied until recently—to make available still more supplies of fuel and ammunition for Allied troops.

To go along with that, Eisenhower wanted to push into Germany along a broad front. The British general, Montgomery, saw it differently, however. Although his entire career had shown him to be slow and methodical, he now advocated a high-risk, high-reward strategy of maximum speed. He thought he could win the war quickly by going for broke with a narrow push forward through the flat terrain of northwest Germany.

Eisenhower refused to sign on to Montgomery's proposal. At the very least, he wouldn't go for it completely. He did, however, agree to a compromise plan. This was driven partly by political motives—to keep the Americans' British allies happy—and also by support from his own airborne commanders, who saw an opportunity.

OPERATION MARKET GARDEN

Montgomery's alternative plan came to be known as Operation Market Garden. It was an ambitious, highly dangerous, and highly complicated operation. The goal was to seize all key points along a highway running through the Netherlands: from the Allied front to the far side of the Rhine river.

However, if the Germans figured out the Allied plan, they could wreck it by blowing up or holding onto even one bridge. The only way to make the plan work was with massive paratroop drops along a 50-mile stretch of road, ending in the Dutch town of Arnhem. Arnhem's bridge would get the Allies to the far side of Rhine river delta, and—at least in theory—open the door to Germany.

Market Garden would require three and a half airborne divisions: two American, one British, and a Polish brigade.

The Poles and British had the furthest to go and the toughest missions. British armored forces would push through on the ground to link up with the paratroops and cross bridges the paratroops seized on the way to Arnhem.

However, Montgomery's staff missed intelligence that two SS tank divisions were sitting near Arnhem, in perfect position to crush the lightly armed paratroops. Additionally, the British armored corps made slow progress, plagued by traffic jams, German resistance, and enthusiastic Dutch crowds eager to greet their liberators.

Because the push forward was narrow, it was easy for German counterattacks to cut the road behind the leading tank forces, leaving them isolated. Meanwhile, the Allies' diversion of scarce fuel and aircraft to support Market Garden meant that George Patton's army ran out of gas and was forced to halt at Metz in northeastern France, just short of the German border.

AFTER MARKET GARDEN

For three months after Market Garden, the Allies had to bide their time, building up supplies and making marginal gains. Once the Allied advance stalled in September, Hitler and his high command had an opportunity to try to seize the initiative for themselves. Still, this wouldn't be easy.

By late fall of 1944, Germany was running short on men, tanks, aircraft, and fuel. But Hitler did manage to scrape together a striking force. Hitler might have chosen to use this force on the Eastern Front against the Soviets. But an offensive there didn't seem to have much potential.

The Western Front—against the British and the Americans—seemed to have more potential. Hitler saw a chance to use his limited reserves to carry out an attack to potentially break through a weak sector of the line. He focused on the Ardennes forest of southern Belgium. German armies had won a great triumph against France there in 1940.

Breaking through there would facilitate a German drive to capture Antwerp. If his armies made it that far, Hitler could have cut off and isolated the British soldiers fighting in Belgium and the Netherlands.

THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

In the fall of 1944, Hitler deployed his strike force opposite a spot in the American line that was thinly held by green, inexperienced troops and those who had been badly battered in previous fighting. American intelligence refused to believe that the Germans were capable of a major offensive and ignored signs that something big was coming.

In mid-December—taking advantage of bad weather that kept American airpower grounded—German artillery opened up, and German men stormed American positions. The advance carved a hole 60 miles deep and 30 miles wide in the American line. This gave the event its name: the Battle of the Bulge. Along the way, the Germans committed the sort of war crimes more frequently seen on the Eastern Front.

Individual American soldiers and units fought bravely, but there was no way to hold a continuous front. Some men were encircled and imprisoned. Others turned towns and cities into improvised fortresses. For five days, Americans held the road junction of St. Vith until they finally were overwhelmed.

Most famously, the Americans raced reinforcements to the town of Bastogne, key to the road network that the Germans needed. They got there just before the Germans. But outlying units were pushed back into the town and surrounded. The Americans fighting at Bastogne held out for a week before reinforcements reached them.

Right before Christmas, the weather cleared. The snow that had kept Allied planes from operating finally stopped. Once the skies were clear, Allied airpower could destroy Hitler's army from the air. German soldiers who had penetrated deeply into Allied

lines now found themselves trapped far from home, out of gas, and out of ammunition.

George Patton, who had earlier been stalled in France on the German border, turned his Third Army north when the Germans began the Battle of the Bulge. He now wanted to turn the tables on the Germans, cutting off the bulge and bagging the Germans. However, Eisenhower and Montgomery had been badly shaken by how serious the crisis had been. They opted to simply shove the Germans back out the way they had come in.

In the end, the German offensive to change the course of the war ended up

with more or less equivalent casualties on both sides: 80,000 or so killed, wounded, or captured, along with fairly comparable levels of tanks and aircraft lost. But whereas the Allies could afford those losses, the Germans could not.

SUGGESTED READING

Citino, *The Wehrmacht's Last Stand*.

Dupuy et al., *Hitler's Last Gamble*.

Hitchcock, *The Bitter Road to Freedom*.

Kershaw, *The End*.

Winik, *1944*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Who had the best strategic idea: Eisenhower or Montgomery?

2. Was Hitler right to expend his scarce reserves on the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944?

22

SOVIET PUSH TO BERLIN AND YALTA POWER PLAY

In summer 1944, at the same time as the D-Day landings, the Soviets launched a massive offensive in Belorussia. It crushed Germany's Army Group Center, and for the next few months Soviet troops ran wild. They raced west through Poland, stopping at the outskirts of Warsaw, while Germany had to contend with an uprising by the Polish resistance.

FALLING DOMINOES

The Soviet advance stalled at the Vistula River in August and September, but the gains continued in the Balkans. In August, Soviet troops poured into Romania and overwhelmed the Germans with tanks. Romania's figurehead King Michael led a coup that overthrew Romania's military government. Now, Romanians who had been fighting and dying in support of Adolf Hitler's war would be fighting and dying in support of Joseph Stalin's war.

Dominoes started to fall in southern Europe. After Romania, Bulgaria dropped out of the German alliance as well. The Soviets moved into Yugoslavia, but much of the country was already liberated by Yugoslav Partisan fighters before the Soviets got there.

The next stop was Hungary. By October, it was clear that the Russians were coming. Hungary's military dictator, Admiral Miklos Horthy, tried to get out of the war rather than go down in total defeat alongside Hitler. German troops arrested Horthy, seized control of the capital, and installed a fanatical fascist as their puppet. They also murdered many of Hungary's Jews.

However, in December 1944, the capital of Budapest was encircled by the Soviets, followed by a two-month siege that levelled much of it. In the course of fighting, Hitler wasted many of his remaining tanks in an effort to hold back the Soviets.

SMASHING GERMAN LINES

The Soviet army had been building forces in central Poland on the Vistula River throughout the fall of 1944. Stalin also manipulated the personalities he had under him. His most reliable subordinate had been Georgy Zhukov. As the Soviets closed in on Germany, Stalin took Zhukov away from his role as a troubleshooter and instead put him in command of a single major formation: the 1st Belorussian Front, aimed squarely at the heart of Germany.

At the same time, Stalin set up two potential rivals to Zhukov, both to goad him on and to detract from his fame and renown. To Zhukov's left, just to the south, Stalin had Ivan Konev, poorly educated but extremely tough. To Zhukov's right, just to the north, was Konstantin Rokossovsky, who was ethnically Polish. An expert on tank warfare, Rokossovsky had been arrested and tortured as a traitor in the 1930s before being released and sent back to the Soviet army.

The Soviets now had overwhelming advantages in men, tanks, and artillery, while the German forces were immobilized by fuel shortages. As the Soviets smashed through German lines in Poland—racing west out of Poland and into Germany itself—Hitler refused to pull tanks from a futile battle in Hungary to stop the Soviet advance. Soviet tanks rolled 250 miles in two weeks, ending on the banks of the Oder River, only 40 miles from Berlin. German refugees choked the roads heading west, trying to get away from the advancing Soviet soldiers.

DESERTIONS AND TERROR

The German military engaged in mass public executions of their own deserting soldiers. Fanatic ideology and terror kept the German army going. Even as the war became hopeless, Hitler permitted no discussion of ending the bloodshed. Some 1.5 million German soldiers died in 1945 defending a lost cause, alongside hundreds of thousands of German civilians.

> During World War I, the German army had executed 48 of its own soldiers. In World War II, the number was 20,000.

By February 1945, three times as many German soldiers were holding off the Soviet army as were fighting the British and the Americans. When Hitler gave orders to destroy anything of value instead of letting it fall into Allied hands, officials quietly ignored his orders, knowing that Germans after the war would need factories and livestock to survive.

For now, Zhukov and the Soviet army couldn't push past the barrier of the Oder River. Over the next couple of months, the Soviets cleared German strongpoints out from the Baltic Sea coast and the mountains of Silesia. They moved troops and supplies forward to the Oder River, getting ready for the next big push, aimed squarely at Berlin.

ALLIED LEADERS AT YALTA

Zhukov's push toward Berlin set the groundwork for the most important wartime meeting of the Allied leadership. At Yalta in Crimea—a Soviet resort town—Stalin hosted the American president Franklin Roosevelt and British prime minister Winston Churchill in early February 1945. The agenda was momentous. Because Hitler's defeat was clearly in sight, the Allied leaders had to determine the shape of the postwar world.

At Yalta, the leaders agreed on democratic governments for countries liberated from Nazi rule. Stalin's understanding of democracy, though, meant rule by the working class as expressed through a communist party. And there was no way he would allow governments on his borders that weren't subservient to him. The only way to stop that from happening was for the western Allies to go to war with Stalin, and nobody with any sense thought that was a good idea.

Roosevelt also wanted Stalin's help in the war against Japan. The atomic bomb didn't exist yet. It was in development, but nobody knew if it would work. That meant victory over Japan would require an invasion of the Japanese home islands. Every assessment of that action included many dead American soldiers (and, of course, many more dead Japanese soldiers and civilians).

The Soviets were not at war with Japan. The Soviets and the Japanese actually had a non-aggression pact. Still, Stalin did agree at Yalta to join the war against Japan within three months after Germany was beaten. He kept that promise—to the day.

Finally, Roosevelt wanted the Soviets' commitment to the postwar United Nations. Roosevelt's vision for the world involved an idea of four policemen—the US, the UK, the Soviet Union, and China—working together amicably. The United Nations, a reformed and improved version of the League of Nations that came out of World War I, was his idea to carry that out. Churchill and Stalin agreed.

SOVIET DEMANDS

In return, Roosevelt had to give some things too. Stalin had two big goals. One was reparations. Roughly a third of the Soviet Union—measured by population and economic potential—had come under German occupation during the war and was wrecked to some degree.

Stalin wanted to punish Germany and rebuild his own economy. Yalta endorsed the principle that Germany would provide compensation. Stalin's soldiers wasted no time in removing economically valuable assets from occupied German territory.

Finally, Stalin got what he wanted in Poland. Any invasion of the Soviet Union would come through Poland, and an independent or hostile Poland was not acceptable to Stalin.

At the very outbreak of war, Stalin had grabbed eastern Poland, and he intended to keep it. Yalta endorsed that view. Poland would be compensated by being picked up and moved west. It gave up eastern territory to the Soviet Union, and would get western territory from Germany, instead. In addition, Poland had two competing governments at the time of Yalta: one, the continuation of the pre-war government, had been operating in London. The other, dominated by communists and pro-Soviet Poles, had been set up by Stalin.

Under the Yalta agreement, representatives of the London-based Poles would join Stalin's Polish government, not the other way around. Combined with the Soviet's physical occupation of Poland, this would make controlling events there much simpler for Stalin.

DECIDING ON GERMANY

The big, unanswered question at Yalta was the toughest of all: what to do about Germany?

In the absence of a clear consensus, the Allies came up with a temporary solution in the form of a four-power occupation. The United States, the United Kingdom, the Soviets, and the French would each occupy a zone of Germany. The capital Berlin would likewise be split into four zones. Each country would manage things temporarily until a permanent solution came along.

That never happened. The split Germany during the Cold War was the result of no master plan. It was simply what happened when nothing came along to replace the temporary fix.

REACHING BERLIN

However, the Allies still had to get to Berlin and finish the war. For the British and the Americans, the problem was getting across the Rhine. Because of that top priority, the German-occupied Netherlands—and with them the Dutch people—became a lower priority.

That country was on the brink of mass starvation in 1945. The American general Dwight Eisenhower's position was clear: The best way to help everyone was to win the war as quickly as possible and not take detours. Despite Allied air drops of food, 20,000 Dutch died from starvation in the winter of 1944–1945.

Between Christmas 1944 and the New Year, the British and Americans began eliminating the giant bulge in the Allied line that the Germans had created earlier in December. Still, German military professionalism remained intact. While pulling back across the Rhine, they blew up all the bridges as soon as the Allies approached. The American general George Patton managed to catch many Germans on the wrong side of the Rhine, capturing 100,000 prisoners.

On March 7, 1945, as an American armored division was pushing through disorganized and retreating German soldiers at the town

of Remagen on the Rhine, the Germans tried to blow up the Ludendorff railroad bridge. However, the charges didn't work. The bridge stood.

Acting without orders, the GIs immediately raced across, followed by American tanks. Now American soldiers were standing on the east bank of the Rhine, with no major natural barriers between them and Berlin. Thousands of Americans made it across the first day. Still, Eisenhower was remarkably cautious and restrained in taking advantage of this stroke of luck.

CROSSING THE RHINE

The accidental crossing at Remagen took place two weeks before the British general Bernard Montgomery was scheduled to go. While Montgomery was still in preparations, the Americans made another crossing.

While Montgomery's buildup telegraphed his plans, Patton's Third Army successfully improvised a Rhine crossing on the southern part of the front. It then quickly built floating pontoon bridges to get heavy equipment and supplies across. Two days later, Montgomery finally forced his own crossing in Operational Plunder.

By the end of March, with three separate Allied crossings of the Rhine, all restraints were off. The British and Americans resumed their advance, facing fierce and dogged resistance from the Germans at every point. Losses were extremely heavy.

At the beginning of April, British and American spearheads linked up on the far side of the Ruhr, Germany's industrial heartland. They trapped 350,000 German soldiers and millions of civilians inside. Even then, the Germans fought for more than two weeks before finally surrendering. The German commander Walter Model killed himself rather than be taken prisoner.

CONCLUSION

The farther the British and the Americans went into Germany, the more evidence they found of what they were fighting for. They made some grim discoveries

while streaming through western Germany: Germany's concentration camps.

On April 11, the Americans reached Buchenwald. Patton wanted to make sure that Germany's civilians could not deny the crimes their country had committed during the war. He compelled local Germans to tour the camp to see for themselves what their regime had done.

On April 15, the British liberated Bergen-Belsen with more than 10,000 unburied corpses. The British made the SS camp guards handle the mass burial of the dead. At the end of April, Americans liberated Dachau, near Munich, and carried out summary executions of a few dozen camp guards.

The Soviets had freed concentration camps before, but the Germans had had time to destroy much of the evidence of what had happened there. Now, American and British journalists could present their public back home with harrowing reports of what they had seen.

SUGGESTED READING

Citino, *The Wehrmacht's Last Stand*.

Jones, *After Hitler*.

Kershaw, *The End*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Could Roosevelt have achieved a better deal from Stalin at Yalta?

2. Was there any way for Germany to end the war more quickly and halt the bloodshed?

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EISENHOWER'S ENDGAME IN EUROPE

By April 1945, British and American forces were across the Rhine River and streaming through central Germany. Allied aircraft roamed at will over German cities. The Soviets, only 40 miles from Berlin, were building for a final push. It was hard to imagine any outcome but Germany's total defeat. Still, Adolf Hitler's army kept fighting.

HITLER LATE IN THE WAR

At this late point in the war, Hitler relied on three men at the top of the Nazi party: Joseph Goebbels, head of propaganda; Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS paramilitary; and Martin Bormann, head of the Nazi administrative machine. All three men were outsiders and failures before signing on with Hitler. Now, they supported his efforts to the bitter end.

The Nazi regime had engaged in desperate efforts to mobilize every last resource. Especially in the east, civilians were put to work digging huge defensive works. Albert Speer, running the economy, kept armaments coming. However, the German transportation system was grinding to a halt. Allied bombing and a lack of fuel meant people couldn't move.

LOSING FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT

At the time, US president Franklin Roosevelt had been seriously ill for months. He was only 63 years old when, during a vacation at Warm Springs, Georgia, he was hit by a massive stroke. The date was April 12, 1945. He died soon after. Grief and shock were deep and widespread in the United States, Britain, and even in the Soviet Union.

The coalition against Hitler never wavered. Still, the American vice president Harry Truman was poorly prepared for the job he stepped into. It was feared that Truman's inexperience might lead to problems after the war in Europe was over. For now, though, the Allies continued in lockstep.

THREE WORRIES

With victory almost in their grasp, the Allies had three principal worries. First, while their troops were pushing hard through central Germany, many German soldiers remained in place in northern Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands. Norway, with only 3 million people, was occupied by 400,000 German troops. It was important to get them to surrender.

The next big fear was to the south. The Americans were concerned that Hitler and the remaining Nazi armies might

flee in that direction to Hitler's old stomping ground of Bavaria and the mountains of the Alps. Furthermore, several hundred thousand German troops were in Czechoslovakia, right next to Bavaria.

A final fear was of German resistance inside occupied territory. The Nazis were preparing a resistance campaign known as the *Werwolf* program, in which thousands of men were given instructions and equipment for a campaign of assassination and sabotage against occupation forces. The program managed to kill a small number of Allied personnel and quite a few more Germans who cooperated with the Allies.

THE SOVIET PUSH

On April 16, 1945, the final Soviet push for Berlin began. Stalin engineered a competition between his two leading generals, Ivan Konev and Georgy Zhukov. Whoever reached Berlin first would get the glory.

Meanwhile, Allied general Dwight Eisenhower didn't see much point in pushing hard and losing American lives in return for territory that in large part would be handed over to Soviet occupation anyway. He was content to let his soldiers halt on the Elbe River, which eventually formed much of the border between East and West Germany during the Cold War. To Stalin, though, it was important to put his troops on the ground in as much of Germany as possible.

First, the Soviet soldiers needed to cross the Oder River, which required attacking through swamps in the Oder flood plain. To move on to Berlin, they then had to storm the Seelow Heights, a plateau that loomed over the Oder. It was a tough assignment but achievable if one was willing to spend the lives to do it. Stalin absolutely was.

After a couple of days, the Soviets made it through and headed to Berlin. They reached the city's outskirts on April 21.

CLOSING IN ON HITLER

Reality finally seemed to set in for Hitler on the next day. He broke down at a staff

briefing when he heard that units weren't following his orders. He made it clear that he intended to die in Berlin, along with his regime.

The day after Hitler's breakdown, the Soviet closed a ring around Berlin. Hitler was trapped inside. On April 25, the advancing Soviets and Americans met at Torgau, cutting Nazi Germany in half.

Now, the rats began to desert Hitler's sinking ship. Himmler and Hermann Göring, head of the Luftwaffe, looked for ways out. Even though he had been deeply involved in the Holocaust, Himmler now tried to save some Jews in a duplicitous attempt to earn some goodwill. He also tried to negotiate a peace deal using neutral Sweden as a go-between.

When that news got out, Hitler declared Himmler a traitor and ordered him arrested. Himmler went on the run and lasted for two weeks before the British caught him. While preparing for arrest and interrogation, he bit on a cyanide capsule and killed himself.

HITLER'S DEMISE

When the Soviets cut off Berlin, Göring concluded that Hitler no longer could lead Germany. He sent a message asking for approval to take over. This was a mistake. Hitler was furious. He disowned Göring, and turned instead to Admiral Karl Dönitz, head of Germany's submarine force.

Hitler, with the Soviets only blocks away, decided not to risk being taken alive. On April 30, he hastily married his longtime mistress Eva Braun. He also got news of the death of Benito Mussolini, who been captured by Italian partisans, shot, and then hung upside down from a gas station.

Hitler and Braun both committed suicide: She took a cyanide pill, and he shot himself. Their bodies were doused in gasoline and burned just outside the bunker to hide their identity. It didn't work. The Soviets recovered the bodies and conducted an autopsy to confirm Hitler's identity to be sure that he was dead.

After Hitler killed himself, the Soviets captured the Reichstag and planted a flag on top, creating an iconic moment of victory. The Berlin garrison gave up on May 2. Still, capturing the seat of German government didn't mean the war was over.

AFTER HITLER

Nazi Germany still had a government, and the German army was still fighting. Admiral Dönitz moved his government north to the German Naval Academy at Flensburg. With Hitler dead, Admiral Dönitz felt free to negotiate terms with the Allies. However, since the Casablanca conference in January 1943, the Allied position had been to push for unconditional surrender.

The details of the war's end became very messy. German formations remained intact and scattered all over the map. In addition to the 400,000 Germans in Norway, there were 300,000 stuck on the Baltic coast and 500,000–600,000 in Czechoslovakia. It was unclear if they would listen to Dönitz if he told them to stop fighting.

In the Netherlands, the local Nazi governor Arthur Seyss-Inquart—trying to save his own skin—asked the Allies for a peace deal at the end of April on humanitarian grounds, to alleviate the starvation that his own policies had caused. The Allies signed an agreement that allowed for peaceful occupation and the quick flow of humanitarian aid. It didn't do Seyss-Inquart any good, though. He was executed for war crimes anyway.

Similarly, the war ended early in Italy. In early April 1945, the Allies started a new push in Italy and the German front lines collapsed. The German forces there signed a deal on April 30 and formally surrendered on May 2.

A COMPLICATED SURRENDER

The real complications came with the surrender in Germany itself. Here, many complications came together: Churchill feared the Soviets after the war. Eisenhower was concerned that the Germans might fight on in the north and south. Stalin mistrusted the Western Allies. The

British military leader Bernard Montgomery's monumental ego was another problem.

At the end of April, with the German armies in Germany clearly falling apart, Montgomery got orders to push forward as fast as possible to cut off access to Denmark. However, Montgomery feared casualties. On May 3, when he received the offer of a deal from the Germans, he was eager to take it.

The Germans proposed that Montgomery accept the surrender of the Germans fighting the Russians. The idea was German officers and men preferred not to end the war in a Russian prison camp. They thought they'd be better off in a British or American camp and wanted to surrender to the Western allies. Montgomery countered with an offer to take the surrender of all German forces in the northwest.

That worked, and now Montgomery had the chance to be the star of a showy surrender ceremony on May 4. Montgomery got his spectacle, and he rushed troops into Denmark to bluff their way into accepting German surrender in Copenhagen.

CHARLEY HAVLAT
American private Charley Havlat, the son of Czech immigrants, was the last US death in the European theater of World War II. He was killed in action in Czechoslovakia on May 7, 1945.

Montgomery missed how others would read this. Dönitz was encouraged to think a separate peace was possible. He portrayed this to his soldiers as a truce, not a surrender, encouraging them to keep fighting the Russians.

Montgomery also allowed Germans in Denmark and the Netherlands to surrender in organized units under their commanders. Some even got to keep their weapons. The Soviets were not happy about this.

CONCLUSION

By May 6, Dönitz had a German delegation discussing

terms of surrender at Eisenhower's headquarters at Reims in France. From Eisenhower's point of view, there were no terms to discuss. He played hardball, threatening to close American lines so that Germans couldn't pass through to end the war on the American side. That finally convinced the German military it was time to give up.

Early on the morning of May 7, they signed an agreement to surrender unconditionally and end the war late the night of May 8. This created a new problem. Although Eisenhower kept the Soviets informed of what he was doing and always insisted that any surrender be complete and simultaneous, he assumed some things about what the Soviets would think.

From the Soviet point of view, Germany's surrender should not have been signed in France at an American headquarters. Stalin wanted a signing in Berlin with a high-level Soviet delegation present.

The Allies were willing to do that, but had to keep things quiet to avoid a public scandal. That didn't work. All it took was one leak. A reporter from the Associated Press released the story on the afternoon of May 7 that the war would be officially over the next day. There was mass rejoicing in western Europe and the United States, even though official confirmation was slow. The Soviets kept the news quiet inside their own country, waiting on the ceremony that they wanted.

For the Americans and British, the surrender was signed on May 7 and took effect on May 8. For the Soviets, the surrender was signed on May 8 just outside Berlin with Zhukov present, taking effect May 9. To this day, Victory Day is May 8 in the west and May 9 in Russia.

SUGGESTED READING

Jones, *After Hitler*.

Kershaw, *The End*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Should the US have taken a tougher line against the Soviet Union in 1945?

2. How important was it to convince the German garrisons in Norway and Austria to surrender?

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WAR'S END: PICKING UP THE PIECES

Almost all of Adolf Hitler's closest collaborators ended World War II as Allied prisoners. They included many of his top military officers. German soldiers—if they survived at all—faced a variety of fates, depending on where they were captured and whose hands they fell into. This lecture looks at the fate of soldiers and Nazi leaders after World War II, and then turns to examine what the world now looked like.

THE FATE OF THE SOLDIERS

About 400,000 German prisoners were relocated to the United States, where they worked as paid labor. The story was very different for the millions of Germans who ended up as prisoners in the Soviet Union.

The Soviets captured around 3 million Germans over the course of the war. At least 300,000 died in captivity. However, Germans in Soviet captivity had a better a chance of survival than the Soviets did in Nazi Germany's hands. Soviets could count on less than a 50-50 chance of surviving until the end of the war inside a German prison camp.

The Soviets used many German prisoners for postwar reconstruction, and the country was in no hurry to send them home. By 1950, however, most had returned Germany. The last, though, didn't make it home until 1956, more than a decade after the end of the war.

WAR CRIME TRIALS AND OTHER FATES

The Allies put together a joint legal process, with judges from the United States, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, and France, to hold the highest-ranking Nazis to account. In less than a year, two dozen leading Nazis were tried for war crimes. Some were acquitted, but most were convicted, and about half were sentenced to death by hanging.

The Nazi leader Hermann Göring escaped that fate. The night before he was to be executed, he committed suicide by swallowing cyanide—possibly smuggled to him by an American prison guard.

While the worst war criminals were tried, many rank-and-file Nazis simply dropped party membership and returned to their old jobs. For Germans—especially those in western Germany, occupied by the US, Britain, and France—1945 was when everything started over again.

Even some of Hitler's generals and military experts made

comebacks. Wernher von Braun, the man behind the V-2 missile program, came to the United States alongside more than a thousand other German scientists and engineers in what was known as Operation Paperclip. Von Braun and colleagues established a sizable German expatriate community in Huntsville, Alabama. Their work contributed to the emerging US missile and space program in the years after the war.

By the mid-1950s, it was clear that having a West German army would be a big help to the United States and Britain in their efforts to contain communism. A West German military was created—the Bundeswehr—and Hitler's surviving generals were used to help build it.

FRANCE

France was both a winner and loser of World War II. After a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Germans in 1940, Charles de Gaulle and the Free French—along with the underground Maquis resistance—restored self-respect and national pride. However, France's left wing and right wing were bitterly divided.

French leader Charles De Gaulle became head of the provisional government for two years as France worked to set up a constitution and build a government. This was a tough assignment, and he resigned in January 1946 amid an ongoing political crisis.

France also forcibly reasserted control over their lost colonial possessions in French Indochina: present-day Vietnam. They found themselves up against the Viet Minh, a nationalist-communist movement under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh. France subsequently endured a decade of bitter war before finally accepting that its time in Vietnam was over.

BRITAIN

British prime minister Winston Churchill was universally recognized for his heroic wartime leadership, but he badly misread the mood of his country once victory was achieved. Churchill headed to Potsdam, Germany, in July 1945—after victory in

Europe—to meet with Soviet leader Joseph Stalin and new US president Harry Truman to settle remaining questions of war. In the meantime, Britain held parliamentary elections for the first time in 10 years. During the war, elections had been suspended, and the country had been ruled by a unity government.

While Churchill had expected that the voters would endorse his leadership, the exact opposite turned out to be the case. The public overwhelmingly rejected Churchill's Conservative Party, voting instead for the more left-wing Labour Party.

By now, the war had created a desire for a more egalitarian society, with far greater protections for the British working class. Churchill was replaced by the Labour Party's Clement Attlee, who had been Churchill's deputy prime minister during the war.

Churchill had sought to preserve the British Empire. By 1945, however, Britain was no longer in position to do that. It was essentially bankrupted by the war. The job of the new Labour Government would be to preside over a gradual rollback of Britain's commitments abroad.

In 1947, the British handed over power in what had been British India to two new states: Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan. The British exit led to enormous bloodshed as refugees moved across borders. The next year, 1948, the British gave up their mandate to govern Palestine.

THE COLD WAR AND THE SOVIETS

Once out of power, Churchill turned his attention to the new Cold War. At Potsdam—where he was unceremoniously replaced by Attlee—it became clear that Stalin saw the world in fundamentally different ways than the West did.

The Cold War did not start at any single moment, but from 1945 to 1948, disputes, tensions, and the possibility of a new war between the communist bloc and the West were growing steadily. Western Europe—along

with the United States and Canada—began creating the institutions that became NATO and the European Union.

In the Soviet Union, life was very hard. A third of the country's productive assets had been wrecked during the war, and Stalin deliberately downplayed the number of lives the Soviet Union lost. Only gradually did the truth emerge: Some 27 million Soviet lives were lost during the war.

The Soviet people might have expected with some justification that Stalin's regime would ease its pressure on them as a reward for their loyalty. The secret police might ease off on its repressions, and censorship might relax. The opposite happened. Stalin's regime returned to full-scale repression, including show trials and purges. By 1953, when Stalin finally died, he was on the verge of a massive new purge, starting with Soviet Jews. His death by stroke in March 1953 likely spared hundreds of thousands of Soviet lives.

THE UNITED STATES

American president Franklin Roosevelt died tragically less than a month before the Allies achieved victory in Europe. His successor was Harry Truman. Both men wanted to win the war, but Roosevelt put a much higher priority on maintaining cooperation with Stalin's Soviet Union. Truman saw things differently.

World War II wasn't over yet. Japan was still fighting, and the soldiers who had beaten Nazi Germany knew that they faced the prospect of transferring to the Pacific and being tasked with invading the Japanese home islands. George Marshall, the US Army's chief of staff, worried throughout the war about how long the American public would sustain a commitment.

American GIs in Germany felt like they had done their part, and there was serious concern in the US government about protest or even mutiny if troops were shipped from Europe to the Pacific. That turned out to not be necessary. In July 1945, the United States tested the first atom bomb, and, in August,

dropped two bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

At the same time, the Soviet Union invaded Japanese-held territory in China. Faced with disaster on all fronts, Japanese emperor Hirohito directed his government to surrender. At last, the war was over.

AFTER THE END OF THE WAR

Within two years, the size of the American military dropped by almost 90 percent, from 12 million to 1.5 million. General George Patton—the United States' most creative operational commander and the one most eager for a showdown with the Soviets—had already left the scene. He died in December 1945 after a traffic accident in Germany.

As the 1940s drew to a close, the dangers presented by communism and the Soviet Union became increasingly clear. Army chief of staff George Marshall now became Harry Truman's secretary of state. In that role, he saw that the communist danger was as much economic and social as it was military.

The European economy had been wrecked by the war, and governments lacked the cash to buy the raw materials they needed to get going again. In June 1947, Marshall gave a speech at Harvard where he outlined a program for massive US government loans to European states to get their economies moving again. Foreign aid has never been popular in the United States, but the fear of communism was so great that Congress authorized the 1948 Marshall Plan. It proved to be astoundingly successful.

In 1948, five European countries signed the Brussels Pact, a collective defensive alliance of Britain, France, and the Low Countries: Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. While that was an important step, it was clear to everyone that those countries could not possibly stand up to the Soviet Union without American help.

The nations of western Europe now joined the United States and Canada to create NATO: the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The countries committed

themselves to collective defense—the idea that an attack on any one of them would be treated as an attack on all.

The Korean War, beginning in 1950, sparked the transformation of NATO into a serious military machine. The first supreme commander of NATO was Dwight Eisenhower. Then, in 1952, Eisenhower left the army and ran for—and won—the US presidency.

Eisenhower deepened US engagement abroad, and cooperation with partners. It was Eisenhower who pushed most strongly for West Germany to restore its army and become a member of NATO. Eisenhower, like Truman, had no trouble understanding the lessons of World War II.

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Hitchcock, *Bitter Road to Freedom*.

Judt, *Postwar*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Was there a missed opportunity to create a better peace after the war?

2. Are we forgetting the lessons of World War II?

QUIZ

1. Soviet spy Richard Sorge's information allowed Joseph Stalin to bring reinforcements from where?

   a. The Arctic
   b. Central Asia
   c. Siberia

2. What was the name of Hitler's program to deny Germany's Jews any legal rights?

   a. Hossbach Memorandum
   b. Nuremburg Laws
   c. Wannsee Conference

3. Hitler's efforts to rearm Germany and break out of his military constraints violated what agreement?

   a. Atlantic Charter
   b. Treaty of Versailles
   c. Yalta Accords

4. World War II began with Hitler's invasion of what country?

   a. France
   b. Poland
   c. The Soviet Union

5. Hitler's Nazi Party was part of what broader ideological movement?

   a. Fascism
   b. Liberalism
   c. Modernism

6. Which army was rescued from destruction at Dunkirk?

   a. British
   b. French
   c. German

7. Which military organization triumphed in the Battle of Britain?

   a. The Luftwaffe
   b. The Marine Corps
   c. The Royal Air Force

8. Germany's surface fleet was badly damaged in the successful invasion of which country?

   a. Britain
   b. Norway
   c. The Soviet Union

9. Which political leader executed his best generals before the start of World War II?

   a. Hitler
   b. Mussolini
   c. Stalin

10. Which of Roosevelt's initiatives provided military assistance to Britain and the Soviet Union?

    a. Lend-Lease
    b. New Deal
    c. Works Progress Administration

11. The tide turned against the Germans in North Africa at which battle?

- **a.** El-Alamein
- **b.** Imphal
- **c.** Monte Cassino

12. Hitler's troops fought and lost at Stalingrad in a failed effort to seize what raw material?

- **a.** Oil
- **b.** Rubber
- **c.** Uranium

13. The collaborationist regime in France was named for its capital in what city?

- **a.** Paris
- **b.** Versailles
- **c.** Vichy

14. The worst of Hitler's death camps were set up in what country?

- **a.** France
- **b.** Italy
- **c.** Poland

15. Germany's U-Boat campaign aimed to cut off supplies to what country?

- **a.** Britain
- **b.** France
- **c.** United States

16. The Anglo-American invasion of Italy triggered the overthrow of which Axis leader?

a. Hitler
b. Mussolini
c. Tojo

17. Which two Allied countries carried out the strategic bombing of Germany?

a. America and Britain
b. America and the Soviet Union
c. Britain and the Soviet Union

18. What top secret project broke German radio codes?

a. Manhattan
b. Overlord
c. Ultra

19. Rather than support an anti-German uprising, Stalin's troops halted outside which European capital?

a. Paris
b. Rome
c. Warsaw

20. On D-Day in June 1944, British and American troops went ashore in

a. Anzio, Italy
b. Dover, England
c. Normandy, France

21. Which commander was eager to push into Germany on a single narrow front in fall 1944?

- **a.** Dwight Eisenhower
- **b.** Bernard Montgomery
- **c.** George Patton

22. In what resort city did Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin met in February 1945 to determine the future of Europe?

- **a.** Davos
- **b.** Spa
- **c.** Yalta

23. Which key Allied leader did not survive to see the end of the war?

- **a.** Churchill
- **b.** Roosevelt
- **c.** Stalin

24. Unlike American policy after World War I, the United States after World War II followed what approach to foreign affairs?

- **a.** Continuing commitment to Europe
- **b.** Isolationism from global affairs
- **c.** The Monroe Doctrine

ANSWERS

1. C, **2.** B, **3.** B, **4.** B, **5.** A, **6.** A, **7.** C, **8.** B, **9.** C, **10.** A, **11.** A, **12.** A, **13.** C, **14.** C, **15.** A, **16.** B, **17.** A, **18.** C, **19.** C, **20.** C, **21.** B, **22.** C, **23.** B, **24.** A

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