

# THE SECOND WORLD WAR

## RIBBENTROP - MOLOTOV PACT (GERMAN-USSR PACT) 23 AUGUST 1939

1. **Official agreement:** The two states agreed not to go to war against each other and also to remain neutral if either were attacked by a third country!
2. **Secret clauses** (became public long after the war): It arranged for Germany and USSR to divide Poland and for the USSR to take what action it wished against the Baltic States (which included Finland!)

The Pact may well have been encouraged by

- the slow pace of British and French approaches towards the USSR
- Britain's and France policies and actions in the Munich agreement
- earlier corporation between Germany and the USSR (during the Weimar Republic)

## PHASE ONE OF WORLD WAR TWO - LIMITED WAR

**September 1<sup>st</sup> 1939 POLAND:** German air assault against Polish airfields, army bases and railroads. Disrupted the Polish troops. The air attack was followed by the advance of infantry and armored divisions - some of them reached fifty miles into Poland within 48 hours - BLITZKRIEG. The Polish army was numerically superior (over 2 million men) but lacked modern equipment and methods of transport... On the 10<sup>th</sup> of September the Polish High Command ordered a general retreat towards the South-east (the border towards Rumania). This retreat was efficient when the USSR attacked Poland on the 17<sup>th</sup> of September. Peace negotiations started on the 28<sup>th</sup> of September. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of October Poland gave up. There was **no** direct assistance from Poland's allies Britain and France. Poland was divided in 3 parts; the eastern part became Russian, the western part became German and the "middle" (called Government General) was under German control.

Stalin and the Soviet Union had little faith in Hitler's promises and therefore they wanted to build a buffer zone between them and the enlarged Germany. To this end a series of treaties were made with the Baltic States; Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. They agreed to allow Russian troops and ships to be stationed in their countries. Finland refused!

**November 28<sup>th</sup> 1939 FINLAND:** Finland was attacked and two days later USSR declared war against Finland. The Finnish Winter War had begun. Finland appealed to the League of Nations and they asked for assistance from the Western world. Sweden and Norway sent some volunteers. France and Britain prepared an expeditionary force that officially should aid Finland. They wanted to travel through northern Norway and Sweden - and capture the Swedish ore mines (which stood for 51% of Germany's supplies...). This force was ready to sail when Finland decided to surrender in March 1940. Finland lost land in the peace treaty. Once again Britain and France decided to not be involved in the actual war. That's why some American journalists christened the war "**the Phoney War**".

**BRITAIN & FRANCE:** prepared for the type of war they expected to come;

- Industry and agriculture came under more direct government control
- Rationing was introduced
- Propaganda machinery was established (RAF dropped leaflets over Germany...)
- Children were evacuated to the countryside

In France the French Commander-in-Chief in the north General Gamelin decided that he did not have sufficient forces to launch a major assault on the German "**SIEGFRIED LINE**" so he stopped in front of it! When the assault of Poland was over the French felt increasingly vulnerable - so most of them secretly withdrew to the "**MAGINOT LINE**". Then they sat down and waited...

**AT SEA:** Only at sea you could see some activity;

- German submarines began a campaign of unrestricted attacks in which not only combatant but also neutral ships were sunk
- December 13: the German battleship "*Admiral Graf von Spee*" was attacked by 3 British cruisers outside South America. "*Admiral Graf von Spee*" was damaged and limped in to Montevideo to make repairs - Uruguay limited the time she could stay. Before the time expired the ship was taken out of port and scuttled (December 17)
- February 19 1940: A German auxiliary cruiser - the "**ALTMARK**" with 299 British prisoners on board were in a Norwegian fjord. The British destroyer "**COSSACK**" went in to the fjord and freed the prisoners from the ship. Norway protested against this attack...

**April 9<sup>th</sup> 1940 DENMARK & NORWAY:** On this date Denmark allowed German troops to occupy the country. Two days before - April 7<sup>th</sup> - German ships were seen to be moving northwards. France and Britain started to mine Norwegian coastal waters. On April 9<sup>th</sup> German troops landed in the five main ports and cities of Norway: Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim, Stavanger and Narvik. The Norwegian resistance was greater than expected - two German cruisers were damaged. In the north (Narvik) the resistance was successful for some time (with the aid of British, French and Polish troops). In early June they withdrew. King Haakon VII and his government managed to escape to London. Norway was now in German hands.

The defeat of Poland, Finland and Norway led to a government change in both Britain and France! Public opinion and the elected representatives expressed their discontent at the lack of allied support for especially Finland and Norway:

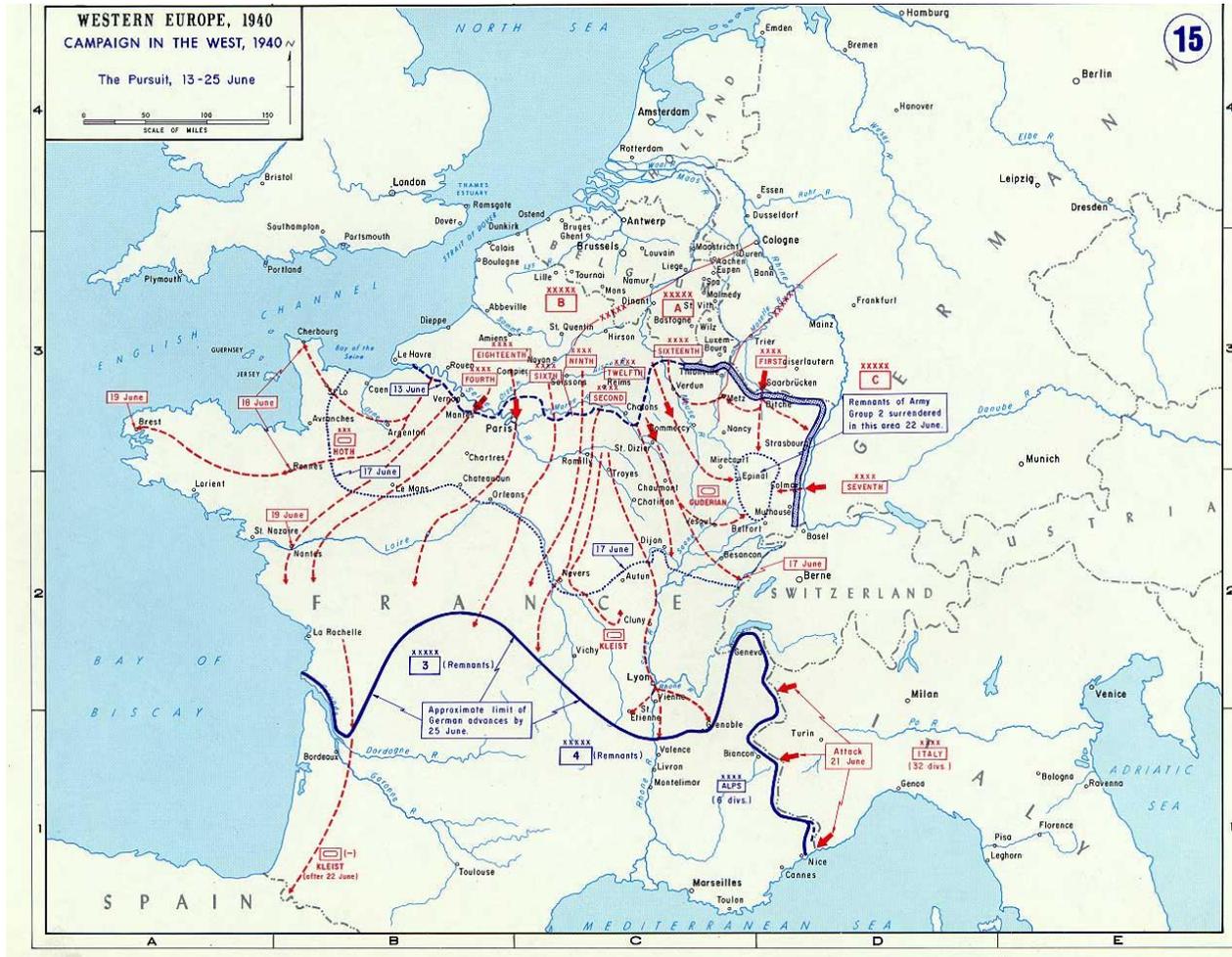
**In France**, the Soviet victory in Finland, led to the downfall of **DALADIER**. He was replaced by **RAUL REYNAUD** on March 20<sup>th</sup> 1940.

**In Britain**, **CHAMBERLAIN**, was replaced by **WINSTON CHURCHILL** on May 10<sup>th</sup> 1940. Both these new governments were broad coalitions which included both conservatives and socialists.

**May 10<sup>th</sup> 1940 LUXEMBOURG, HOLLAND & BELGIUM:** Germany attacked Luxembourg, Holland and Belgium the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 1940. Luxembourg fell at once but Holland and Belgium expected an attack and they were prepared. They thought they would defend themselves along the rivers and waterways - but their armies were small and they lacked artillery and air support. Germany broke the Dutch defensive system within 3 days. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of May Rotterdam was systematically bombed (part of the city was destroyed). Cease fire came the same evening. Queen Juliana and her family fled to Britain and Holland surrendered. The allies had more hope of defending Belgium. The defense line went from the **MAGINOT LINE** along SEDAN to NAMUR and then along the river DYLE. Belgian troops were supposed to hold the northern part, British in the centre and French in the south. The Germans attacked the weakest point in the south through the **ARDENNES**. They met very little resistance and were soon on the south and west side of SEDAN. The allied could not agree on how and where to counterattack. Meanwhile a retreat of their troops towards the English Channel continued. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of May 1940 King Leopold III surrendered Belgium to the Germans. The allied decided to try to get out by the Channel in NIEUPOORT and **DUNKIRK**.



government as legitimate and began the task of organizing the **Free French forces**. Numerous French colonies abroad (French Guiana, French Equatorial Africa) joined de Gaulle rather than the Vichy government. The British began to doubt Admiral Darlan's promise to Churchill not to allow the French fleet at Toulon to fall into German hands by the wording of the armistice conditions; they therefore attacked French naval forces in Africa and Europe, which led to feelings of animosity and mistrust between the former French and British allies. After growing resistance within occupied France Vichy France was occupied on 10 November 1942 and all of France remained under German occupation until after the Allied landings in 1944.



So why did France fall: Two things stand out – the efficient German military campaign and weaknesses of France:

#### German efficiency:

- One part of the German economy was the concept of *war economy* (Wehrwirtschaft). An organization of the entire economy towards the needs of a future war. - The reintroduction of military conscription (1935) and the re-armament improved the economy especially for "big business". The war economy was the absolute most important factor behind the early German military success in WWII
- Germany had one of the biggest armies of Europe (125 divisions)
- Germany had constructed modern tanks that were superior to their counterparts
- Germany had the biggest air force and the planes were faster and more maneuverable than anything the countries above possessed
- Germany had very skilled military commanders like Guderian and Rommel who skillfully adopted the principles of mechanized warfare (which Germany had "rehearsed" in the Spanish Civil War)

- Germany further developed the tactic of “Blitzkrieg” (Lightning war) which was a rapid thrust of tanks and army with heavy aerial support against a slow-moving enemy. The German troops cut off the enemies’ line of supplies and retreat. Then they closed in on the surrounded troops.
- The military forces of the enemies’ were not modernized in the same way as the German forces. French militaries thought the tanks were basically just a “military horse”, the infantry was the backbone of the forces and the Polish military forces were basically the same as they had been 20 years earlier...

### **French weaknesses:**

Even though France had built a huge defense wall against Germany (the Maginot Line) and the fact that they had several months to prepare they were taken by surprise. The winning concept of the German army was the “*Blitzkrieg*” (speed and power) as well as the unexpected strategy. The French strategy was focused on the German army marching through central Belgium (like they did during WWI). The German General von Manstein changed the German war plan in January 1940 and suggested a German attack through the hilly and wooded region in the Ardennes, which was only lightly defended. This strategy succeeded! The German General von Kleist broke through the fairly weak French line near Sedan. This breakthrough did not defeat France but it decided its eventual outcome. The German forces continued to push all the way out to the English Channel. That split the allied forces in two parts.

The British troops and some French retreated north towards the coast and were transported back to Britain by a huge fleet of navy ships mixed with many smaller boats that had been hastily assembled to save the allied forces (**NOTE:** Hitler could have crushed the allied forces but decided to hold back tanks and some of the air force. This decision has led to a lot of speculation – did Hitler lose his nerve? Was this an attempt to get Britain to conclude a separate peace? Etc...). The outcome was that Germany now completely controlled northern France and then focused on Paris.

The new French defense line along the rivers Aisne and Somme fell within two days. Then the French forces piled one disaster on top of another one. At June 9<sup>th</sup> the French government left Paris (for Bordeaux). The next day they declared Paris an “*open city*”. The French government resigned and a WWI war hero, Marshal Philippe Pétain, took over. During the night of 16 June and into the morning of 17 June, Pétain proposed an armistice with the German government. This was not accepted right away. After the Italians got involved and Germany had pushed the French troops further the negotiations of the French armistice started (June 21<sup>st</sup> at Rethondes – in the same railroad carriage that was used when Germany had to sign their surrender in WWI). France was split. The north and west of France became occupied by Germany (still under French officials) while the southern part still was counted as a complete sovereign area free from German military occupation. Marshal Pétain put up his new government in Vichy – that’s why this regime is referred to as the Vichy regime and this part was referred to as Vichy France.

### **A few things that led to the French complete defeat were:**

- Political and economic problems. France had several different governments between WWI and WWII and none of them wanted to rearm. They relied on the policy of appeasement and support from Great Britain.
- The old fashion tactics (and equipment) of the French Army (where they looked at a tank as a mechanized horse)
- Too much reliance on the Maginot Line. When Germany broke through the district of Ardennes France had not planned for this eventuality
- Italy joined the war June 10<sup>th</sup> 1940 as a German ally. On Thursday 20 June, the French government asked the Italian government for an armistice. The same day Italy launched their attack into France. Even though the Italian campaign was not successful France signed a treaty with Italy a few days later.
- The French troops were hindered by the masses of refugees: Many civilians sought refuge by taking to the roads of France: some two million refugees from Belgium and Holland were

joined by between eight and ten million French civilians, representing a quarter of the French population, all heading south and west.

**RESULT** of the French defeat:

- The French collapse after only five weeks of fighting shocked the rest of the world. Hitler + Germany was now convinced of German military superiority and therefore started to plan for future expansion using the same tactics
- Great Britain was now the only remaining enemy of Hitler and Germany. Her chances against Germany were not good. The British army was relatively small and a lot of British equipment had been left on the beaches of Dunkirk
- The US agreed to let Britain buy war material. This decision and President Roosevelt's positive attitude towards Great Britain would eventually lead to a US involvement in WWII

## TIMELINE WWII – SECOND PHASE (August 1940-January 1942)

August

**”Battle of Britain” starts (Operation “Sea Lion”):** Germany's plan was to gain air superiority, then launch Operation Sea Lion: amphibious and airborne **invasion of Britain**. Initially RAF airfields were attacked. As the Battle progressed, operations were extended to the strategic level: systematic destruction of aircraft production centers and ground infrastructure. Eventually the *Luftwaffe* and the RAF resorted to attacking areas of political significance and terror bombing tactics. British historians date the battle from 10 July to 31 October 1940, which represented the most intense period of daylight bombing. German historians usually place the beginning of the battle in mid-August 1940 and end it in May 1941, on the withdrawal of the bomber units in preparation for Operation Barbarossa, the Campaign against the USSR on 22 June 1941.

The failure of Nazi Germany to reach its objectives—to destroy Britain's air defense or to force Britain out of the war by forcing an armistice or surrender—is considered both its first major defeat and a crucial turning point in the war.

**Italy attacks British troops in British Somaliland (East Africa):** Mussolini had established big Italian forces in the African Colonies – Over 200 000 men in Abyssinia and Eritrea – Britain had 9000 men in Sudan... So Italy attacked! (*Italian “Living Space”*)

September

**Italy attacks British troops in Egypt:** Italy had even more men in Libya – against 36 000 British men in Egypt – So Italy attacked! (*Italian “Living Space”*)

**Britain received 50 destroyers from the US:** In an agreement with the US Britain received 50 destroyers to help guarding convoys (cash and carry-system). The Us received the right to use naval bases in British colonies near the USA.

October

**German troops enter Romania:** Agreement with the Romanian government. This was part of a political deal after Soviet Union had seized Bessarabia (June 1940) and northern Bukovina (June 1940). (*Preparation for the German attack against Soviet Union – German “Lebensraum”*)

**Italy attacks Greece (from Albania):** Italy attacked Greece by the end of October. The Greeks did not ask any other nations for help (Britain offered some) they were convinced they could defeat Italy all by themselves... (*Italian “Living Space”*)

November

**Britain successful in an air raid against the Italian fleet (in Taranto – South Italy):** 21 British airplanes from British air carriers attacked the Italian fleet at the harbor of Taranto in South Italy. This is the first all-aircraft naval attack in history! These planes managed to sink 2 Torpedo bombers and 1 battleship and they damaged 2 battleships and 1 light cruiser. This attack was repeated about a year later – this time by Japan at Pearl Harbor...

**Hungary joins the Axis (Germany and Italy):** Political agreement between Germany and Hungary allows German troops to enter Hungary

*(Preparation for the German attack against Soviet Union – German “Lebensraum”)*

**Romania joins the Axis (Germany, Italy and Hungary):** Political agreement between Germany and Romania allows German troops to enter Romania (*Preparation for the German attack against Soviet Union – German “Lebensraum”*)

December

**Britain starts an offensive against the Italian troops in Egypt:** The British troops use “Blitzkrieg” and within weeks the British advanced over 800 km. They were now south of the city of Benghazi.

1941

January

**Britain starts an offensive against Italian troops in East Africa:** British troops thrust into Abyssinia and Eritrea from Sudan and Kenya. In May they let the Emperor of Abyssinia Haile Selassie return...

**Britain captures the city of Tobruk in Libya:** After the capture of Tobruk the Prime Minister Churchill orders the British advance to stop. Then the British starts to reorganize their troops in Northern Africa...

**Britain had used up her credit in the USA** – and the “Cash and Carry” system was seriously jeopardized...

February

**German General Rommel arrives in Northern Africa:** Rommel arrived in Tripoli in Libya. He launched several attacks (“Blitzkrieg”) against the British forces that were in the midst of reorganization. They were therefore soon driven into retreat.

**Greece accepts British help:**

Britain captures Mogadishu – capital of Italian Somaliland

March

**Bulgaria joins the Axis (Germany, Italy, Hungary and Romania):** Political agreement between Germany and Bulgaria allows German troops to enter Bulgaria (*Preparation for the German attack against Soviet Union – German “Lebensraum”*)

**Britain sends troops to Greece:** Over 50000 British soldiers land in Greece...

**Yugoslavia signs a pact with the Axis (but then the government is overthrown):** The Yugoslavian government is overthrown by a military coup. This new government rejects the agreement between the old government and Germany...

April

**German troops broke into Yugoslavia (from Austria):** Hitler has made his mind up about the attack on Soviet Union. He must therefore secure his right flank. He postpones the attack on Soviet Union to a later date – the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June. (*Preparation for the German attack against Soviet Union – German “Lebensraum”*)

**Germany sends troops to aid Italy in Greece:** Mussolini and the Italian troops were not able to advance in Greece. After the British troops arrived Italy risked losing their Greek campaign. Hitler therefore sent German troops in so he could continue to secure the right flank... (*Preparation for the German attack against Soviet Union – German “Lebensraum”*)

German troops (under Rommel) and Italian troops re-enter Libya

**British troops capture the Abyssinian capital Addis Ababa in East**

**Africa:** The Emperor Haile Selassie (*His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, King of Kings and Elect of God*) returns to his capital after several years in exile...

**Yugoslavia surrenders to Germany:**

**Greece surrenders to Germany and Italy:** The British troops in Greece were evacuated to the Greek island Crete...

May

**Iraqi troops attack British troops in Iraq:**

**Germany invades Crete:** The German General Student was able to land at Crete even though the British knew they were coming (these German messages were sent using the code machine Enigma). After the Germans were able to capture one airfield they could land over 22000 troops. In the end of May Britain evacuated the island – the entire European mainland was now in or under German influence. Now Hitler could concentrate on Russia... (*Preparation for the German attack against Soviet Union – German “Lebensraum”*)

**British troops enters Baghdad (Iraq)**

June

**Syria is attacked by Allied troops (British and French)**

Germany and Turkey signs a treaty where they promise to respect each others territory...

**OPERATION BARBAROSSA starts.** Germany attacks the Soviet Union the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 1941...

**Finland declares war against Soviet Union**

## OPERATION BARBAROSSA

Hitler formally issued orders for the invasion of Russia in December 1940. His advisers, on the basis of intelligence reports and the performance of the Russian Army in Finland, suggested that an eight-week campaign should be sufficient to reach Moscow and bring the Soviet government to its knees. This low estimate of Soviet capability was shared by western intelligence experts.

### HITLERS REASONS FOR ATTACKING RUSSIA

1. **Lebensraum.** The political idea of “Lebensraum”, living space, was a political cornerstone in Adolf Hitler’s ideology. It argued that the German people needed extra space for a growing population. This lebensraum should be found in the East, and in order to get ahold of the land a war was necessary (ideological reason).
2. Russian lands contained some very desirable **raw materials**, such as rich oil fields in Baku and fertile soil in Ukraine. Germany was desperate to acquire these assets (economic reason). Ukraine would be a reliable **source of cheap food**.
3. The German War Machine desperately needed **access to oil** and only a push to the Soviet Baku Oilfields could achieve this objective (economic reason).
4. **Hostility to Bolshevism** - Some members of the Nazi party considered the war between Russia and Germany as a struggle between the Nazis and the Communists, who Hitler had labeled the second largest threat to the German Reich after the Jews (political and ideological reasons).
5. The Soviet Union could be a **source of cheap slave labor**. The people with Slavic origins living in Russia could serve as a cheap source of slave labor, according to some high standing leaders. The Nazis believed the Germans to be a “master race”. The

Slavic population was seen as inferior and therefore suitable as slaves (economic and ideological reasons).

6. When the Soviet Union was defeated, the labor shortage in the German industry could be ended by the **demobilization of many German soldiers** (economic reason)
7. Defeat of the Soviet Union would further **isolate the British Empire**. It would leave Britain with no prospect of further support in Europe. (military reason)
8. Hitler was afraid that if he did not attack, **Stalin would charge instead**. Therefore, he decided to be one step ahead and strike first (military reason).
9. The attack would also **leave Japan without any distraction** in her impending confrontation with the United States (political and military reasons)

June 22<sup>nd</sup> 1941 was chosen as the day to start OPERATION BARBAROSSA...

### **GERMAN ATTACK ON THREE FRONTS:**

In the South the aims were the Ukraine (agricultural products), the Don Basin (industries) and the Caucasus oil fields.

In the North the aim was to take the city of Leningrad.

The Centre attack had the aim of capture the capital, Moscow.

### **NEW ALLIES FOR RUSSIA – AND AID:**

Alliance Russia – Great Britain on 12 July!

Agreement Britain + United States and Russia – October 1<sup>st</sup> 1941. They agreed to supply Russia with war materials for nine months.

In June 1942 the United States extended her lend-lease arrangements to Russia, and eventually sent 11 billion dollars' worth of goods to the Soviet Union (over 3000 tanks and more than 4000 planes)

### **GERMAN SUCCESS – AT FIRST**

In December 1941 the North “Army” was just outside Leningrad, the Centre “Army” reached suburbs of Moscow and the South “Army” managed to take Ukraine...

In December Hitler relieved the Commander-in-Chief and took personal control.

The German troops suffered badly during the winter of 1941-2 but were ready to continue the offensive in May 1942.

### **CHANGE OF TACTICS 1942**

For 1942, Hitler adopted different tactics in Russia. Instead of attacking on all three fronts, it was decided to restrict the offensive to the southern front (the rich industrial area of the Don Basin and the oilfields of Caucasus + maybe connect with the Axis forces from North Africa and thereby take the Middle East...

### **GERMAN OFFENSIVE 1942**

The offensive during summer 1942 was successful and on September 14<sup>th</sup> the first German forces reached the outskirts of Stalingrad. This is the place where the war turned in the East! The German troops did not manage to take Stalingrad. After being surrounded Field Marshal von Paulus decided to surrender (with his surviving 80000 men) January 31<sup>st</sup> 1943!

At the same time, there were other Russian successes.

### **START OF GERMAN RETREAT 1943**

During February, the Russians recaptured Kursk, Rostov and Kharkov, and had either killed or taken prisoner half a million Germans during three months. Even though the Russian advance came to a temporary stop in March 1943 it was clear that the Germans were forced back - the boot was on the other foot.

<i>July</i>	<b>Armistice with Syria!</b> Britain occupies Syria and Lebanon... Alliance – Great Britain + Soviet Union (July 12 <sup>th</sup> )
<i>August</i>	<b>The Atlant Declaration</b> Iran let British and Soviet troops enter the country
<i>October</i>	USA + Great Britain agreed to supply Russia with war materials for nine months... Japan takes over the rule of French Indo-China
<i>November</i>	British Counter Attack launched into Libya... (Tobruk reached – again in December)
<i>December</i>	Great Britain declares war on Finland <b>Japan attacks Pearl Harbor (Dec. 7th)</b> The German troops come to a halt over winter in Russia... Hitler now takes personal over the continuation of the Russian Campaign USA and Great Britain declares war against Japan (notice that the USSR and Japan honors their mutual non-aggression pact...) Germany and Italy declares war on the USA and signs a full military alliance with Japan

## TIMELINE WWII – THIRD PHASE (January 1942-May 1945)

### 1942

*January*

*May*

Germany ready to continue the Russian Campaign – focus is now on the South (the rich industrial area of the Don Basin and the oilfields of Caucasus) – eventually take the Middle East with the help of the African corps...

Axis counter-attack launched in Libya. Tobruk falls (again) in June and the Axis move into Egypt (again) – halt at El Alamein (for four months). Rommel tries to attack two times: July 1<sup>st</sup> and August 31<sup>st</sup> – both attempt failed!

*June*

The earlier agreement between USA-Great Britain and Russia (about assisting the USSR with war supplies) runs out. USA extends her lend-lease arrangements to the USSR (ev. US would send 11 billion dollars' worth of goods to Russia – over 3000 tanks and 4000 air planes)

*September*

German troops have reached the outskirts of Stalingrad – The Battle of Stalingrad had begun!

*October*

British troops under Montgomery starts a counter-attack at El Alamein (have good use for the 500 new US Sherman tanks they received). In early November they start to come through...

*November*

At the same time as the British troops came through the German defense lines outside El Alamein US, British and Free French troops land in North-West Africa (Casablanca and Oran). The Vichy-French Head of Morocco/Algeria was assassinated and an Allied appointed French General (Giraud) was appointed! This made the Germans react in Europe... Pétains Vichy-regime was removed by Germany and all of France was now under German occupation! The French managed though to scuttle their fleet in Toulon before it fell in German hands...

### 1943

*January*

The fighting in North Africa is “stabilized”. The front will not start to move until May...

**CASABLANCA CONFERENCE** decides that the eventual victory in North Africa should be followed by an invasion of Italy (described by Churchill as the “soft under-belly of Europe”).

At the 31<sup>st</sup> of January General von Paulus (Germany) surrenders with his 80 000 surviving men...

*February*

Russia starts an offensive and take back the cities of Kursk, Rostov and Kharkov.

*May*

The Italian Commander-in-Chief (Marshal Messe) surrender in North Africa. Mussolinis dreams of an Italian Empire in Africa is dead and

Hitlers hope of dominating Egypt and the Middle East also... Now they have to try to protect Europe.....

*June* Some small islands between Tunisia and Italy are occupied by Allied forces. That starts the Italian Campaign

*July* British and US troops land on Sicily...  
Mussolini was forced to appear before the Fascist Grand Council. They criticized him and he was formally sacked by King Victor Emmanuel III. He was then put in arrest.  
Russia launches another offensive in the USSR (Smolensk falls in September)...

*August* After negotiations a secret act of surrender is signed by Italy August 3<sup>rd</sup>. At the 8<sup>th</sup> the surrender was made public and the following day bigger Allied forces landed on the Italian mainland. August 10<sup>th</sup> - the Italian Fleet surrender to the British at Malta. Germany counters by occupying Rome and they managed to release Mussolini who now becomes a German “puppet”...

*October* The Allied invasion of Italy continues. The troops had as an aim to spend Christmas in Rome...

*November* The German General Kesselring constructs a defense line south of Rome – the “Gustav Line” (which includes the old monastery at Monte Cassino) which stops the allied advance. He manages to hold this line until late May 1944...

**TEHRAN CONFERENCE** – Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin meet in Iran to discuss the war...

## **1944**

*January* The Russian offensive in the North finally manages to break the siege of Leningrad (after 900 days)...

*March/April* Russian forces enter Poland and stands at the borders of Romania and Czechoslovakia.

*May* Kesselring orders the German troops to retreat from the Gustav Line... He moves north and there he constructs a second defense line – the “Gothic Line” which he will hold until April 1945...

*June* The Allies enter Rome!  
D-Day – “Operation Overlord” took place at the morning of June 6<sup>th</sup>.  
Russian offensive against Finland. Viborg falls and Russia manages to break through the Mannerheim Line.

*August* Romania surrenders! Romanian forces join the Russian troops marching towards Yugoslavia.  
The Allied forces reached Paris. General De Gaulle and the Free French marched into the capital.

- September* Bulgaria surrenders! A pro-Russian government is established in Sofia. Bulgarian forces join the Russian troops marching towards Yugoslavia. Brussels liberated by the Allied forces. After the failure at Arnhem the allied advance was stopped (by the Siegfried Line and bad weather...)
- October* Russian troops stops outside Warsaw – Meanwhile their has been an upraise in the city which now the Germans manage to crush. This tactic demonstration of Russia is strongly criticized by her Allies. Churchill flew to Moscow where he meets Stalin. They conclude the **Percentages agreement...** Belgrade liberated by Russian, Bulgarian and Romanian troops. The Yugoslavian resistance forces also play an important role (split in two – nationalists and Communists. The Communists are lead by Marshal Tito)
- December* General von Runstedt launched a German counter-offensive through the Ardennes – again! It took the Allies by surprise but after a few weeks of better weather (so the bomb planes could find the German troops) the German advance was stopped!
- 1945**
- January* Russia continues her offensive in Poland. Warsaw falls on January 17<sup>th</sup>.
- February* Russian troops are now within 30 miles from Berlin. A bridgehead cross the Siegfried Line was established **YALTA CONFERENCE** – Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin meet each other at the Crimean peninsula to discuss post-war issues...
- March* American forces reach Cologne and they managed to secure a bridge across the Rhine.
- April* Russian troops enter Berlin...  
Hitler commits suicide
- May* Hitler's death is announced  
May 7<sup>th</sup> – Admiral Doenitz signs an official German surrender.  
May 8<sup>th</sup> – President Truman and Prime Minister Churchill officially announces the victory in Europe...

## So – why did Germany and her allies in Europe loose WWII?

### *German collapse in Russia – at Stalingrad 1942/1943:*

- **Inferior forces** - much of the German flanks were made up of Hungarian, Romanian, and Italian troops, who lacked the equipment and training of the German forces.
- **Lack of mobility** - one of the strongest assets to the German army was its mobility, its capability to move and amass forces too quickly for the enemy to react. This didn't work in Stalingrad, as most of the fighting took place within an urban environment.
- **Weather** - Russian fall/winter struck the German troops as they were only wearing light clothing in juxtaposition to the Russian troops' heavy clothing.
- **German resources were stretched too thin** - the German air force was vital to its success early in the war, but as more and more territory was claimed they began to spread too thinly, greatly reducing their effectiveness.
- **Scarcity of supplies** – Stalingrad lay at the end of a very long supply line. While Germany was able to reach the city, it wasn't able to funnel enough troops or supplies to the city to finish pushing out the Soviets. Instead, the Soviets were able to gather enough troops to counterattack and cut off the 300,000 or so Germans in the city of Stalingrad. Additionally, the Russians burned almost every town that the Germans came upon in Russia so that they could not get any supplies and food from the town(s).
- **Hitler's stand and hold order.** If the Germans had bypassed the city, cutting it off on the vine and retaining mobility, then the German Army could have dealt with the city later. As it was, by standing in a slogging contest, they allowed just this to happen to them, as the Russian reinforcements bypassed the city and cut off 6th panzer army.
- **The interference of Hitler** - The generals wanted to pull back from Stalingrad once they felt the strength of the Russian resistance as they did not want to be caught there fighting a winter war far from their supply bases. Hitler was obsessed with taking Stalingrad at all costs since it was named after Stalin and he thought it would be a significant boost to German morale. The outcome was that the Russians were too brave and smart to be defeated in the city and eventually Russian troops encircled the city from north and south cutting off the Germans from being resupplied, which led to the surrender of the Germans on February 2, 1943.
- **The Germans did not know the land as the Russians did** - The terrain and scale of the attack hindered the German's ability to take Stalingrad. Their offense stretched across 500 miles and if they gained the land that would come with Stalingrad, including the Caucasus Mountains, they would gain 1,300 miles of territory. The Caucasus Mountains caused trouble for the Germans from the beginning. The mountains were heavily reinforced with Soviet troops who knew the land much better than the Germans because it was their home (Showalter). There were not enough troops in the Caucasus because the majorities were stationed at Stalingrad; Hitler believed that Stalingrad was so vital to their campaign that he would not let troops from other countries take the lead in the fighting.

### *The Italian collapse 1943/1944:*

- Italy was the weakest power of all the other major powers. Even though it was one of the Axis Powers, it stayed neutral for seven months when Germany attacked Poland.
- Italy did not have as much and developed industry as the other major powers had. They could not supply their army with arms and vehicles in the same way that for example France could. It therefore took longer time to rearm and to import cost a lot of money.
- Italy's unsuccessful attacks of France, Greece and Egypt made Italy a part of the WWII at

the same time as they needed help from the Germans in the battles.

- In 1943 the Axis powers met major setbacks overall.
- After the defeat in Egypt 1942 the Axis powers had to retreat until they were defeated again in July 1943 by the allies in North Africa.
- Italy also had problems at the front in their own country. Allied troops invaded Sicily.
- People were starving because of the lack of food and they lost their faith in Mussolini.
- The industries did not have enough raw materials and could not produce. Workers were striking in industrial cities.
- Later the same year, the allied troops invaded Sicily and bombed the Italian mainland. This and the fact that Italy was in need of help by the Germans led to a coup d'état.
- At this point members of the Italian government turned against Mussolini as the army and country were about to fall apart.
- A democratic vote took place and the majority voted to dismiss Mussolini as the leader of Italy.
- The King, Victor Emmanuel III, ordered the Carabinieri to arrest Mussolini. Marshal Pietro Badoglio replaced him.

### ***The Allied invasion of Normandy June 1944.***

- The Germans thought the attack was going to occur further along the coast at Calais. (Shortest route by sea was Dover → Calais)
- When the attack began Hitler still believed the attack would be held at Calais.
- False intelligence was spread by the Allies and in turn led to the Germans receiving false intelligence.
- Wooden guns, wooden planes, plastic dummies, and mirrors on ships fooled the Germans as they saw themselves going the other way.
- New technology specifically designed for the landing in Normandy gave the Allies advantages.
- Mulberries, floating docks, enabled the Allies to safely land while firing.
- On some beaches there was no resistance, allowing a smooth disembark. (The Allies suffered heavy losses on Omaha beach)
- D-day had been planned for many years and everything was ready.
- The Germans had to control other parts of their Empire and therefore had troops everywhere else. The Italian attack and keeping control of the land made it harder for the Germany.

### ***Summary of why did Germany and her allies lose WWII:***

- Persecution of Jews. Notable Jews such as Albert Einstein could have done much with the German scientists.
- Technology was good but too slow. They did not succeed in inventing the a-bomb first.
- Attacking Poland (had already gained Czechoslovakia and Sudetenland) was a mistake
- The Germans had a prime opportunity to cripple the British Military and take out the Royal Air Force during operation Eagle but Goering and Hitler changed their minds and instead began attacking the RAF Fighter Command Stations.
- Betrayal of non-aggression pact and attacked the Soviet Union with harsh winters and crippled leadership threat would open a two-front war.
- The German declaration of war against the USA was a mistake...
- Germany had economic troubles. Difficulty in maintaining ex. fuel and oil. Germany's enemies had plentiful through lend-lease act.

- After Mussolini was executed Italy declared war on Germany, stacking the odds against them even higher.
- At the end of the war – with Japan fighting in the far Pacific Germany's only allies were Yugoslavia, Hungary, Romania, and other smaller Eastern European countries, not any superior ones.
- The German people and military had experienced much war the previous six years and were both physically and mentally drained.

#### ***Germany under-estimated the Red Army***

- A year after the Soviets collapse in 1941, the USSR out-produced Germany, transformed their military from inexperienced to organised and skilled and destroyed Germany's Sixth Army

#### ***Bombing of Germany by the United States and U.K.***

- Crippled Germany's front line, reduced production of aircraft bombers, and caused vast social disruptions leading to almost 800 000 German refugees leaving the country

#### ***American bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki***

- Japan was one of Germany's strongest allies. The atomic bombs dropped in Japan lead to Japan's surrender and a lost ally for Germany

#### ***Italy's surrender to the Allies and other Axis Ally switch coats***

- After the Western Allies invaded Italy, many other countries `Axis' countries, for example Finland, Romania, Bulgaria, changed sides (1944). Towards the end, Germany was fighting all by her lonesome which contributed toward her loss

#### ***American entry to WWII***

- US supported allies with plethora of weapons, war craft, and men. Although Germany was a power house at the time, America out shone them and could support more

#### ***Some poor German military strategies***

- Hitler was a politician, not a general. Some historians believe that Germany's lack of true military leadership is what lead to its loss althea battle field. Organisation failed when fighting the RAF, British and Canadian Navy, and coordination with other Axis Allies, especially when thousands of German troops were sent to North Africa to bail out the Italian troops when those men should have been fighting the USSR

#### ***Too many fronts for Germany to handle***

- Germany was fighting 3 fronts at once: France, Britain, and USSR. On top of watching all 3 borders, they had troops fighting to hold new territory in Poland and the Czech Republic and had to back up Italy

## MEETINGS AND NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE ALLIES:

**1941**

*August*

**Atlantic Declaration / Atlantic Charter** – Churchill and Roosevelt meet in Canada to discuss questions of mutual interest (like US aid to Britain, order in Europe after the war, etc...)

**1943**

*January*

**CASABLANCA CONFERENCE** decides that the eventual victory in North Africa should be followed by an invasion of Italy (described by Churchill as the “soft under-belly of Europe”).

*November*

**TEHRAN CONFERENCE** – Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin meet in Iran to discuss the war...

**1944**

*October*

Churchill flew to Moscow where he meets Stalin. They conclude the **percentages agreement...**

**1945**

*February*

**YALTA CONFERENCE** – Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin meet each other at the Crimean peninsula to discuss post-war issues...