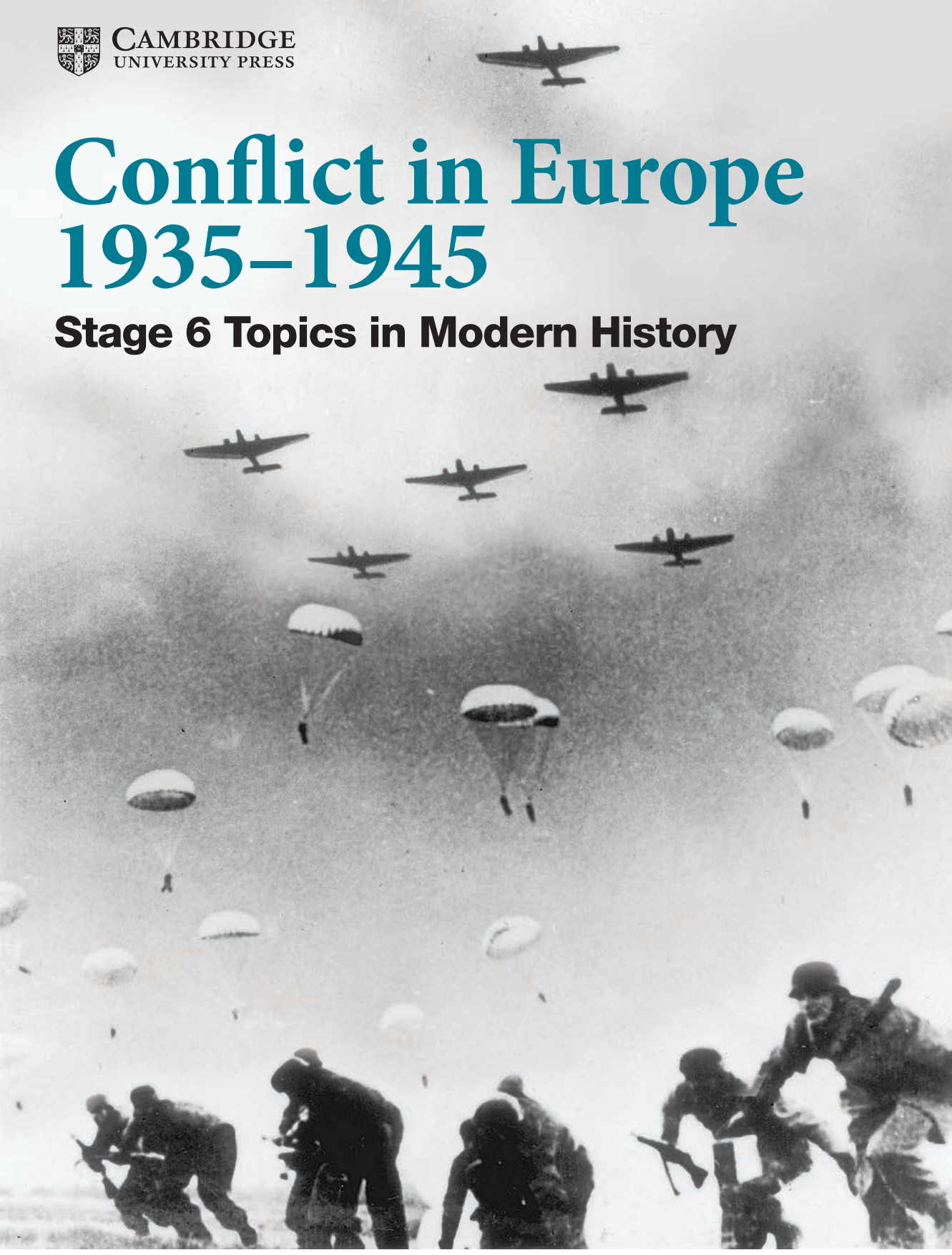
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Stage 6 Topics in Modern History



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About the author

Tom Dunwoodie



Tom Dunwoodie is currently the teacher/librarian and English Coordinator at Trinity Catholic College Goulburn. He has previously served as Head of History for the multi-campus M.E.T. Schools in New South Wales. As Campus Coordinator in Goulburn, Tom was lead teacher on introducing Harvard's Visible Thinking Routines, and developing a program fostering self-directed learning. He has attended several universities, most recently obtaining a Masters of Humanities in research from the University of New England, Armidale. Tom is also a co-author of Cambridge's new title *Modern History Transformed: Stage 5*.

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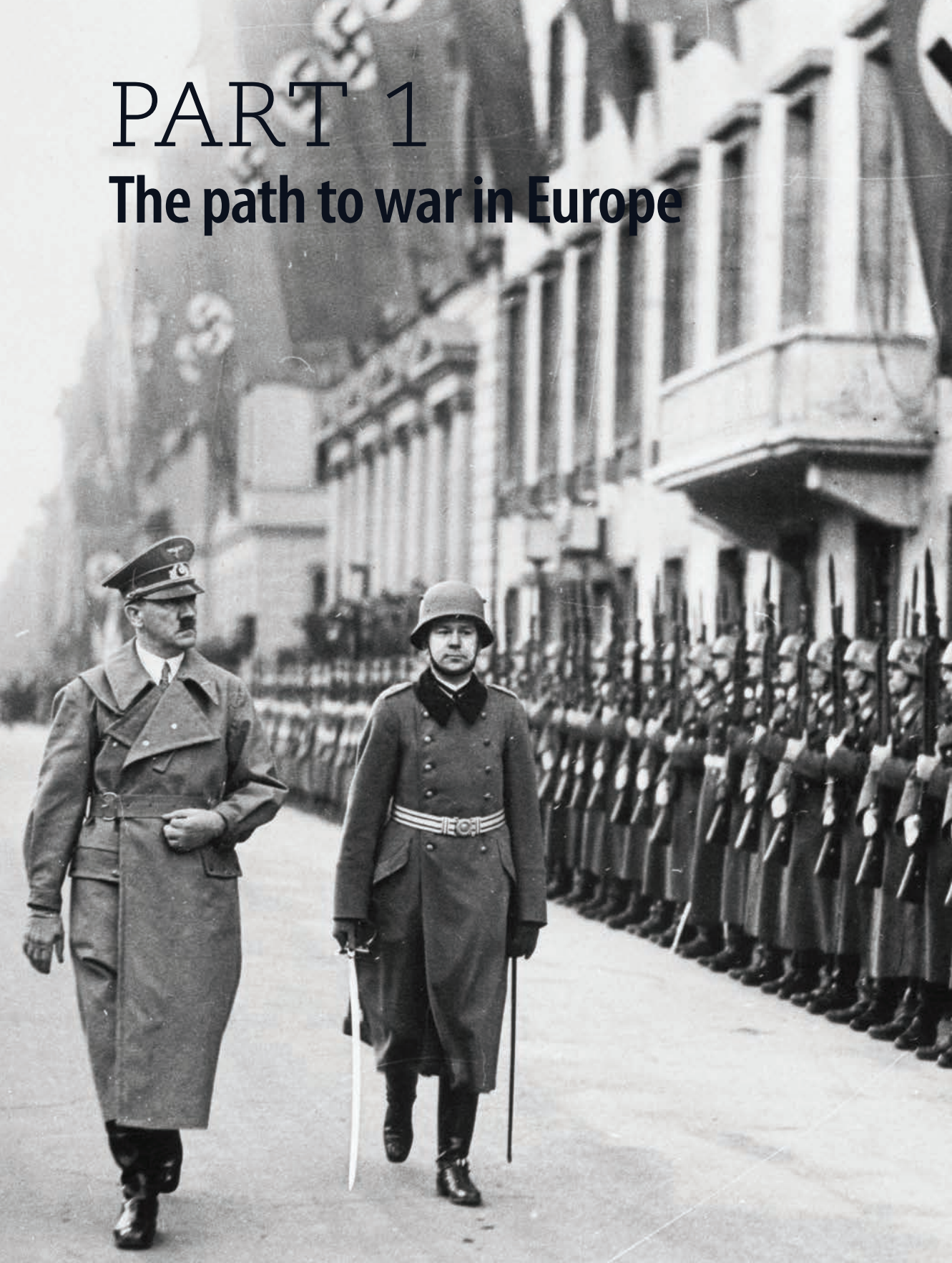
About the cover



On 20 May 1941, the Luftwaffe commenced an airborne invasion of Crete by deploying paratroopers to assault critical positions. Due to the strong defences of the largest Greek island, an airborne operation was considered the most effective way for the Nazi forces to achieve their victory. The battle signified the first large-scale use of paratroopers in an airborne invasion. However, the high death toll to his airborne forces led Adolf Hitler to believe that paratroopers were not a very effective method of winning the war, unless they had the element of surprise. After Crete, further German paratrooper missions were limited.

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PART 1
The path to war in Europe



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1 Why war? Rearming Germany

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- A survey of the German army and rearmament during the 1930s



Figure 1.1 Territory controlled by Germany and its allies, early 1941

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See, think, wonder

Create a three-columned table with the titles See, Think and Wonder.

1. List what you can **see** in Figure 1.1 in the first column. (I can see …)
2. Using this list, write down what the image makes you **think** about. (I think …)
3. In the final column, create a list of ideas which may not directly be in the image, but you now **wonder** about. (I wonder …)

After obtaining power, **Adolf Hitler** committed Germany to a path of war. The only question was: when? Throughout the 1930s, he breached the terms of the Treaty of Versailles by expanding the army, building submarines and creating the Luftwaffe. These aggressive steps were followed by the reoccupation of the Rhineland in 1936, the Anschluss with Austria in 1938, occupation of Czechoslovakia, and eventually the attack on Poland in 1939. Hitler achieved his aims through aggression, not peace.



Figure 1.2 Adolf Hitler, Führer of Germany, reviews his troops.

1.1 Rearming the Wehrmacht

Before Hitler, the Weimar Government continually breached Versailles during the 1920s; General von Seeckt sent soldiers to train, build and test weapons in Russia under the Treaty of Rapallo, and both Chancellors Brüning and Schleicher followed policies designed to rearm Germany while maintaining their international relationships. This process mainly occurred through discussion of rearmament – Britain and France hoped that by continual discussion they would slow, if not prevent, German rearmament. But Hitler did not follow the path of the Weimar Republic. Throughout the 1920s, he continually stated his desire to overturn the Treaty of Versailles, particularly its articles dealing with rearmament. To do this, he had to test the resolve of the British and French. He wasn't interested in rearmament controlled by other countries; he wanted Germany to control its own army, country and future.

Hitler took a pragmatic approach to rearmament by insisting that Germany only required equal status to its neighbours, and the ability to protect itself if invaded. Further to this, he regularly spoke of how peace was Germany's

Video 1.1
A military parade of members of the various departments of the Wehrmacht (00:33)

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aim, not further global conflict. While rearmament was a broad aim for the **Third Reich**, Hitler targeted specific areas for development during the mid-1930s. These included the navy (Kriegsmarine), air force (Luftwaffe) and the army (Heer), all serving in the armed forces of Germany (Wehrmacht). Germany did not officially renounce the Treaty of Versailles until 1935, but as demonstrated by the construction and flight dates of numerous German aircraft and submarines, it began rearmament well before its official withdrawal.

1.2 The Luftwaffe

During World War I, aircraft were an emerging technology. Despite this, the Treaty of Versailles expressly forbade Germany the right to have an air force under Article 198. From 1919, the depleted German army forged a bond with the newly formed **Communist** government in Russia over their shared dislike of Versailles. Russia saw Versailles as a way for Britain and France to maintain their power across the globe. Russia was isolated through its choice of government and shared similar goals as Germany. The Treaty of Rapallo, negotiated in 1922, formally restored relations between Germany and Russia, and allowed for the development of secret programs for sharing military personnel, skills and technology. This included the establishment of glider schools across Russia, which allowed German pilots to practise their craft. The Weimar Government and **Reichswehr** were responsible for these agreements, which laid the groundwork for Hitler to pursue a greater European war.

Source 1.1 Reich Minister Hermann Göring speech, published in a Berlin newspaper, the *Berliner Morgenpost*, 30 April 1933

German men! German women! Since the end of the war the general disarmament has been promised to the German people. The truth, however, is that the world is now more in guns than ever before. Thousands of war planes are always ready for action around Germany, while we are completely helpless in the air. Even the defence from the earth was almost completely taken away. Germany is more threatened [from the air] than any other country. Every German city is accessible to bombers. Our most important industries lie in the vicinity of foreign air combat forces. Air protection has therefore become a vital issue for our people. It requires a long-term goal-conscious construction under expert management and taut leadership …

Source questions

1. Outline the information contained in this source.
2. Describe the genuine fears Germans may have had if they were not able to build an air force.
3. Why would Göring deliver this statement to a newspaper in 1933? What was he hoping to achieve by doing so?

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Planning began in 1933 for an air force which consisted of both bombers and fighter planes, built in direct violation of the Treaty of Versailles. A Ministry for Aviation was established and, by August 1933, a program for creation of air force squadrons was agreed upon by General von Blomberg of the Reichswehr and **Hermann Göring** in his new role as Reich Commissioner for Aviation. By the end of 1934, industry constructed and delivered nearly 2000 aircraft, including 270 bombers. This was remarkable progress, and German scientific innovation ensured a stream of technological development for these aircraft.

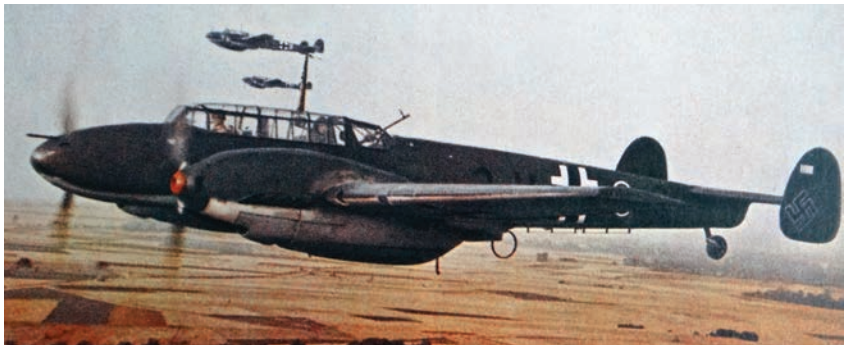


Figure 1.3 Heinkel HE 111 – first flight, 24 February 1935

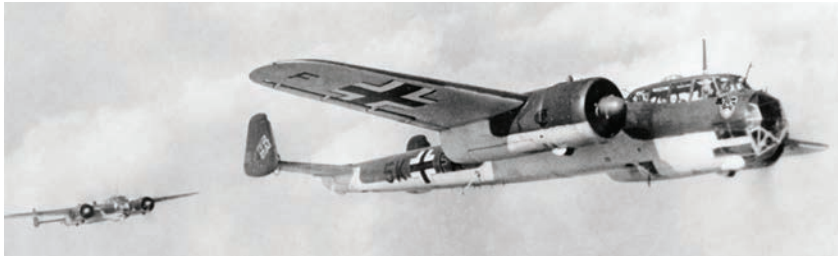


Figure 1.4 Dornier DO 17 – first flight, 23 November 1934



Figure 1.5 Junkers JU 87 Stuka – first flight, 17 September 1935

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Figure 1.6 Messerschmitt BF 109 – first flight, 29 May 1935



Figure 1.7 The Nazis experimented with a helicopter, the Focke-Wulf FW 61.

After 1936, production of aircraft by the Third Reich decreased due to two major problems. Firstly, rearming across all areas of the military had created competition for resources, which were not always allocated to the Luftwaffe. Secondly, the technical challenges of producing quality aircraft tested German innovation. As scientists and industry realised a potential war with Britain was looming, they focused on developing long-distance bombers and craft for fighter escorts. These technical challenges led to slowed production, despite Hitler's demands for increases.

1.3 The Kriegsmarine

When Hitler came to power in 1933, he inherited the Weimar Republic's renegotiations of the Treaty of Versailles, and the disarmament conference of 1933. Weimar politicians worked hard with the Allies to secure Germany's ability to rebuild its navy, which would provide greater security. However, Germany's goal was not simply to increase its armed forces, but for the Allies to decrease theirs, which is an idea known as parity.

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The French were not eager for any negotiations which restored Germany to parity; after all, the greatest destruction in World War I occurred on their soil, in their towns. With post-war challenges and the Great Depression, the French resisted all calls to negotiate. As a result, Germany withdrew from the League of Nations in 1933 (it had re-entered in 1926), and despite British attempts, could not be persuaded to return. Hitler concluded that Germany was better off rearming secretly than continuing political negotiations.

Evans, R. *The Third Reich in Power* (2006), Penguin, United States, p. 705 Source 1.2

> Naval rearmament began more slowly, initially based on plans drawn up in November 1932, but here as well, expansion eventually reached a headlong pace. There were 17,000 naval officers and seamen in service in 1933, an increase of only 2,000 on the previous year, but by the beginning of the war in 1939 the number had grown to almost 79,000.

From 1935, Germany rapidly rearmed across all sectors of the military, although production of ships and U-Boats was hampered by limited skilled construction workers and materials. The June 1935 naval agreement, when the British *agreed* to Germany violating Versailles, marked the first steps towards a European war. From this point, Germany rapidly escalated its production before World War II, creating the fleet necessary to inflict heavy losses on Allied shipping.

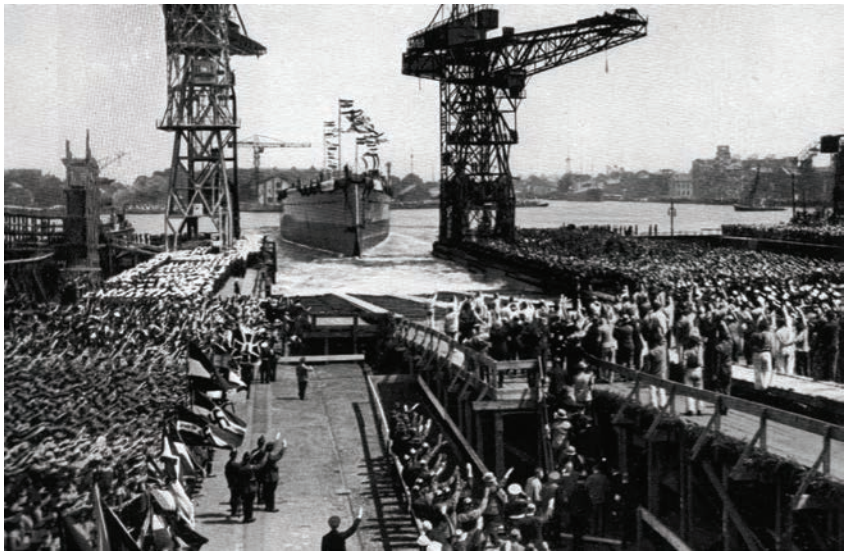


Figure 1.8 The launching of the battleship *Graf Spee* in 1934

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One notable absence was present in German naval plans – they only constructed one aircraft carrier, called the *Graf Zeppelin*. With Admiral **Erich Raeder** focusing on battleships and U-Boats, and the Luftwaffe under the control of Hermann Göring, the Third Reich was never able to integrate air and naval power effectively. Considering the impact of aircraft carriers in the Pacific War, this may have been a costly choice.

Source 1.3 **Müller, R.D. & Ancker, J.W. *Hitler's Wehrmacht 1935–1945* (2016), University Press of Kentucky, United States, p. 11**

> In terms of foreign policy, it was primarily Great Britain that demonstrated a willingness to comply with German pressure to a limited extent. The protests and resolutions by other powers did not impress Berlin. Three months after Hitler's spectacular step, his breach of the Versailles Treaty was sanctioned by the Naval Treaty of 18 June 1935.

Source 1.4 **Toland, J. *Hitler: The Definitive Biography* (1992), Anchor, New York, United States, p. 373**

> The attainment of all of Germany's secret naval aims by negotiation had transformed Hitler from a man of force to a statesman. France, stunned at such unilateral action (made incidentally on the anniversary of Waterloo) by a so-called ally, sent an angry note to London but British public opinion was almost universally favourable and (except for Winston Churchill, who damned the agreement as damaging British security) even those politicians generally hostile to Hitler supported the agreement.

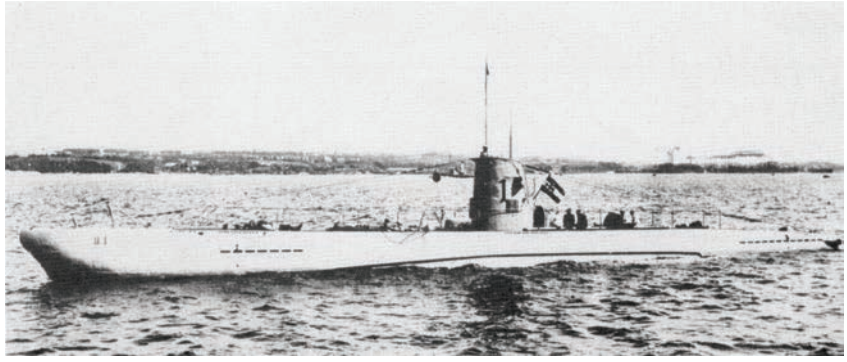


Figure 1.9 German submarine the U-1, first sailed in 1935

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Figure 1.10 The German battleship *Tirpitz*



Figure 1.11 Painting of the *Bismarck* engaged in the Battle of the Atlantic

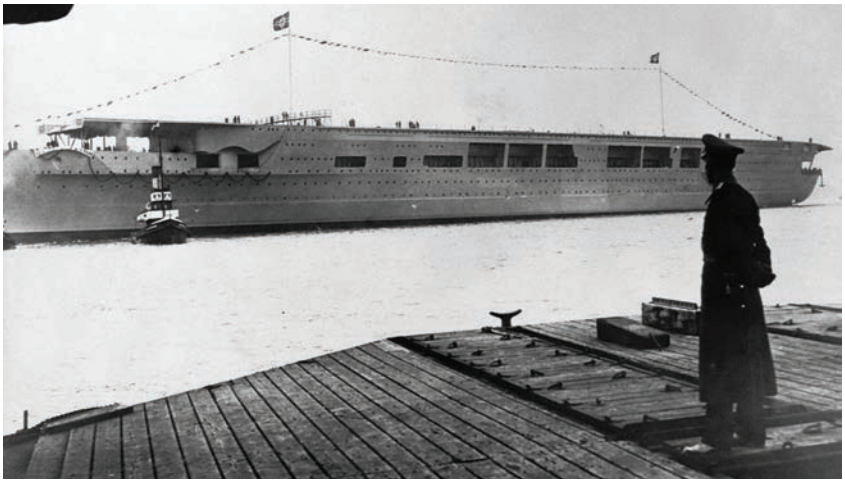


Figure 1.12 The only German aircraft carrier, the *Graf Zeppelin*

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Source questions

1 What do these photographs suggest about German technology in the 1930s and 1940s?
2 Discuss how the countries of France and Britain would feel as Germany developed the Kriegsmarine with the ships and U-Boats displayed in Figures 1.9 to 1.12.

1.4 The Wehrmacht (Heer)



Figure 1.13 Members of *Feldjagerkorps* taking the Hitler oath in Lustgarten

The **Night of the Long Knives** in 1934 secured Hitler the support of the Reichswehr – renamed the Wehrmacht in 1935. While the Wehrmacht is a term generally applied to the German army, the land-based Nazi forces were technically known as the Heer.

By March 1935, Hitler was willing to make an open statement against the Treaty of Versailles through the reintroduction of **conscription**. This saw the armed forces swell from the official 100 000 limit imposed by Versailles to over 3.7 million soldiers by 1939. Hitler planned for his army to be ready for defensive action within five years, and offensive action within eight. German conscription achieved the stated goal of 36 divisions by 1937, allowing Hitler to pursue more aggressive foreign policy.

Source 1.5 **Evans, R. *The Third Reich in Power* (2006), Penguin, United States, p. 627**

> Defence Minister General Werner von Blomberg announced that Germany was about to take up its rightful place in the world of nations once again. Naturally, Hitler assured everyone that all Germany wanted was peace. Many of his middle-class sympathisers believed him. 'We've got general conscription again!' wrote Luise Solmitz triumphantly in her diary: 'The day that we have longed for since the disgrace of 1918 … General conscription is to serve not war but the maintenance of peace. For a defenceless country in the midst of heavily armed people must necessarily be an invitation and encouragement to maltreat it as territory to march into or to plunder. We haven't forgotten the invasion of the Ruhr.'

With renewed spirit, particularly among younger Germans, the Reich set about adapting new tactics to overcome the military limitations of World War I. The Great War was a savage lesson in the strength of defence over attack, and the need for supporting tactics and technology to break the stalemate. The rise of planes, tanks and gas (which Germany stockpiled

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but never used in World War II) demanded the Wehrmacht develop new tactics and weaponry. This culminated in the tactic of ***Blitzkrieg***, although in reality, this was simply a modernised method of German warfare that now incorporated tanks and aircraft.

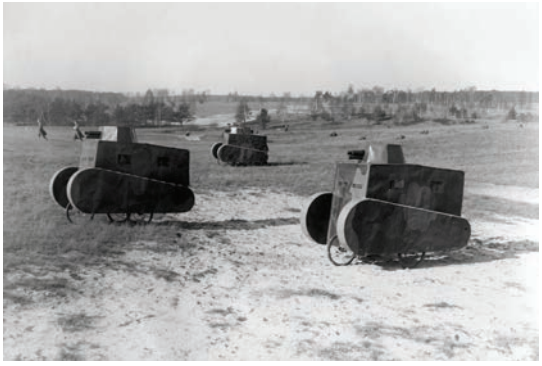


Figure 1.14 'Dummy tanks' for Reichswehr training



Figure 1.15 A German 'Tiger' tank from World War II

Shepherd, B.H. *Hitler's Soldiers: The German Army in the Third Reich* (2016), Yale University Press, United States, p. 17 Source 1.6

German armoured-warfare techniques were founded on the army's experience of the storm-troop tactics of the First World War, of the Allies' combined-arms offensives of 1918, and of the period of clandestine cooperation between the Reichswehr and the Red Army. The first Panzer troop school was founded in November 1933. Basic training was the same as the infantry's, together with additional training in anti-tank gunnery … The new army's first major development in armoured warfare came with the formation of the first four Panzer divisions in 1935.

Whittock, M. *A Brief History of the Third Reich* (2011), Constable & Robin, London, England, p. 94 Source 1.7

The rearmament campaign had set the priorities as 'guns before butter'. Göring himself was associated with the phrase in 1936 when, in a radio broadcast, he claimed: 'Guns will make us powerful; butter will only make us fat'. Goebbels, earlier that same year, had commented: 'We can do without butter, but, despite all our love of peace, not without arms.'

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Figure 1.16 Adolf Hitler at the 1937 Nuremberg rally with, among others, Minister for War, Field Marshal Werner von Blomberg (centre front)

Germany undertook rapid and largely successful rearmament in the 1930s. This change brought the support of the Wehrmacht forces firmly behind Hitler and widely introduced National Socialist ideologies into the armed forces. There were economic concerns, such as overheating the economy and resource allocation, but Germany placed itself in a position where it could successfully defend itself from hostile forces, and potentially launch an effective attack as an aggressor. The question now was whether Hitler's foreign policy would lead Germany to that war of aggression.

Summary

- The Treaty of Versailles in 1919 had numerous articles restricting or forbidding Germany's ability to have an army, navy or air force.
- Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, the Weimar Republic focused on rearming Germany through effective foreign policy, and international pressure through the League of Nations.
- By the time Hitler became Chancellor in 1933, the Weimar Republic had undertaken secret rearmament. This rapidly expanded from 1934 onwards.
- Hitler's worldview required Germany to have a strong army capable of defending its borders and pursuing its territorial goals.
- Conscription was reintroduced on 16 March 1935. This quickly expanded the Luftwaffe (air force), Kriegsmarine (navy) and the Heer (army).
- Germany undertook a massive economic push to produce new technologies like the Panzer tank, long-range bombers and weaponry.
- In Hitler's eyes, a strong military provided the potential to recapture Germany's displaced territories and peoples in the Rhineland, Sudetenland and Poland.

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Key personalities and terms

Personalities

German leader **Adolf Hitler** (1889–1945) was *Oberkommando* (Commander) of the Wehrmacht forces. He obtained the Chancellorship of Germany in 1933, taking the role of Führer after the death of the German President, Paul von Hindenburg. Hitler pursued aggressive policies of rearming Germany and retaking control of German-speaking territories throughout Europe.



Figure 1.17 Adolf Hitler



Figure 1.18 Hermann Göring

Hermann Göring (1893–1946) was *Oberkommando* of the Luftwaffe. He played a key role in the electoral successes of the Nazi Party, and was given various duties in industry, policing and the military. Göring was captured after the war and put on trial at Nuremberg. Before his sentence of death by hanging took place, he committed suicide with a cyanide tablet smuggled into the prison.



Figure 1.19 Erich Raeder

Admiral **Erich Raeder** (1876–1960) was commander of the Kriegsmarine from 1 June 1935 until 30 January 1943. In 1943, he resigned, to be replaced by Admiral Karl Dönitz. Raeder was charged at the criminal trials of Nuremberg and sentenced to life imprisonment, but was released in 1955 due to his failing health.

Terms

***Blitzkrieg*:** falsely attributed to Hitler, *Blitzkrieg* translates as 'lightning war'. It involved a rapid, concentrated attack with combined forces (infantry, air, tanks, artillery).

Communism: a type of government with no class structure where the 'state' owns everything and redistributes it to its people.

Conscription: a government policy which forces citizens (mostly men), usually aged between about 18 to 45, to join the armed forces of their country.

Night of the Long Knives: a purge conducted by the Nazis in 1934, to remove political threats and secure the support of the Reichswehr.

Reichswehr: the name of the German army from the end of the war in 1919 to 1935, when it became the Wehrmacht.

Third Reich: the official name in Germany for the period during which the Nazi Party ruled.

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Activities

Thinking historically

1. Outline the secret steps taken to rearm Germany by the Weimar Republic.
2. Identify the reasons Hitler gave for rearming the Third Reich.
3. Describe the role foreign countries, such as Britain or France, played in the rearmament of Germany.
4. Analyse the changing role of technology in the Nazi forces.
5. By restricting Germany's ability to expand its armies, the Allies could have prevented the outbreak of World War II. In pairs, discuss this idea.

Claim, support, question

- Make a **claim** (or thesis) about the process of German rearmament.
- Identify **support** for your claim – things you have researched or know to support your claim.
- Ask a **question** related to your claim that you would need to research further.

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2 Foreign policy

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- A survey of the collapse of collective security – Abyssinia and the Spanish Civil War
- A survey of Britain, France and the policy of appeasement
- A survey of the significance of the Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact
- The aims and strategy of German foreign policy to September 1939
- The impact of ideology on foreign policy

CHRONOLOGY

30 January 1933	Hitler becomes Chancellor of Germany
14 October 1933	Germany leaves the League of Nations
3 October 1935	Italy invades Abyssinia
7 March 1936	German troops reoccupy the demilitarised Rhineland
August 1936	The Olympics are held in Berlin to great acclaim
26 April 1937	The Luftwaffe destroys Guernica in the Spanish Civil War
11 to 13 March 1938	Germany invades Austria and achieves Anschluss
29 to 30 September 1938	The Munich Conference between Germany, France, Italy and Britain gives the Sudetenland to the Nazis in a policy known as appeasement
1 to 10 October 1938	Germany takes the Sudetenland
15 March 1939	Germany invades Czechoslovakia
31 March 1939	Britain and France guarantee war if Germany attacks Poland
22 May 1939	Germany and Italy form the Pact of Steel alliance
23 August 1939	The Soviet Union and Germany sign the Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact

Foreign policy was Hitler's passion – it was he who decided when and how to act. For Hitler, foreign policy was about restoring German national pride, smashing the restrictions of Versailles, obtaining ***Lebensraum*** and fulfilling his antisemitic desires by the removal of Jews from Germany – not mass killing at this stage. These ideas were stated in ***Mein Kampf***, written while Hitler was imprisoned at Landsberg in 1924.

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How Hitler achieved his foreign policy aims was quite complex. From 1933, Hitler prepared Germany for war as he considered it inevitable. Sections of *Mein Kampf* demonstrate Hitler's belief in **Social Darwinism**, clearly believing an **Aryan** nation could only become superior through its struggle against weaker nations and people, especially 'Jewish **Bolshevism**'. Historians estimate that Hitler planned a conflict for Germany in the middle of the 1940s and did not believe Germany was ready for war before this. It is important to understand that while Hitler did have ideological beliefs which would lead to war, he did not have a clear policy on when, or where, he wished to pursue war, nor was he certain of his enemy.

2.1 Opening salvos

One of the first foreign policy tests for Hitler was the **plebiscite** administered by the League of Nations, to determine if the Saar region reverted to German control. But with an overwhelming majority of 90% of its electorate voting for the union, the Saar region folded back into greater Germany. After the settlement, Hitler continued to publicly express his desire for peace.

Source 2.1 **A speech from Hitler in January 1935, cited in Domarus, M. *The Essential Hitler: Speeches and Commentary* (2007), Matot-Braine, United States, p. 551**

> When I talk about peace, I am expressing none other than the innermost desire of the German Volk. I know the horrors of war: no gains can compensate for the losses it brings … What I want is the well-being of my Volk! I have seen that war is not the highest form of bliss, but the contrary: I have witnessed only the deepest suffering. Hence I can quite frankly state:
> 1 Germany will never break the peace of its own accord, and
> 2 He who would lay hands upon us will encounter thorns and barbs! For we love liberty just as we love peace.

Hitler spoke of peace while his armies rebuilt, while his Luftwaffe grew and constructed new aeroplanes, even while the terrors of the seas, the U-Boats, were developed. His ability to convince his own population or foreign countries that Germany simply wanted equality and peace demonstrates his skill at manipulating events. It also helped that in October 1935 Italy invaded Abyssinia. This created a division in the three countries (Britain, France and Italy) that initially united against Hitler's foreign policy objectives through an agreement known as the **Stresa Front**. When the French and British failed to act over Abyssinia, it led Hitler to conclude that the Allies would not stop his territorial ambitions, just like they did not

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stop Italy's. With the outbreak of a civil war in Spain, the events of 1935–36 played into Hitler's hands. For quite some time, the world's attention was not focused on Germany.

2.2 Invading Abyssinia

On 3 October 1935, Abyssinia was attacked by Italian troops at a ratio of eight to one. While Italy was not the most technologically advanced country, the Italians still had machine guns, artillery, tanks and support from their air force. Emperor Haile Selassie's Royal Abyssinian Army was equipped with outdated World War I weapons, flintlock rifles, bows and arrows, or machetes and spears. The Italians won decisive victories with high casualty rates for the Abyssinian army. But after initial losses, the Abyssinians launched a brutal guerrilla warfare effort across the deserts. Without direct confrontation, the Italians were exposed to stealthy attacks and kidnappings – with soldiers fearing their fate if captured.



Figure 2.1 Abyssinia and the neighbouring British, French and Italian territories

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The League of Nations condemned Italy's leader, **Benito Mussolini**, but no country was ready to go to war to defend Abyssinia. Economic sanctions were imposed, taking six weeks to be formally organised and not including vital oil supplies. There was no public desire in Britain or France for greater action, despite concerns over their territories in the area. After a savage campaign, featuring widespread civilian deaths and the use of mustard gas dropped from planes, Abyssinia surrendered to Italy in 1936. In the same way the League of Nations was willing to allow Hitler to breach the Treaty of Versailles, many countries tolerated Mussolini's actions. The League was proven to be toothless in the face of aggression, and unwilling to fight for the rights of invaded countries.

Source 2.2 **Pederson, S. *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (2017), Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, p. 356**

> By the late 1930s the League of Nations was in decline. The impressive so-called 'technical' organisations continued their work – tracking epidemics, analysing economic data, managing cross-border traffics and exchanges, negotiating labour standards, and promoting humanitarian norms. But the security apparatus deteriorated after the Abyssinian debacle.

Source 2.3 **Henig, R. *The League of Nations* (2010), Haus Publishing, London, United Kingdom**

> Divisions between Britain and France had already undermined the effectiveness of the League in the 1920s, during the Corfu dispute and over discussion around the formulation of the Geneva protocol. Now their complete failure to agree on a common approach to deal with the aggressive ambitions of Mussolini and of Hitler robbed the League of any remaining claim to be able to maintain international peace through collective action. After the failure to protect Abyssinia against Italian aggression its credibility was completely destroyed.

Source 2.4 **Adamthwaite, A.P. *Making of the Second World War* (2009), Routledge, London, United Kingdom, p. 52**

> The Abyssinian crisis delivered a mortal blow to the League. It was already weakened by the departure of Japan in March 1933 and Germany in October. Italy left in 1937 … While Britain and France were distracted by the Abyssinian war, Hitler made his first major move against the territorial order … [as] he sent a force of 22,000 men into the demilitarised Rhineland, violating the Versailles and Locarno treaties.

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Source questions

1. To what extent was the League of Nations failing in the 1930s?
2. Assess who is to blame for the deteriorating condition of the League of Nations referred to in Sources 2.3 and 2.4.
3. Explain how Hitler would have responded to the weakening League of Nations, the distraction of the British and French, and Mussolini's attack on Abyssinia.

2.3 Braver steps: Reoccupation of the Rhineland

In a real sense, Hitler was gambling with the Allies through the 1930s. The key question was, how much were they willing to let him get away with. As no meaningful response to Abyssinia came, Hitler thought it was time for action, and set his sights on the demilitarised zone between France and Germany known as the Rhineland.

Toland, J. *Hitler: The Definitive Biography* (1992), Anchor, New York, United States, p. 380 Source 2.5

> The Führer's spirits were abruptly revitalized and by mid-January he was prepared to take his next step forward – seizure of the demilitarised Rhineland zone which encompassed all German territory west of the Rhine as well as a thirty-mile strip east of the river that included Cologne, Düsseldorf and Bonn. He was heartened in this ambition by the death of a monarch. On the evening of January 20 King George V died and was succeeded by Edward VIII, a man of individuality and independence who had made no secret of his sympathies with many of Germany's aspirations. In his first broadcast [he] declared that he had much sympathy for Germany's difficult position. Such encouraging words from England, together with the weak half measures of the League of Nations against Italian aggression, strengthened the Führer's resolve to reoccupy the Rhineland. If England could not even bring herself to make an all-out effort to check Mussolini, surely she would never do more than formally protest if he followed in Il Duce's footsteps.

Joseph Goebbels' diary – entry dated 1 March 1936, in Kershaw, I. *Hitler* (2010), Penguin, Great Britain, p. 586 Source 2.6

> It's another critical moment, but now is the time for action. Fortune favours the brave! He who dares nothing wins nothing.

Hitler sent troops into the Rhineland on 7 March 1936. Three battalions crossed the river Rhine, although no more than 3000 men were to penetrate deep into the **demilitarised zone**. Hitler prepared to withdraw instantly if the French resisted, recognising they had little chance of winning a war at this

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point. But French intelligence miscalculated the German invasion force at 295 000 – in reality, it was 30 000 with additional police units. One French unit would have stopped Hitler's invading force, but the French ruled out resisting when the British refused to support them.

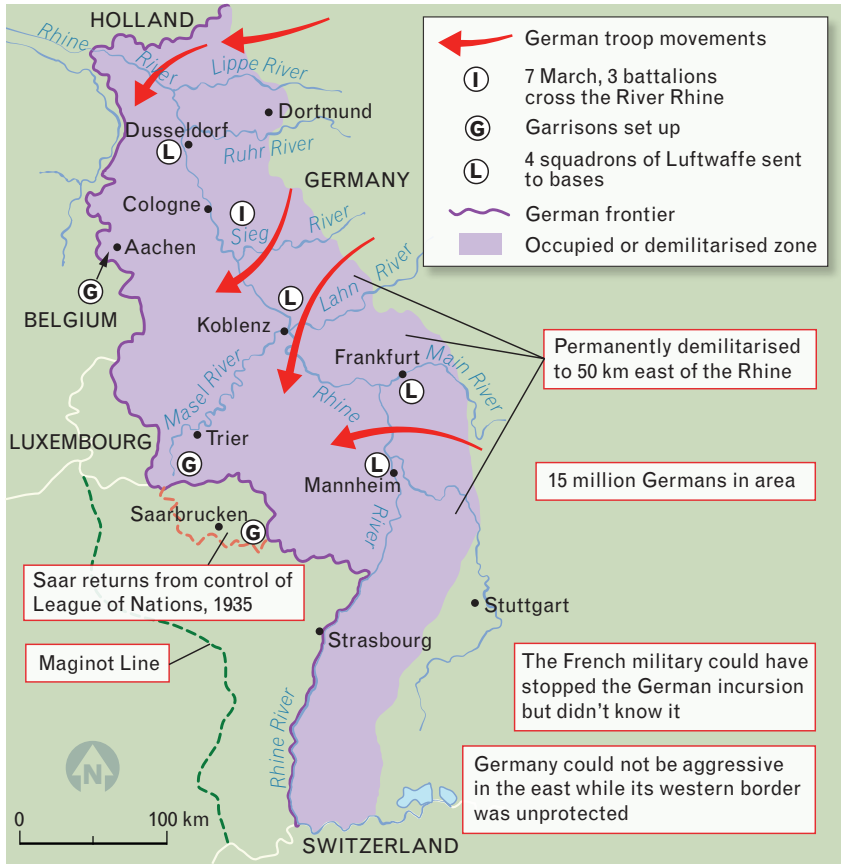


Figure 2.2 The German reoccupation of the Rhine



Figure 2.3 Children of the Rhineland pinning posies on the lapels of German troopers following the reoccupation of Cologne on 17 March 1936

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Hitler's speech to the Reichstag – 7 March 1936, cited in Bergen, D.L. *War & Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (2016), Rowman and Littlefield, United States, p. 78 Source 2.7

Germany regards itself, therefore, as for its part no longer bound by this dissolved pact … In the interest of the primitive rights of a people to the security of its borders and safeguarding of its defence capability, the German Reich government has therefore from today restored the full and unrestricted sovereignty of the Reich in the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland.

Shirer, W. *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (1960), Simon & Schuster, New York, United States, p. 258 Source 2.8

They spring, yelling and crying, to their feet. The audience in the galleries does the same, all except a few diplomats and about fifty of us correspondents. Their hands are raised in slavish salute, their faces now contorted with hysteria, their mouths wide open, shouting, shouting, their eyes, burning with fanaticism, glued on the new god, the Messiah. The Messiah plays his role superbly.

Paul Schmidt, Hitler's interpreter, cited in Payne, K. *Understanding Deterrence* (2014), Routledge, London, England, p. 79 Source 2.9

More than once, even during the war, I heard Hitler say: 'The 48 hours after the march into the Rhineland were the most nerve racking of my life'. He always added, 'If the French had then marched into the Rhineland we would have withdrawn with our tails between our legs, for the military resources at our disposal had been completely inadequate for even moderate resistance.'

Speer, A. *Inside the Third Reich* (1997), Simon & Schuster, United States, p. 76 Source 2.10

The Western governments had, as [Hitler] commented at the time, proved themselves weak and indecisive. He found this view confirmed when the German troops marched into the demilitarized Rhineland on March 7, 1936. This was an open breach of the Treaty of Locarno and might have provoked military counter-measures on the part of the Allies … [Hitler] was intensely anxious, and even later, when he was waging war against almost the entire world, he always termed the remilitarization of the Rhineland the most daring of all his undertakings.

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Source 2.11 **Shirer, W. *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (1960), Simon & Schuster, New York, United States, p. 261**

> France's failure to repel the Wehrmacht battalions and Britain's failure to back her in what would have been nothing more than a police action was a disaster for the West from which sprang all the later ones of even greater magnitude. In March 1936 the two Western democracies were given their last chance to halt, without the risk of a serious war, the rise of a militarized, aggressive, totalitarian Germany and, in fact – as we have seen Hitler admitting – bring the Nazi dictator and his regime tumbling down. They let the chance slip by.

Hitler's risk resulted in great success for Germany. The Allies splintered and were unwilling to resist Germany reclaiming its pre-war territory. The Führer's direct control over foreign policy led to this personal triumph, and further consolidated his support at home while also bringing admirers abroad. New elections delivered Hitler 98.9% of support as the German people united behind him. Filled with pride and a sense of infallibility, Hitler began planning the next steps for the expansion of the Third Reich.

Step inside

In your workbook, respond to the three following points:

1. What would Hitler have perceived in 1935 about German foreign policy?
2. What actions did he believe he could take as a result of these ideas?
3. What was important to Hitler, that he would take such risks to achieve these goals?

2.4 The Spanish Civil War: Practice makes perfect

The Spanish Civil War erupted in 1936, with General **Francisco Franco** revolting against the elected government. After an initial refusal of support for Franco by German Foreign Minister von Neurath, Hitler personally stepped in to declare that Germany would support the **Nationalists** in their coup. Sensing political advantage, he declared that Germany would resist **Communism** wherever it was found. Tactically, Hitler believed that fighting alongside Italy (who also worked with Franco) strengthened the possibility of an alliance, as Italy continued its shift away from Britain and France. If Franco could succeed in Spain, Hitler would gain an ally who could exert pressure along the French border.

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By November 1936, the Axis forces recognised Franco as the leader of Spain, and supplied both weaponry and men, mobilising the newly formed '**Condor Legion**' from the Luftwaffe. Likewise, Stalin supplied the Communist forces in Spain, while Britain and France largely abstained from taking sides, only shipping medical supplies.



Figure 2.4 Hitler with Francisco Franco in 1940



Figure 2.5 Postcard showing the departure of a German Condor Legion member as he shakes hands with a Nationalist soldier, during the Spanish Civil War

The Spanish Civil War provided Germany with a chance to test and develop combat strategies and technologies, and provide combat units with experience. The heaviest involvement in the war was orchestrated by the German Luftwaffe, who transported troops and bombed enemy cities, like Guernica. Here, the Germans used incendiary devices to annihilate the city.

By the end of the war, over 19 000 Germans had participated in securing Spain for Franco, but at a heavy price. The civil war was brutal, with hundreds of thousands of deaths and innumerable atrocities committed. Civilians, even priests and nuns, were killed, while assassinations and hangings were common practice. When Franco's Nationalists won the war, the total number of casualties reached approximately one million.



Figure 2.6 German soldiers of Condor Legion parading through the streets of Leon, Spain, at the end of the Spanish Civil War

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Figure 2.7 The destruction of Guernica in 1937

Once again, the League of Nations did little in this brutal war – it was not a war between nations in the technical sense, but a war fought within a country. Italy and Germany stepped closer together and were rewarded for their efforts in the war with access to Spain's military bases and seaports, which was vital for future campaigns in the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea. For Hitler and Mussolini, the civil war was a chance to challenge the authority of the League of Nations, the 'old order' who shaped international policy, and prevent the spread of Communism. Japan sought the same goal, and signed the Anti-Comintern Pact with Germany in 1936, before this expanded to include Italy in 1937. Like World War I, alliances were created in preparation for a future war.

Source 2.12 **Bullock, A. *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (1993), Random House, United States, p. 586**

> The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War so soon after the end of the [invasion of Abyssinia] was a remarkable piece of luck for Hitler, who could watch the other Powers continue their Mediterranean quarrel while Germany concentrated on rearmament. Germany's interest, therefore, lay in focusing European attention on Spain, especially that of France, Britain and Italy, for a long time to come, not in securing a quick victory for Franco. Germany must make sure that Franco was not defeated, but should leave the major burden of military support for him, to Italy. The more deeply the Italians became committed to intervention, the more difficult it would be for them to restore relations with France and Britain, and the more they would be obliged to continue the process, already begun during the [invasion of Abyssinia], of drawing closer to Germany.

2.5 The 1936 Berlin Olympics

The Olympic Games of 1936 are an example of the complexity of Nazi foreign policy during the 1930s, as they demonstrate how Hitler proffered peace with one hand while preparing for war with the other. The 1936 Olympic Games were awarded to Germany before the Third Reich came to power. Hitler capitalised on the propaganda value of the Olympics to project an image of Nazi Germany as a unified, supportive and civilised culture.

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Bauer, Y. *A History of the Holocaust* (2001), Franklin Watts, United States, pp. 112–13 Source 2.13

To create a good impression on visitors to the Olympic games in 1936, the Nazis splashed a coat of whitewash on Berlin. Anti-Jewish signs disappeared from shops, theatres and town gates. Jewish sportsmen and sportswomen were invited to participate in the games … As in 1934, the 1936 Olympic Games episode tended to delude the Jews into a false sense of relative stability if not security.



Figure 2.8 The Olympic torch procession begins in Olympia, Greece, in 1936.



Figure 2.9 The Olympic flame ceremony at Lustgasse, 1 August 1936

Wilson, A.N. *Hitler: A Short Biography* (2012), Harper Press, London, p. 103 Source 2.14

A crowd of 100,00 cheered as Hitler took his place in the stand. All 250 of the French athletes enthusiastically gave him the Roman salute as they marched past his imperial stand. By the time the Games ended, the hypnotic effect of crowd-mania – upon which the Nazis had been playing so successfully for years at home – gripped the international crowd. When the Games ended on 16 August 1936, it was not only Germans who cried out 'Sieg Heil! Unser Führer, Adolf Hitler! Sieg Heil!'



Figure 2.10 Berlin Olympic Stadium in 1936

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Figure 2.11 Jesse Owens wins the long jump and numerous other gold medals. He was referred to in the media as 'the Negro Owens'.



Figure 2.12 Adolf Hitler was a central and visible figure at the Berlin Olympics.

Source questions

Use Sources 2.13 and 2.14 and Figures 2.8 to 2.12 to answer these questions.

1. Describe how these images portray the Olympic Games.
2. Why would Hitler have created traditions like the torch relay (Figures 2.8 and 2.9)?
3. Do you agree that Hitler saw the political opportunity in hosting the Olympics and exploited it? Justify your response with reference to the sources provided.

Despite the international communities' growing concern about the treatment of Jews in Germany following the **Nuremberg Laws** of 1935, the world rallied behind the spectacle of the Olympic Games the Reich created. Many of the modern traditions were introduced by the Nazis, from the torch relay to the iconic interlocking Olympic rings. Hitler and Goebbels recognised the propaganda potential the Games offered. Apart from the unification of people, the Führer became the centrepiece of the ceremonies from his specifically crafted box in the Olympic Stadium. He was saluted by athletes from numerous countries, including France, in front of cameras in the first live television broadcast. The Games were a massive success for Hitler, providing the Reich with respectability among the international community and reducing fear of Germany's aggressive foreign policy. If Hitler was willing to host the Games in such goodwill, surely he was not willing to go to war?

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2.6 The Anschluss

With the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire following World War I, Austria went through a difficult period. This was a result of treaties designed to prevent Austria returning to a position where it could wage war. However, the heavy economic consequences of the Great Depression made Austria ripe for the plucking, and Hitler was eager to do just that through the unification of Austria and Germany – **Anschluss**. Apart from condemning the act, Britain and France, again, had no serious response to Hitler's actions.

Burleigh, M. *The Third Reich: A New History* (2001), Hill & Wang, United States, pp. 270–1 Source 2.15

Austria's problems after the Treaty of Saint-Germain in 1919 were worse than those of post-war Germany, which had been temporarily rather than permanently displaced as a great power. Austria had no way back, except as a client of Italy or by being absorbed into Nazi Germany. The new republic was roughly a quarter of the size and population of the Austrian lands of the Habsburg empire, with a huge and mostly redundant civil service, and a depleted agricultural, industrial and raw-materials base … The Austrian slump from 1929 onwards was both more acute and of longer duration than anywhere else in Europe, with a third of the workforce unemployed in 1936, the nadir of the Austrian depression. This enhanced the economic attractions of closer ties with a northern Nazi neighbour …

Sandor, C.A. *Through Innocent Eyes: The Chosen Girls of the Hitler Youth* (2012), Balboa Press, United States, p. 10 Source 2.16

The people of Austria are desperate. They want to be so much like their neighbours in Germany, where Hitler has been in power since 1933 … Everyone is happy in Germany, and Austria wants the same. However, they want the same without giving up their sovereignty. Austria wants to stay independent and guarantee the best interests of its citizens and state. Everyone in Austria knows that the people of Germany are happy. Their Führer re-awakened industry and set his people on a path of prosperity. When Hitler annexes Austria into the Third Reich, he promises assistance to businesses. Farmers will receive lands taken away from them and the first autobahns will be constructed. Everyone is guaranteed work and because of this, ninety-eight percent of the Austrian people will soon vote to annex their country into the Third Reich, wanting National Socialism instead of Communism.

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Source 2.17

Toland, J. *Hitler: The Definitive Biography* (1992), Anchor, New York, United States, p. 458

> The elections the following day exceeded [Hitler's] hopes. In Austria 99.73 per cent of the voters approved Anschluss. In Germany 99.02 per cent voted in favour of union, while 99.8 per cent approved his list of candidates for the new Reichstag. Hitler's bold action (the result of considerable pressure from Göring) had been confirmed almost unanimously by the peoples of Austria and Germany. 'For me,' he said, 'this is the proudest hour of my life.' It also confirmed the conviction that his was the correct path and that he should continue along it to the next station – Czechoslovakia.

Video 2.7
Hitler in Austria (00:24)



Figure 2.13 Hitler enters Austria in 1938.

2.7 Munich: Farewell to Czechoslovakia

On 30 September 1938, Germany, Britain, France and Italy met to decide the fate of the **Sudetenland** within Czechoslovakia. The Czechs were not invited even though it was part of their country being discussed.

Agitation among the German-speaking areas of the Sudetenland had led Hitler to turn his gaze to the east. With the consolidation of Austria into the Reich, Germans in Czechoslovakia had agitated to be given the right to self-determination, a principle of the League of Nations. The Sudeten-Germans demanded to return to German control since many were German-speaking, and had only been separated by the Treaty of

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Versailles. Hitler was again willing to gamble the Allies would not stop him from uniting the Sudetenland with Germany, for fear of war.

Neville Chamberlain (England), **Édouard Daladier** (France), Benito Mussolini (Italy) and Adolf Hitler (Germany) met in Munich to discuss the future of Europe, with the threat of war a real possibility. Chamberlain was desperate to avoid war, recalling the cost to his country from World War I. Similarly, France did not wish for another war, but balanced this with a desire to stop continued German aggression. By this time, Mussolini was interested in his own empire and was largely unconcerned by what the future Allies thought of **Fascist** countries.

On 30 September 1938, the **Munich Agreement** was signed. When Chamberlain returned from Munich to Britain, he waved a piece of paper to journalists at the airport. It bore Hitler's signature and would, Chamberlain declared later, bring 'peace in our time'. The four leaders had negotiated (or forced) the surrender of another country's territory, the Sudetenland, at the expense of vague promises from Hitler to cease his hostility in Europe and move to become part of the international community. This 'peace' did not last long. By 15 March 1939, the German armies moved into Czechoslovakia as Hitler broke his word yet again, and the world held its breath to see if war resulted.



Figure 2.14 The Munich Agreement – (*left to right*) British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, French Premier Édouard Daladier, German Chancellor Adolf Hitler and Italian Prime Minister Benito Mussolini



Figure 2.15 Chamberlain speaking to a crowd on his arrival at Heston Airport from Munich. He declared that 'peace in our time' had been secured.

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Figure 2.16 Czechoslovakia dismembered, 1938–1939

2.8 Hitler's bluff: Why appeasement?

By the end of January 1939, Hitler had proven he would not stop with small concessions. His successful diplomacy brought an increase in support among Germans; after all, he had resisted the constraints of the united Allies in order to restore German pride. **Appeasement** had failed. Next, Hitler focused his attention on the German territories in Poland lost after World War I.

Source 2.18 **Bullock, A. *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (1993), Random House, United States, p. 580**

> For two and a half years after [the occupation of the Rhineland], the illusion persisted in the Western democracies that, in some way or other, it should be possible to satisfy Hitler by producing a settlement of his demands which would avoid war. For a moment after Munich (October 1938), the British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain believed he had found the key to it in the Anglo-German Declaration; not until the occupation of Prague (March 1939), three years after the Rhineland crisis, was the illusion finally dispelled.

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Beevor, A. *The Second World War* (2012), Weidenfeld & Nicolson, Great Britain, p. 8 Source 2.19

Some historians have argued that, if Britain and France had been prepared to fight in the autumn of 1938, events might have turned out very differently. That is certainly possible from a German point of view. The fact remains that neither the British nor the French people were psychologically prepared for war, mainly because they had been misinformed by politicians, diplomats and the press. Anyone who had tried to warn of Hitler's plans, such as Winston Churchill, was simply regarded as a warmonger.

Appeasement is a topic thoroughly debated by historians, who pose the counterfactual question, 'what if' Britain and France decided to intervene earlier? In the 1960s, historian A.J.P. Taylor developed the idea that Chamberlain's actions, in conceding to Hitler to avoid war, amounted to appeasement. Studying Chamberlain's actions with the benefit of hindsight has led to easy criticism. The real question which must be considered is, what could have been done differently?

Writing post-war, Winston Churchill was quick to defend his legacy and declare that he was, in fact, correct on the issue of Hitler and Nazi Germany. While history may show this to be true, Churchill's desire for war was not reflected among the British population. The scars of World War I loomed over any future warfare – the horrors of trench warfare, machine guns, and the needless destruction of an entire generation lingered. Civilians feared this loss, and the newfound ability to annihilate cities like Guernica in the Spanish Civil War. Was Chamberlain doing the best he could with a bad hand? If there was no public desire for war, what could be done to resist Hitler? Even if the British decided to declare war over Austria, or Czechoslovakia, did this necessarily mean that France would follow suit?

Apart from a lack of civilian support, both Britain and France were feeling the impacts of the Great Depression. In the post-war period, there had been no mass build-up of forces, or desire to ready for another war in either country. The previous Allies now turned to different paths, with America pursuing a policy of isolationism, and Russia shifting to a Communist government whose motives and actions were difficult to predict. There was also a sentiment that Germany was simply returning to where it was pre-war, before its destruction by the Treaty of Versailles. The Rhineland was German territory; why shouldn't Germany be able to defend it? Germany had been allied with Austria; did that make much difference? The Sudeten area had a strong population of German-speaking people; why shouldn't they be part of the Reich?

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The logical excuses made justifying a full-scale invasion extremely difficult, especially when considering it took multiple nations to defeat Germany the first time.

Consideration must also be given as to *why* Britain or France would go to war. Countries who suffered internal problems were not known for their kindness or generosity to others; they focused on their own problems instead. So, the real question is, what did the Allied forces gain by declaring war against Germany and committing their forces? Austria and Czechoslovakia brought no immediate gain as they were situated on the other side of Europe, with few shared values. Britain did fear for its empire, particularly if Germany was able to secure areas to mass-produce its navy and air force technologies – this would be a direct challenge to British interests, but it had not yet occurred. Prior to the Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, the desire for peace and maintenance of the status quo of European society was at the forefront, even if that meant a resurgent Germany. Only once this threat extended to their interests were other countries required to act.

The question of whether a different foreign policy would have prevented war in Europe, or lessened the scale, is difficult to answer. Germany was heading to war regardless of whether other countries were ready for such action. Hitler's concept of racial superiority and *Lebensraum* allowed for no other option. This does perhaps lead to the conclusion that an earlier war, such as in response to the Rhineland reoccupation, would have prevented the German successes and consolidation of later years, and forced Germany to fight on its own territory. This is, however, purely speculation, and the results of such a war, if it did occur, are very difficult to calculate. There would have also needed to be a significant increase in British rearmament through the middle of the 1930s, something that Chamberlain resisted for a long time. This is why, historically, Chamberlain receives the blame for appeasing Hitler, with some historians asking the question of whether Neville Chamberlain is co-responsible for World War II. It is important to remember that historical speculation is difficult to conclusively prove, leaving the appeasement debate up to every historian's personal interpretation.

Source 2.20 **Parker, R. *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War* (1993), Red Globe Press, London, England, p. 347**

Chamberlain's powerful, obstinate personality and his skill in debate probably stifled serious chances of preventing the Second World War.

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Kennedy, P. *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1988), Fontana Press, London, England, p. 318 Source 2.21

> There was a persistent willingness on the British government's part, despite all the counterevidence, to trust in 'reasonable' approaches toward the Nazi regime. The emotional dislike of Communism was such that Russia's potential as a member of an antifascist coalition was always ignored or downgraded. Vulnerable eastern European states, like Czechoslovakia and Poland, were all too often regarded as nuisances, and the lack of sympathy for France's problems showed a fatal meanness of spirit. Germany's and Italy's power was consistently overrated, on the basis of slim evidence, whereas all British defence weaknesses were seized upon as a reason for inaction … Critics of the appeasement policy such as Churchill were systematically censored and neutralized, even as the government proclaimed that it could only follow (rather than give a lead to) public opinion.

Churchill, W. *The Gathering Storm: The Second World War* (2005), Penguin, London, England, p. 221 Source 2.22

> Neville Chamberlain … was alert, businesslike, opinionated and self-confident in a very high degree … His all pervading hope was to go down to history as the great Peacemaker, and for this he was prepared to strive continually in the teeth of facts, and face great risks for himself and his country. Unhappily he ran into tides the force of which he could not measure, and met hurricanes from which he did not flinch, but with which he could not cope.

Source questions

1. To what extent do these sources demonstrate the view that Chamberlain was to blame for appeasement being the major policy of Britain and France?
2. Describe the bias in Source 2.22 by Winston Churchill.
3. What reasons would Churchill have to be biased?

2.9 Significance of the Nazi–Soviet Pact

Following World War I, both Germany and the Soviet Union sat outside the international community. The Soviet Union's establishment of a Communist government by the removal and murder of Tsar Nicholas II attracted a general sense of fear, especially as the Russians wanted to spread Communist revolts to other countries. Germany was still the villain of World War I, but the nature of the Russian revolution led the Soviet Union and Germany to forge closer ties, initially with the **Treaty of Rapallo**, and subsequently with the **Treaty of Berlin**.

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While Germany moved in and out of the League of Nations in the 1920s and 1930s, the Soviet Union only joined in 1934 following developing fear about Japanese expansion in the Pacific. As **collective security** failed, the Soviet Union realised there was no way Britain or France would ever be able to ensure its security or even assist in the event of a war. Stalin initially looked to work with Britain and France, while also maintaining the rebuilt relationship with Germany. When the Munich Agreement was signed in 1938, like Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union was not invited. It was very clear to the Soviet Union, therefore, that it needed to open diplomatic relationships with Germany itself, and did so by signing the Nazi–Soviet **Non-Aggression Pact**, with both sides secretly committing to dividing Poland between themselves after a war.



Figure 2.17 Nazi Foreign Minister **Joachim von Ribbentrop** (*far left*), Soviet leader **Joseph Stalin** (*centre*), Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov (*far right*) signing the German–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, 23 August 1939

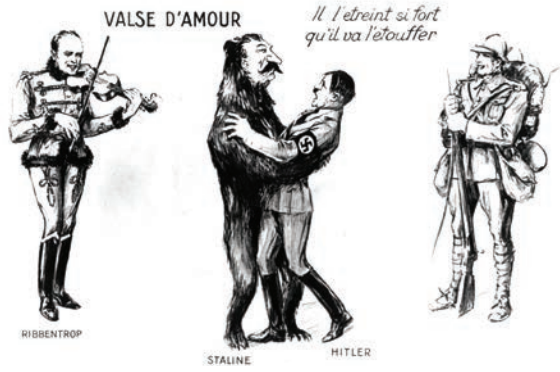


Figure 2.18 French caricature of the German–Soviet Pact, 'Waltz of Love' (Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop, Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler), 1939

Source 2.23 **Taylor, A.J.P. *The Origins of the Second World War* (2001), Penguin, United Kingdom, p. 263**

When one spins the diplomatic 'crystal ball' and tries to look into the future from the point of view of August 1939, it is difficult to see what other course Stalin could take. Stalin wanted recognition and Hitler gave this distinction to him. Russia's foreign policy was right according to the rules of diplomacy. It also contained a grave blunder. When Stalin and Molotov concluded a written agreement with Hitler they, like other Western statesmen before them, slipped into the delusion that Hitler would keep his word.

Source questions

1. Describe the satire in Figure 2.18.
2. Discuss the ideas conveyed by the physical appearance of each figure.
3. How do Figure 2.18 and Source 2.23 suggest that countries other than Germany played a key role in the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939?

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The Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact was a significant contributor to the outbreak of war in Europe. It allowed Hitler a secure eastern front to pursue his policies in Poland – even if these were largely confused and improvised - before turning to focus on the west. There is no real evidence that Hitler had a direct plan to attack the west in 1939, but without security in the east, he would surely have felt greater fear looking westward. With the Soviet Union agreeing to the division of Poland, Hitler again gambled that Britain and France would not be willing to attack both countries who invaded. For the Führer, the time was right to move.

Summary

- Despite speaking of peace, Hitler's foreign policy in the 1930s was very aggressive.
- The first 'gamble' for Hitler was the reoccupation of the Rhineland, which was undertaken with orders to withdraw if the French attacked.
- Italy's decision to invade Abyssinia drove it apart from Britain and France, and towards Germany.
- Britain and France struggled to rebuild their economies following the Great Depression of 1929.
- Hitler saw an opportunity to expand the Third Reich and coordinated the Anschluss of Germany and Austria, March 1938.
- The Führer then targeted the German-speaking Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia, which he occupied under an agreement signed with the Allies at Munich.
- It was not long before Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia, tearing up the Munich Agreement.
- The Allies had sought to appease Hitler by agreeing to sacrifice territories to Nazi Germany in order to avoid war.
- By the middle of 1939, Hitler achieved multiple foreign policy successes, while also rearming Germany. Most importantly, the time to fight a preventative war had passed. Only a world war would now stop Hitler.
- Hitler desired to further expand into Poland. The question now was not a matter of 'if' war would occur, but 'when'.

Key personalities and terms

Personalities

Benito Mussolini (1883–1945) was the Italian Fascist dictator who marched his Blackshirts on Rome to take power. Initially working with Britain and France to contain Hitler's aggression, Mussolini's focus on expanding the Italian Empire saw him switch sides and declare war on the Allies after German successes in France, 1940.



Figure 2.19 Benito Mussolini

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Francisco Franco (1892–1975) was a Spanish dictator who led a nationalist party which overthrew the government in a bloody civil war. Despite sharing common ideologies with the governments of Italy and Germany, Franco maintained Spanish neutrality during World War II.



Figure 2.20 Francisco Franco



Figure 2.21 Joachim von Ribbentrop

Joachim von Ribbentrop (1893–1946) played a strong advisory role in foreign affairs after joining the Nazi Party in 1932. He worked on disarmament talks at Geneva, the Anglo-German Naval Treaty, the Comintern Pact with Japan, and the Pact of Steel with Italy. Ribbentrop's greatest diplomatic achievement was securing the Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact in 1939. He was tried and hung at Nuremberg in 1946.

In this image, **Neville Chamberlain** (1869–1946) arrives in London holding the Munich Agreement signed by Germany, France, Great Britain and Italy. He claimed he had successfully limited Hitler's ambitions and kept Britain out of another war. His joy was short-lived, as Hitler invaded Poland and Britain declared war. Chamberlain was replaced by Winston Churchill and died of cancer in 1946.



Figure 2.22 Neville Chamberlain



Figure 2.23 Joseph Stalin

Communist leader **Joseph Stalin** (1878–1953) worked closely with Vladimir Lenin to overthrow both the Romanov dynasty and the Provisional Government of Russia in 1917. After Lenin's death, he secured power by removing opposition, and established a government which used fear and terror to maintain his rule. He was a key figure in the events of World War II and the following Cold War.

Édouard Daladier (1884–1970) was the French Prime Minister when the Munich Agreement was devised. He sought to rearm France in late 1938, and negotiated a British commitment to fight any future war on the European mainland if Germany attacked. After initially fleeing for North Africa when Germany occupied France, Daladier was imprisoned by the Third Reich from 1942, but released post-war.



Figure 2.24 Édouard Daladier

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Terms

Anschluss: the uniting of Austria and Germany.

Appeasement: the name given to the policies of Britain and France where they gave in to Hitler's desires in the hope this would stop him from further aggression.

Aryan: a 'pure' German race, usually featuring blonde hair and blue eyes.

Bolshevism: the Bolshevik Party overthrew the Russian government, later changing its name to the Communist Party.

Collective security: countries cooperating in an alliance to bring security to each other.

Communism: a type of government with no class structure where the 'state' owns everything and redistributes it to its people.

Condor Legion: the Wehrmacht units who served in Spain during the Spanish Civil War.

Demilitarised zone: an area which cannot have military forces within it.

Fascism: a political system based on a very powerful leader, state control and being extremely proud of country and race.

***Lebensraum*:** an ideology of Hitler which translates as 'living space' for the German people, particularly in eastern Europe.

***Mein Kampf*:** translating as 'My Struggle', *Mein Kampf* outlined Hitler's ideas on a variety of topics, from *Lebensraum* and the Jews to the future of Europe.

Munich Agreement: a 1938 agreement surrendering the Sudeten area of Czechoslovakia to Germany, while Hitler committed to peace thereafter.

Nationalism: the promotion of the interests of one's own nation above all others.

Non-Aggression Pact: an agreement between two countries not to engage in any military action against each other.

Nuremberg Laws: a series of anti-Semitic and racist German laws which passed in 1935.

Plebiscite: a vote by all citizens of a country to decide an important issue, such as a constitutional change.

Social Darwinism: theories applying Charles Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest to human society and politics.

Stresa Front: Italy, Britain and France met at the small town of Stresa in 1935 to declare they were united in their opposition to German rearmament. Their unity was soon abandoned.

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Sudetenland: Czech territory on the German/Czechoslovakian border where German-speaking people lived.

Treaty of Berlin: a treaty which committed Russia and Germany to remain neutral if either were to be attacked by another country.

Treaty of Rapallo: a treaty negotiated between Russia and Germany, where both countries dropped their claims to territory in the east of Europe, and committed to positive relations.

Activities

Thinking historically

1. Summarise Hitler's foreign policy during the period 1933 to 1939.
2. Describe how the invasion of Abyssinia impacted international relations in the 1930s.
3. What did Hitler gain from sending the Condor Legion to Spain?
4. Why would Hitler have pursued a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union?
5. To what extent was the Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact a significant cause of World War II? Explain your response.
6. Using your understanding of the course from the unit Power and Authority, research and record Adolf Hitler's key ideologies (anti-Communist, Aryanism, autarky, *Lebensraum*, anti-Jewish).

Tug of war

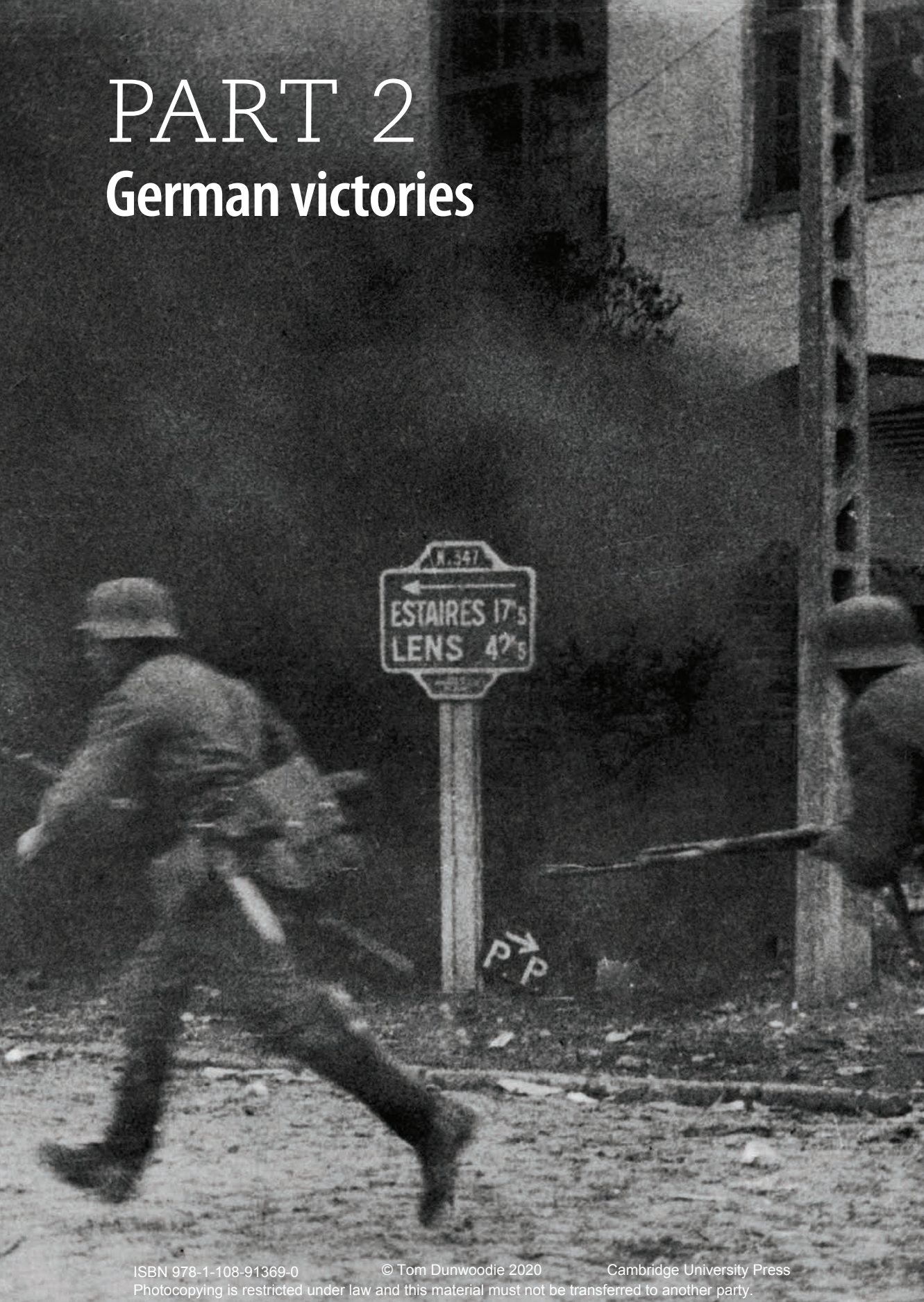
- Consider the Allied use of appeasement as a method of preventing war.
- Create a table of evidence for and against appeasement – these are the 'tugs'.
- Using the 'tugs', write an opinion explaining whether you believe a different policy – anything other than appeasement – would have prevented World War II.

Writing historically

1. Create a table of Hitler's main foreign policy aims. In the second column, discuss how ideology impacted each aim.
2. Sequence the top six foreign policy events of the 1930s, in terms of the extent to which they led to war in Europe (1 – most important, 6 – least important). Explain why you sequenced the events in this order in a paragraph.
3. Write the text for the debate topic: The Allies could have prevented the outbreak of World War II if they were willing to take earlier military action against Nazi Germany. Choose which side you wish to represent.

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PART 2
German victories



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3 The outbreak of World War II

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- The impact of Nazi ideology on German foreign policy to September 1939
- The reasons for the outbreak of World War II
- The fate of Poland and the Phoney War

CHRONOLOGY

31 March 1939	Britain and France pledge to support Poland if it is attacked by Germany
23 August 1939	The Soviet Union and Germany sign the Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, which contains secret agreements on the division of Poland
26 August 1939	Adolf Hitler had planned to invade Poland on this day, but postponed the attack on learning that Britain had signed a new treaty on 25 August 1939 with Poland promising military support if it was attacked
31 August 1939	German forces disguised as Poles attack several installations on the German–Polish border, including the radio station at Gleiwitz
1 September 1939	Germany invades Poland
3 September 1939	Britain and France declare war after Germany refuses to withdraw
17 September 1939	The Soviet Union invades Poland from the east
18 September 1939	The Polish government flees the country
27 September 1939	The Polish capital city, Warsaw, is captured
September 1939 to May 1940	Germany, France and Britain enter the 'Phoney War' period, where neither country launches significant military operations

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3.1 Invasion of Poland

World War II began with the invasion of Poland by Germany, and the subsequent declaration of war by both France and England. The Polish government resisted German designs on a 'peaceful' resolution to the Danzig corridor issue. Despite having little regard for Danzig, the British guaranteed to declare war if Germany invaded, which in turn stiffened the Polish resolve to not negotiate with Germany. The Poles were rightfully worried; after all, Czechoslovakia, Austria and the Sudetenland were negotiated away by the Allied powers, and there were no indications that Poland would have a different fate.



Video 3.2
Neutral (01:14)

Hitler's actions surrounding the attack on Poland are complicated – what seems clear is that he wanted a way to achieve his objective of Danzig, gaining further ***Lebensraum*** and uniting Germans within the Reich – all without Britain and France entering the war. The **Polish Guarantee** created a challenge for Hitler. Should he continue to call the Allies on their bluff? After all, much of Poland was previously German territory that he was reuniting, in the same way the Allies had allowed him to unite ethnic Germans previously. The risk was that an attack would be the final straw leading the Allies to declare war. Primary sources close to Hitler suggest he was genuinely worried by the Allied response, as he had been when reoccupying the Rhineland. Desperate, Hitler concocted an attack by the Polish on German soil, hopeful that this would provide a 'legal' basis for Germany's response. The plan did not work.

Manvell, R. *SS Gestapo: Rule by Terror* (1970), Ballantine Books, New York, United States of America, p. 63 Source 3.1

> Himmler was permitted to undertake a single, inglorious exploit at the start of the war with Poland. This was the so-called 'Operation Gleiwitz'. A fake border incident, planned by the Gestapo chief, Heinrich Muller … With the aid of some Polish uniforms and a few prisoners obtained from the camps, Poland was made to appear to have started the war on Germany by attacking the radio station at Gleiwitz. The dead and the dying, dressed in the appropriate uniforms, lay there for photographs to be taken by army and press photographers. The prisoners from the camps were brought in for sacrifice under a code phrase, 'canned goods': they were given fatal injections by an SS doctor, and then 'wounded' by gunshot. Such was one of the border 'incidents' used to justify Hitler's merciless Blitzkrieg upon Poland …

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Source questions

1. What excuse for the invasion of Poland is provided in Source 3.1?
2. How does the source reveal evidence about brutality in Nazi Germany?
3. To what extent does this source provide evidence that Hitler was uncertain attacking Poland was the right decision? Explain your answer.

Source 3.2 **Hitler's speech before Parliament, 1 September 1939, cited in Müller, R.D. & Ancker, J.W. *Hitler's Wehrmacht, 1935–1945* (2016), University Press of Kentucky, United States, p. 156**

This evening, Poland fired shots for the first time on our own territory, and has used regular soldiers to do so. Since 5:45 am, we have been shooting back. And from now on, we will retaliate, bomb for bomb! Anyone who fights with poison gas will be fought with poison gas. Anyone who fights without regard for the rules of a humane conduct of war can expect that we will do the same. I will conduct this battle, no matter against whom, until the security of the Reich and its rights are guaranteed.

True, for who?

1. **Discuss**. In what kind of situation was Hitler's claim made? (What were his interests and goals? What was at stake?)
2. **Brainstorm**. Make a list of different points of view from which you could look at this claim.
3. **Dramatise**. Choose a viewpoint to embody and imagine the stance a person from this viewpoint would be likely to take (e.g. a German citizen or British politician). Would he or she think Hitler's claim is true, false or uncertain? Why? Go around in a circle and dramatically speak from the viewpoint. Say:
   - My viewpoint is …
   - I think this claim is true/false/uncertain because …
   - What would convince me to change my mind is …
4. **Stand back**. Step outside of the circle of viewpoints and take everything into account: What is your conclusion or stance on Hitler's speech? What new ideas or questions do you have?

Source 3.3 **Beevor, A. *The Second World War* (2012), Weidenfeld & Nicolson, Great Britain, p. 25**

In Paris, news of the invasion had come as a shock, since hopes had risen over previous days that a European conflict could be avoided. Georges Bonnet, the foreign minister and most extreme appeaser of all, blamed the Poles for their 'stupid and obstinate attitude'. He still wanted to bring

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in Mussolini as mediator for another Munich-style agreement. But the 'mobilisation générale' continued, with trains full of reservists pulling out of the Gare de l'Est in Paris towards Metz and Strasbourg. Not surprisingly, the Polish government in Warsaw began to fear that the Allies had once again lost their nerve. Even politicians in London suspected from the imprecise note and the lack of time limit that Chamberlain might yet try to evade the commitment to Poland. But Britain and France were following the conventional diplomatic route …



Figure 3.1 German soldiers breaking down the border barrier and crossing into Poland at Sopot on 1 September 1939

3.2 Causes of World War II: Historical sources

Who was to blame for the outbreak of World War II is a topic thoroughly debated by historians. Was it as simple as saying that Hitler wanted war, and therefore he was responsible for the one that followed? Or was it a variety of reasons which combined to lead the world back onto the path it had desperately sought to avoid since 1919?

Bullock, A. *Hitler Reconsidered. World War II: Roots and Causes* (1975), Heath Publishing, London, United Kingdom, p. 212 Source 3.4

Western opinion made a clear-cut distinction between peace and war: Hitler did not, he blurred the distinction … he treated politics as a continuation of war by other means, at one stage of which he employed methods of political warfare – subversion, propaganda, diplomatic and economic pressure, the war of nerves – at the next, the threat of war, and so on to localised war and up the scale to general war.

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Source 3.5 **Adolf Hitler, in his 'Political Testament', 29 April 1945, cited in Stackelberg, R. & Winkle, S. *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook: An Anthology of Texts* (2002), Taylor & Francis, Routledge, London, England, p. 319**

It is untrue, that I or anyone else in Germany wanted to have the war in the year 1939.

Source 3.6 **Taylor, A.J.P. *The Origins of the Second World War* (2001), Penguin, United Kingdom, p. 218**

The state of German armament in 1939 gives the decisive proof that Hitler was not contemplating general war, and probably not intending war at all.

Source 3.7 **British historian B.H.L Hart, cited in Taylor, T. *Munich: The Price of Peace* (1979), Doubleday, New York, United States, p. 971**

The Polish Guarantee was the surest way to produce an early explosion, and a world war. It combined the maximum temptation with manifest provocation. It incited Hitler to demonstrate the futility of such a guarantee to a country out of reach from the West, while making the stiff-necked Poles even less inclined to consider any concession to him, and at the same time making it impossible for him to draw back without 'losing face'.

Source 3.8 **Smith, G. *The Dark Summer: An Intimate History of the Events That Led to World War II* (1987), Collier Books, London, England, p. 145**

Seeing Armageddon in the offing … the pledged word of the West, of democracy, of the future, was in the hands of the unstable and irresponsible leaders of [Poland] … no less authoritarian, nationalistic, totalitarian and racially intolerant than Germany and Italy.

Source 3.9 **Murray, W. & Millett, A.R. *A War to Be Won: Fighting the Second World War* (2001), Harvard University Press, United States, p. 16**

The rise of Nazi Germany represented a threat to the survival of Western civilization. Yet the shadow of World War I's slaughter exercised a powerful influence over statesmen guiding Western policy … [I]n unfavourable circumstances the Western powers took a stand over Poland. While the outbreak of World War II was a direct result of Hitler's aggressive policies,

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the date on which it began reflected as well the choices and mistakes made by Western statesmen, military leaders, and diplomats. The long road to 1 September 1939 was paved with good intentions, but in a world of Hitler's and Stalin's, good intentions were not enough. Now only cold steel and the battlefield could defend the interests and hopes of Western nations.

Evans, R. *The Third Reich in Power* (2006), Penguin, United States, p. 705 Source 3.10

War had been the objective of the Third Reich and its leaders from the moment they came to power in 1933. From that point up to the actual outbreak of hostilities in September 1939, they had focused relentlessly on preparing the nation for a conflict that would bring European, and eventually world, domination for Germany. The megalomania of these ambitions had been apparent in the gigantism of the plans developed by Hitler and Speer for Berlin, which was to become Germania, the new world capital.

Stop, look, listen

Select one of the sources in this section, and complete the following:

- Identify a claim in the source about who, or what, started World War II.
- **Stop:** Define the key idea of this claim, and consider whether you find it to be accurate or inaccurate.
- **Look:** Find more sources (from the sources provided above, or your own research) which support or counter this claim.
- **Listen:** Hear what the sources tell you with an open mind. Is it possible for your source to be biased, and how does it affect your information?

3.3 Fall of Poland

The Wehrmacht deployed six armoured divisions against Poland, who cleared the way for 48 infantry divisions. Despite strong resistance in some areas, the Polish Army could not avoid being surrounded and destroyed. Warsaw capitulated on 27 September, after more than two weeks of siege and heavy air attacks that broke down the Polish resistance. The last troops surrendered on 6 October. Polish losses were estimated at 66 300 dead, 133 700 wounded and 694 000 captured. The Wehrmacht listed 10 572 dead, 30 222 wounded and 3404 missing. Officially, the Germans 'disarmed' 230 670 Polish soldiers.

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Figure 3.2 German and Soviet forces invade Poland.

Source 3.11 **Hastings, M. *All Hell Let Loose: The World at War 1939–1945* (2012), Harper Collins, London, United Kingdom, p. 4**

> The Western Allies, heartened by knowledge that Poland boasted the fourth largest army in Europe, anticipated a struggle lasting some months … But the Wehrmacht was far better equipped, having 3,600 armoured vehicles against 750 Polish, 1,929 modern planes against nine hundred obsolete ones. The Polish army had been progressively deploying since March, but had held back from full mobilisation in response to Anglo-French pleas to avoid provoking Hitler.

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Figure 3.3 German troops watch a Polish village burn in 1939.

Whatever resistance the Allies thought Poland could muster quickly dissipated in the wake of Germany's tactical superiority – ***Blitzkrieg***. Rapidly advancing troops with strategic goals swiftly penetrated through Polish defences to ensure their defeat. Cities offering stiff resistance, such as Warsaw, were bombed mercilessly until the defenders surrendered. Adding to Poland's woes, the **Red Army** began its advance on 17 September 1939.



Figure 3.4 A satire of the division of Poland between Germany and the Soviet Union

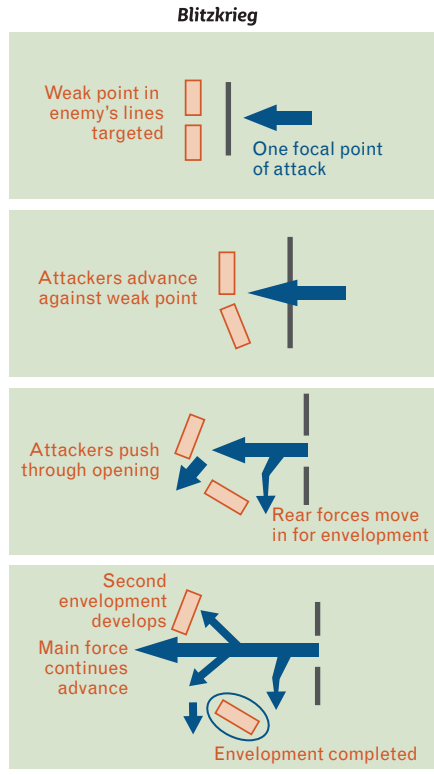


Figure 3.5 The German tactic of *Blitzkrieg*

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3.4 Why was Germany successful in the east?



Figure 3.6 View of an undamaged Polish city from the cockpit of a German medium bomber aircraft, likely a Heinkel He 111 P, October 1939

Germany's rapid industrial advancement in the 1930s, combined with its skilled workers in the scientific and technological fields, led to the development of an effective fighting force. This, added to the combat experience obtained in the Spanish Civil War, created a large gulf between the Wehrmacht and the Polish Army. While the stories of the Poles using horses to charge tanks, or World War I planes to defend the skies against Stukas, Heinkels and Messerschmitts are exaggerated, they are still representative of the gap that occurred between the technological and tactical skills of both countries. *Blitzkrieg* was a highly effective style of fighting, one which Poland was not capable of resisting. As their defensive lines were breached, Polish fighters were **encircled** by Nazi forces and surrendered. Stubbornly resistant cities were bombed to destroy morale and force a surrender.



Figure 3.7 Photograph from September 1939, showing Polish cavalry about to fight German forces

Source 3.12 **Evans, R. *The Third Reich at War* (2009), Penguin, United States, p. 4**

> On 16 September 1939 alone, 820 German aircraft dropped a total of 328,000 kilos of bombs on the defenceless Poles, who possessed a total of only 100 anti-aircraft guns for the whole of the country. So demoralizing were the air attacks that in some areas Polish troops threw down their arms, and German commanders on the ground asked for the bombing to stop.

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Overy, R. *The Third Reich: A Chronicle* (2011), Quercus, Great Britain, pp. 200–202 Source 3.13

While the savage pacification of Poland was taking place, Hitler was forced to decide how to respond to the British and French declaration of war. Since neither state did anything to assist Poland during September, he returned to his earlier conviction that they were not serious about waging war. On 5 October he returned from a victory parade in Warsaw and the following day announced a peace offer to the Western powers, aimed principally at reaching a special agreement between Britain and Germany. While not all Western leaders were opposed to the idea of a compromise agreement (since little could be done to save Poland) the governments rejected the peace proposal on the grounds that war had been declared to rid Europe of the menace of Hitlerism, not to endorse Hitler's victories.

Source questions

1 How does Source 3.12 support the idea that *Blitzkrieg* was a highly effective tactic?
2 Explain what Source 3.13 suggests about Hitler's relationship with the western powers after the outbreak of war in Poland.



Figure 3.8 German invasion of Poland, 1 September 1939

The Allies responded to the outbreak of war in Europe by issuing a demand to Hitler.

***The Outbreak of War: 22nd August – 3rd September 1939*, The British Library of Information, New York, United States, p. 8** Source 3.14

Early this morning the German Chancellor issued a proclamation to the German Army which indicated clearly that he was about to attack Poland.

Information which has reached His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom and the French Government indicates that German

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troops have crossed the Polish frontier and that attacks upon Polish towns are proceeding.

In these circumstances, it appears to the Governments of the United Kingdom and France that by their action the German Government have created conditions (viz., an aggressive act of force against Poland threatening the independence of Poland) which call for the implementation by the Governments of the United Kingdom and France of the undertaking to Poland to come to her assistance.

I am accordingly to inform your Excellency that unless the German Government are prepared to give His Majesty's Government satisfactory assurances that the German Government have suspended all aggressive action against Poland and are prepared promptly to withdraw their forces from Polish territory, His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom will without hesitation fulfil their obligations to Poland.

The ultimatum was a desperate response from an empire who wanted to avoid war, particularly over a country on the far side of Europe. Hitler rejected the demand, leading the British to declare war on 3 September 1939. The question remains as to what support Britain and France could have realistically provided to the Polish armed forces. Despite British reinforcement of France and some minor fighting along the French border, the Allies had remained behind the **Maginot Line**, wary of the German **Siegfried Line**. As France and Britain sat back, the Soviet Union had joined in the occupation and division of Poland.



Figure 3.9 German defences known as the Siegfried Line

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But the question remains, what could the Allies have done? Evidence suggests that an attack by the Allies along the length of the Siegfried Line may have been successful. They had more tanks, air support and men than the Germans, who had committed the best of their forces to Poland. In theory, an attack that penetrated into Germany could have swiftly ended the war – but this speculation does not consider the losses incurred fighting through the Siegfried Line. These heavy fortifications would inflict terrible losses on any attacking force, and were potentially strong enough to resist an attack altogether.

3.5 What happened to the war in 1939?

After the collapse of Poland, eight months passed before any operations commenced – on either side. The Germans ironically named this period the '*Sitzkrieg*', while in England it became the '**Phoney War**'. In reality, both sides used the time to prepare their forces while fearing the defensive capability of the other. The stagnant nature of World War I remained in the thinking of generals in 1939, especially considering the vast defensive fortifications of the Maginot and Siegfried Lines. Germany had 66 divisions committed in the east, which needed relocation to the west in preparation for any attack. Hitler was eager to build momentum for his conquests, but two factors interfered with this desire. The first was poor weather, which made fighting across a broad front very difficult. This was followed by the accidental leaking of the German plans to the Allies when a plane was shot down. Hitler took the extra time offered by these forced breaks to continue production, exploit gold, resources and labour from Poland, and devise a new plan that did not closely match the **Schlieffen Plan** of World War I.

Britain and France struggled to devise a plan to attack the Nazi forces, with suggestions including the occupation of Norway, to attacks north from the Mediterranean. Economic warfare was their first method of engagement, as they sought to establish a blockade on Germany similar to the blockade that had such a devastating impact in World War I. For eight months the war existed in a strange state, with neither side launching attacks other than surveillance, or small operations which were soon withdrawn. Some fighting occurred at sea, with ships sunk and planes shot down, but this was also relatively minor.

The first significant offensive, after the division of Poland between Germany and the Soviet Union, was the invasion of Finland by the Soviet Union on 30 November 1939. Again, this triggered a widespread debate in England about how best to respond, but a delay in agreeing to a response left Finland isolated against the Soviet Union.

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Terms

***Blitzkrieg*:** falsely attributed to Hitler, *Blitzkrieg* translates as 'lightning war'. It involved a rapid, concentrated attack with combined forces (infantry, air, tanks, artillery).

Encircled: a feature of the rapidly moving *Blitzkrieg*. Attacking units passed around both sides of the enemy before rejoining deep behind their lines. This created isolated 'pockets' of resistance which could be bombed or starved into surrender.

***Lebensraum*:** an ideology of Hitler which translates as 'living space' for the German people, particularly in eastern Europe.

Maginot Line: over 1500 km of concrete fortifications, obstacles, tunnels and weapons installations running in a line along the French border.

Phoney War: the six months following the fall of Poland during which none of the British, French or Germans fought.

Polish Guarantee: the statement made by the British that if Germany attacked Poland, the English would declare war.

Red Army: the name for the military forces of the Soviet Union.

Schlieffen Plan: the plan Germany used during World War I. It involved a rapid attack on France through Belgium and the Netherlands, before moving south to Paris.

Siegfried Line: over 630 km of German defensive fortifications built opposite the Maginot Line in the 1930s.

Summary

- After his successes in Czechoslovakia, Hitler was keen to further Nazi territorial expansion in the east.
- He struck a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union, which also included secret clauses to divide Poland.
- The British guaranteed that if Hitler invaded Poland, Britain and the empire would go to war. France followed shortly after.
- Hitler was indecisive, but committed to military action against Poland in early September 1939, fostering a weak attempt to make it seem as if Poland attacked Germany first.
- The gamble failed, with the Allies declaring war against the Nazis.
- No serious conflict broke out between the Allies and Germany in a period known as the Phoney War.
- Poland was swiftly conquered by superior Nazi numbers, technology and the tactic of *Blitzkrieg*.
- The Soviet Union invaded Poland from the east to confirm its division with Hitler.

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Activities

Thinking historically

1. How is the invasion of Poland evidence of the concept of technological shock?
2. Compose your own definition of *Blitzkrieg*. Explain what made it so effective in Poland.
3. Analyse why Britain and France did not seek to negotiate with Germany during the Phoney War period.
4. What was the consequence of both Britain and France delaying their attacks from September 1939 to May 1940?
5. Imagine you are a British citizen during the Phoney War period. Discuss how this would impact your general morale and support for the war.

Connect, extend, challenge

- **Connect:** How are the ideas and information presented on the invasion in Poland connected to what you already knew of the conflict in Europe?
- **Extend:** What new ideas did you get that extended or pushed your thinking in new directions?
- **Challenge:** What is still challenging or confusing for you to get your mind around? What questions, wonderings or puzzles do you now have?

Writing historically

1. Justify whether you believe Britain and France should have provided Poland with a guarantee of protection.
2. Essay question: To what extent was ideology responsible for the outbreak of World War II in Europe?
   - Create an essay scaffold for this question using the following table:

Overall thesis statement				
	Paragraph idea	**Topic sentence**	**Key facts**	**Historians' views**
Paragraph I				
Paragraph II				
Paragraph III				
Paragraph IV				
Paragraph V				

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4 The attack in the west

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- The fall of the Low Countries and France
- The air war and its effects
- Effective German strategies and tactics

CHRONOLOGY

6 October 1939	Poland is defeated by Germany and the Soviet Union
10 May 1940	The invasion of France and the Low Countries (Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands) is launched, on the same day that Winston Churchill becomes the British Prime Minister
15 May 1940	The Netherlands surrenders
27 May 1940	The Dunkirk evacuation begins
28 May 1940	King Leopold III of Belgium surrenders
10 June 1940	Italy declares war on Britain and France
14 June 1940	The Germans occupy Paris
22 June 1940	France surrenders to Germany

4.1 The Sickle Cut of France

On 10 May 1940, a broad assault was launched upon France and the Low Countries, signalling the beginning of the war in the west. This coincided with the day **Winston Churchill** became Prime Minister of Britain in the wake of Chamberlain's inability to prevent war, or respond to German attacks on Norway and Denmark in April 1940. After these conquests, Hitler turned his attention to the Low Countries, and beyond that, France.

France spent roughly 2% of its military budget creating the Maginot Line, a massive investment by any measure. In theory, the Maginot Line prevented Germany from attacking through Alsace and Lorraine, as it had during World War I. However, its purpose was not solely as a means of

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defence; it was also designed to push German forces north into Belgium. French planning predicted elite German forces moving through Belgium and Holland, as they had with the Schlieffen Plan in World War I. This belief was confirmed by the shooting down of a German plane in Belgium, which carried secret plans detailing a sweeping invasion force following the Schlieffen Plan. But Germany knew of the captured plane, and revised its plan to follow a bold idea of **Erich von Manstein**, Chief of Staff of Army Group A. The Manstein plan called for diversionary attacks on the Maginot Line, to hold French troops in place, and into Belgium. While the French responded to these opening moves, German troops would rapidly drive a concentrated force through the **Ardennes Forest** – north of Maginot's defences, but south of the fast-moving French forces heading into Belgium.

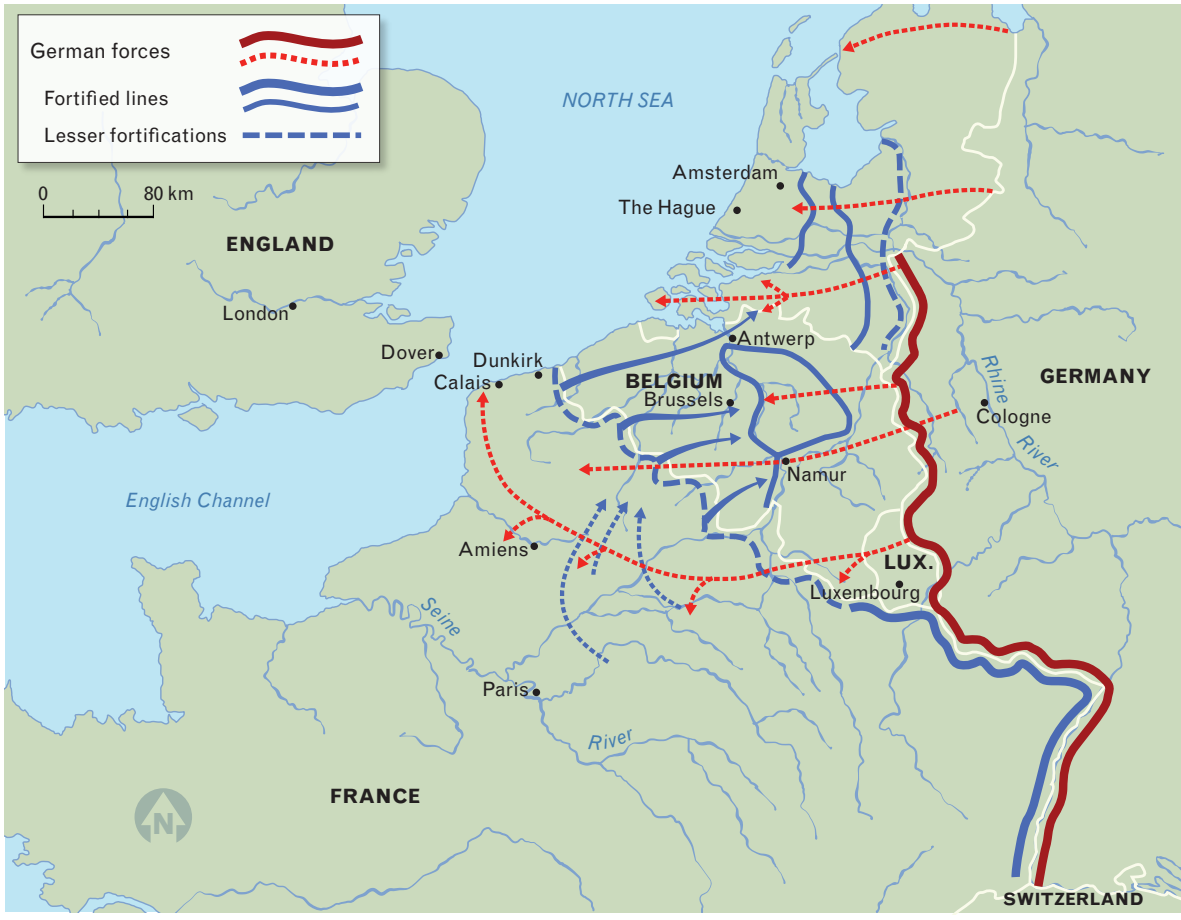


Figure 4.1 The German offensives into the Low Countries and France

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See, think, wonder

Create a three-columned table with the titles See, Think and Wonder.

1. List what you can **see** in Figure 4.1 in the first column. (I can see …)
2. Using this list, write down what these words make you **think** about. (I think …)
3. In the final column, create a list of ideas which may not directly be in the image, but you now **wonder** about. (I wonder …)

All French planning declared the Ardennes region impenetrable to German forces. But the Germans deployed bulldozers and construction teams to remove trees and create dirt roads for the Panzers and vehicles to travel. Two hundred bulldozers cleared a path for 46 divisions in a tactical and logistical masterstroke. On 13 May, the first German forces emerged from the Ardennes near Sedan, on the River Meuse. In a two-day battle, the Panzers crossed the river despite surprising resistance from the second-class French defenders, and near-suicidal attacks by Allied aircraft. After cutting through above the Maginot Line, the Germans created the perfect conditions to enact what Hitler called, a **Sickle Cut**, or in German, the *Sichelschnitt*. Panzers pushed deep into France to split the Allied forces, leaving the French stuck in Belgium while their capital became vulnerable. After a failed counterattack by the combined Allied forces, and the withdrawal of Belgium from the war, the remaining British and French forces retreated to Dunkirk. Issues with the fleet in Norway, and Hitler's decision to halt the advance for fear his forces were spread too thin, allowed the Allies to desperately flee across the English Channel.



Figure 4.2 The German army clearing a path through the Ardennes Forest in 1940

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Figure 4.3 Engineer troops building a makeshift bridge over the Semoy, near Bouillon in the Ardennes, 5 November 1940

The second part of the Battle of France began on 5 June, with the Germans attacking southwards towards Paris, entering it on 14 June. The French government fled to Bordeaux as any resistance was slowly obliterated. Hitler forced the new government (**Vichy France**) to sign a declaration to end the war in the same railway carriage used to conclude World War I. In Britain, a French government in exile was created under **Charles de Gaulle**.

Table 4.1 The relative forces deployed during the war in the west

	Germany	France	Britain	Belgium	Netherlands
Divisions	130+	94	10	22	10
Tanks	2400	3000+	–	10	
Artillery	7700	11 200	1280	1338	676
Bombers	1680	300	536	–	–
Fighters	1210	632	608	–	144

Table 4.1 provides evidence that forces deployed across western Europe were relatively balanced between the Allies and Germany. All statistics are approximations, as varied calculations arise based on when and where units were deployed. These statistics are only a guide to understanding the war, as they do not provide evidence of the effectiveness of the forces arrayed against each other. For example, the statistics suggest the French held a significant advantage due to the amount of artillery they had. However, these statistics do not reveal the fact that French artillery was largely horse-drawn, slow-moving and often immobile. Many

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artillery pieces were a legacy of World War I, and did not prove effective against rapid Panzer attacks. Likewise, tank statistics suggest France held an advantage over the Germans. The French SOMUA S35 tank was one of the best tanks deployed in the Battle of France, but it was only deployed in small numbers. France had focused on developing tanks to support infantry, and these struggled to match the speed, reload rates and firepower of German tanks.



Figure 4.4 A tank covers the crossing of assault engineers to the opposite bank of a river in the Ardennes.



Figure 4.5 Three German soldiers, probably from the 5th Panzer Division, run through smoke-filled streets near Lens while under shellfire, France, late May 1940.

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Figure 4.6 A famous photograph of Hitler before the Eiffel Tower in Paris following the surrender of France

4.2 Belgium's fate

Belgium became the focal point for ***Fall Gelb* (Plan Yellow)** in 1940. While this was a diversionary attack to tempt the French forces north of the Ardennes, this did not change the brutality of the fighting, or the consequences of loss for Belgium. On 10 May 1940, Germany ignored Belgium's claims for neutrality, and for the second time in 30 years crossed its borders with the intent to rapidly conquer Belgian territory. One of the key German targets was Fort Eben Emael, which had towering walls and heavy guns. To capture the fort, paratroopers and soldiers in gliders were used to disable the fort's defences, leading to its capture by German infantry. Like the tactical skill of the Ardennes operation, Eben Emael is another example of the growing military capacity of the Wehrmacht forces in World War II.

Video 4.2
England and France to help (01:42)

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Figure 4.7 Fort Eben Emael in Belgium, 1940

In southern Belgium, three major battles were fought, including the Battle of Hannut, the largest tank battle at that point in history. Belgium stood little chance of resisting the might of the German forces, even as France rushed to support it from the south. The Nazi forces used the Luftwaffe to prevent troop movement, and delivered rapid strikes to any gathering forces or defences. On the 27 May 1940, **King Leopold III** of Belgium requested an armistice with the Nazis, and withdrew Belgium from the war on 28 May. Public sentiment in Britain and France immediately claimed Belgium had betrayed their allies, but the high commands of both sides knew Belgium was days from collapse. They did not form a **collaborative government** like France, but **unconditionally surrendered**.

4.3 Surrender of Holland

In 1940, the Netherlands declared itself to be neutral when war broke out with Poland. However, German strategists recognised the need to secure their northern flank to the sea and prevent any Allied forces using Holland as a base for air attacks or for landing troops. On top of this, access to Dutch ports and airfields allowed for vital bases for future bombing raids on both France and England. On 10 May 1940, Germany invaded Holland. The fighting lasted until 14 May, before the Netherlands was occupied for five years.

The Dutch stood little chance of resisting the might of German technology and numerical superiority. Holland had few soldiers, who were poorly trained, and lacked the technology to provide any major resistance. The Dutch hoped that Britain and France would come to their aid to prevent occupation – but the speed of the initial German thrust into Holland never allowed time for this, even if the Allies were willing.

Despite this, the Dutch fought fiercely in individual battles such as the Maas River, where they resisted German attempts to secure the bridge. By 13 May, Dutch generals regarded the situation as dire. German Panzers drove between the scattered opposition forces, splitting them between the north and south. They followed this with massive bombing raids on Rotterdam, where 800 civilians died and 78 000 were left homeless. The fires lit up the horizon for kilometres in all directions. The Dutch royal family and government fled to England, and with future threats to bomb Utrecht, Amsterdam and Den Hague, the Netherlands officially surrendered.

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Figure 4.8 German troops enter Rotterdam as it burns.



Figure 4.9 The aftermath of Rotterdam's bombing

Figure questions

1 What evidence does Figure 4.9 provide about the nature of aerial warfare?
2 Describe how you would feel about the war, if you lived in Rotterdam during the bombing.

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4.4 The evacuation at Dunkirk

The evacuation at Dunkirk was the event which gave the British some hope of surviving the war, even if France was lost. French and British forces fought savage defensive engagements as their forces retreated towards Dunkirk on the English Channel, while in Britain, politicians and military advisers created a desperate plan to withdraw their stranded forces before they were overwhelmed by the Wehrmacht. **Operation Dynamo** was the solution. A mass evacuation by the Royal Navy and fleets of small civilian boats – anything which could be found to survive the Channel. The evacuation boats crossed while the **British Expeditionary Force (BEF)** and French forces held a defensive perimeter around Dunkirk.



Figure 4.10 Troops fighting in the city of Dunkirk to allow for the British and French withdrawal

The forces evacuating at Dunkirk had a stroke of luck when Hitler ordered the Panzers to halt their advance, and instead offered Britain a chance to surrender. Historically, this decision to halt the Panzers has been described as one of Hitler's greatest tactical failures. What if Hitler had advanced and knocked the BEF and remaining French forces out of the war? Would the Commonwealth have surrendered? The reality is not as simple. Hitler accepted the advice of two commanders seeking a tactical halt. German losses were high due to strong British resistance. General Gunther von Kluge told General **Gerd von Rundstedt** that the German forces were not strong enough to guarantee they could defeat the Allied forces at Dunkirk. Despite victory in France, Germany suffered heavy losses of both men and machines. It was sensible that the Germans approached any future battles with some caution after they had lost the element of surprise. The German pause gave the Allies

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time to commence mass troop withdrawals from the beaches of Dunkirk. After the devastating German attacks across Europe, this was a small ray of hope the British government, its military and civilians clung to.



Figure 4.11 Thousands of soldiers line up to be evacuated from Dunkirk. Of the 250 000 British troops stranded after the fall of Belgium, 30 000 were lost.



Figure 4.12 Soldiers waded to the ships for evacuation.

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Source 4.1 **Hastings, M. *All Hell Let Loose: The World at War 1939–1945* (2012), Harper Collins, London, United Kingdom, p. 66**

> The legend of Dunkirk was besmirched by some uglinesses, as is the case with all great historical events: a significant number of British seamen invited to participate in the evacuation refused to do so, including the Rye fishing fleet and some lifeboat crews; others, after once experiencing the chaos of the beaches and Luftwaffe bombing, on reaching England refused to set forth again. While most fighting units preserved their cohesion, there were disciplinary collapses among rear-echelon personnel, which made it necessary for some officers to draw and indeed use their revolvers. For the first three days, the British were content to take off their own men, while the French held a perimeter southward and were refused access to shipping. On at least one occasion … they were fired on by disorderly British troops. Only when Churchill intervened personally did ships begin to take off Frenchmen, 53,000 of them after the last British personnel had been embarked.

4.5 Effectiveness of German attacks in the west

Many explanations have arisen as to why the Germans were so effective during the battles for France and Belgium. Historians offer different explanations in answer to this key question: Germany was the weaker force, with the united Allied front having more planes, artillery and men. What factors, then, made the German attack so successful?

France in decline

The British, and to a lesser extent Belgium and the Netherlands, pinned their hopes of victory in the war on the ability of the French soldiers. They knew the quality of France as a fighting force; after all, the French successfully resisted the Germans in World War I, surely they could again. This certainty did not match the reality of the state of France, or consider what it had endured during the interwar period.

Like many countries across the world, the Great Depression severely impacted France. Its democratic government struggled with the challenges of unemployment and social decline, made worse by serious corruption and **decadence**. Low birth rates and the mass loss of men during World War I meant that France had an air of defeat about it before the war began. The Depression saw the rise of anti-democratic sentiment across the world, and France was no exception. Many people did not trust democracy, and believed France was a struggling, if not failing, country.

While true, these viewpoints on French society do not tell the whole story. While Germany committed to a rapid path of rearming, France's

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rearming and construction of new technologies was much slower. This did change at the end of 1938, and did go some way to restoring a sense of hope for the French, which strengthened with the reality of war against the Nazis in 1939.

Carswell, R. *The Fall of France in the Second World War – History and Memory* (2019), Springer Nature Switzerland, Cham, Switzerland, p. 44

Source 4.2

> After years of doom-laden predictions of France's moral decline, various changes in fortune coincided to revive French morale: the improvement in the economy, the quickening pace of rearmament, the more forthright support of the British ally and the growing realisation on the part of public opinion that Hitler's aggression had to be stopped, if necessary by force. Ideas about French decadence did not vanish, they were merely put into the freezer for the time being. It would not be patriotic to criticise the country, its institutions, other social and economic groups in such dangerous times ... [T]here is scant evidence to suggest that most French people believed that the Allies would not prevail.

The state of France did play a role in the loss inflicted by the Wehrmacht in World War II, but it is only part of the story. Historian Marc Bloch summarises these thoughts on France by saying that social decline was a 'deeper cause', while 'direct causes', such as the failures of the French commanders or the inability to resist the German Panzer attacks, also played a key role. This approach is generally accepted despite the mass of historical writing on the state of France before 1940.

Technological superiority and tactical deployment

While the Allies outnumbered the Germans statistically, the quality of those units was extremely varied. France did have a technologically advanced fighting force, with quality tanks such as the SOMUA S35 providing speed, protection and armour penetration. The heavy BI tank had protective armour greater than a German Panzer, and a larger main gun. These tanks were so effective the Germans repurposed them for use during the attack on the Soviet Union in 1941. France also had the upper hand in artillery (11 200 to Germany's 7710), but significantly fewer anti-tank guns.

If French forces were numerically superior in many areas, how then did they lose the war? Putting aside the broader tactics employed by the Germans, for each battle, the French did not utilise their resources to achieve their objective. French commanders focused on infantry as the key to winning any engagement. Aircraft, artillery and tanks were to be used to support the infantry advance. This was in direct opposition to the Panzer units the Germans established, who quickly accelerated miles away from

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their infantry divisions, forcing them to catch up. France's tactics meant its heavy units were isolated against a unit of Panzers, and quickly defeated or captured. On a basic tactical level, France did not have the experience or tactical understanding to use its units appropriately.

Training and leadership

By the time of the Battle of France, many German soldiers had fought in major conflicts in both Spain and Poland. This hard-earned knowledge allowed the German generals to tactically deploy their forces, aircraft, Panzers and infantry to provide a united assault. Wehrmacht soldiers were professional and dedicated, and it was they who first secured the bridges and assaulted French forces beyond, not the tanks.

The German generals, particularly Rommel and Guderian, were highly effective in this type of warfare. They disobeyed Hitler in the sense that they did not look to Hitler for instructions, but seized the initiative with swift and decisive action to achieve a goal. Whether it was the **ghost units** of General **Erwin Rommel** or **Heinz 'Hurry Up' Guderian's** rapid passage into France, the generals thought and responded as they saw fit. This helped to prevent the **fog of war**, and startled France as the Germans swiftly penetrated to the heart of the country.

The importance of leadership was also evident on the French side. They were too defensive, cautious, over-reliant on the Maginot Line for protection, and stayed in their trench fortifications even as Germany passed the Ardennes (ongoing attacks by the Wehrmacht were designed to hold French forces on the Maginot Line). Their desire to defend became a fixation as the Wehrmacht pressed forward. To the French, defence would buy time to consolidate their position, slow the war down and achieve a tactical stalemate as in World War I. But the German motorised method of fighting allowed no time for preparation of defences, and the onslaught of the 'Sickle Cut' ended any attempts to form a unified 'front' to resist the Wehrmacht.

The plan and preparation

France trusted its defensive fortification and allowed Germany to dictate the attack. They were the defenders and Germany the aggressors. France could have launched an attack during the Phoney War, but instead allowed Germany to plan, prepare and transfer experienced troops from now secured Poland to the west. Would it have made any difference if France had led the attack into Germany early in January 1940?

Hitler and his generals initially planned an attack similar to World War I, and nearly gave the 'go' order in January before delaying. The French **Dyle Plan** was both a military and political response to the Schlieffen Plan. Defending the Netherlands and Belgium was dictated by their belief of what Germany would do, from their experiences of World War I. They wanted to secure Belgium, to stop it from falling into Nazi hands, and by doing so they hoped to avoid fighting the war on French soil. These political considerations mixed with military ones to ensure France's attention was focused away from the Ardennes.

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The greatest strength to the Ardennes attack was surprise. The assault on Luxembourg into the Ardennes isolated French forces before the rapidly moving Panzer units. This created a three-to-two advantage for the Nazis, who were attacking with their best units against weak French units. But this attack was confused and slow at times, with Wehrmacht forces queueing for miles to travel along small roads or cross bridges. The element of surprise meant the French did not bomb these queues to create chaos and confusion. Instead, the elite French divisions raced towards Belgium to counter the German thrust there.

The Sickle Cut which followed allowed Germany to punch into the heart of France and split its forces to the north. Blinded by their belief that Hitler and his generals would follow a revised version of the Schlieffen Plan, French forces now found themselves defending from the east, and the south, with limited ability to communicate or resupply. France failed to predict the avenue of the German attack, which significantly contributed to their demise. Post-war, historians concluded that French intelligence realised the Ardennes was passable, but they simply failed to address this path of attack. Such conclusions are easy to draw with hindsight, especially considering the fortunate nature of the Germans' change of plan.

Nord, P. *France 1940 – Defending the Republic* (2015), Yale University Press, London, England, p. 86 Source 4.3

> These were the result of flawed, indeed blundering, decision-making on the part of the nation's military leadership. It was the army command that lost the Battle of France, not civilian error or a disinclination to fight, let alone faults, real or imagined, in French society as a whole.

Communication

French commanders generally remained around 40 km behind the frontline battle, in direct contrast to German commanders who fought – and died – in frontline battles. For communication purposes, the ability of the German commanders to issue on-the-spot orders, based on information they could see, was greatly superior to the fog of war which descended upon French commanders desperately awaiting small pieces of information. The separation of command from the front lines was compounded by the fact that most French communication occurred by messenger, not radio. French Commander-in-Chief, **Maurice Gamelin**, did not even have a radio in his headquarters. Messengers could be killed on their way to their target, meaning no communication was received, and the intelligence Gamelin acted upon was not complete. Leadership situated well behind the lines was a legacy from World War I, and the newly adopted fighting method, despite its risks, carried the greater ability to communicate and direct units as required.

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Source 4.4 **Overy, R. *Air Power, Armies, and the War in the West, 1940* (1989), The Harmon Memorial Lectures in Military History, US Air Force Academy, p. 7**

> Even more bizarre for a military that placed so much emphasis on the prepared battlefield and static, centrally controlled operations, the French forces had very poor communications. This deficiency was true of the link between air units and between the air force and army. Only 0.15 percent of the military budget between 1923 and 1938 was spent on communications … Poor communication fatally weakened French combined operations.

The Alliance

The Alliance between Great Britain, France, Belgium and the Netherlands, which formed in the face of hostility from Hitler, gave the appearance of strength to the Allied cause. France had an effective army, the British had the BEF, and while the Low Countries were small, their numbers bolstered the alliance. Their combined might should have theoretically given them a significant advantage over the Wehrmacht forces; but in reality, it significantly hindered their ability to wage war.

Belgium and the Netherlands had no effective way to defend themselves against the Nazis. Small populations, with limited capability on land, in the air or at sea, resulted in their swift surrender. Indeed, it was the desire to prevent their surrender that led the French to so heavily fixate on rushing to defend Belgium. France was the defender of these small countries, including England. The BEF deployment was not substantial enough to resist the Germans. When British Commander-in-Chief **John Gort** decided to retreat, rather than join the French in attack to reconstruct a united front, the fate of France was sealed. Britain was withdrawing across the English Channel; whatever happened from that point, France was on its own. Many French felt abandoned by their allies, a view compounded when Britain sank the French fleet to stop it from falling into German hands.

Apart from this, the Allies did not communicate effectively during the war. Despite the haphazard command structure under Hitler, the Germans were united in their purpose of conquering France. The Allies did not necessarily share the same objectives. Analysis of the battles fought suggests that Allied forces working as separate countries tended to achieve their outcomes at a greater rate than when united. The French struggled to communicate with their forces, let alone their allies. This meant that coordinating a defence became a challenge.

Intelligence

One of the greatest dangers for military commanders is the concept of confirmation bias. This process occurs when intelligence is provided to a leader which may support conclusions they have already drawn. They do not consider the different interpretations of the information, but

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accept it as it matches their point of view. This happened to the French military leaders and their intelligence community when looking at the Ardennes assault.

To some extent, Allied intelligence failed to notice the signals that Germany was planning to attack through the Ardennes. This occurred for both the British and French intelligence community, as they fixated on Belgium. Constant Luftwaffe reconnaissance missions flown across the Ardennes were not spotted or were ignored, as was the build-up of supplies along the Luxembourg border.

Jackson, J. *The Fall of France: The Nazi Invasion of 1940* (2004), Oxford University Press, Great Britain, p. 219 Source 4.5

> The French intelligence services in 1940 did pick up quite a lot of information on the possibility of an Ardennes offensive – for example, on 13 March 1940 it was reported that a lot of bridging equipment was being assembled in Germany opposite the Luxembourg border, two days later that an increasing number of tanks were being deployed opposite south Belgium and Luxembourg – but even more about the possibility of a German move through Switzerland. The problem was how to distinguish genuine information from 'noise'. The cumbersome French command structure meant that there were no very clear mechanisms for the collation and centralization of intelligence information … According to one historian 'no senior officer had the task of assimilating intelligence and relating it to operational planning'.

Source question

- Assess the challenges France faced in responding to the German threat which are demonstrated in Source 4.5.

French morale and surrender

France's morale was extremely low. Political dissatisfaction, corruption and the struggles of the country following the Great Depression led France to adopt a 'defeatist' approach very quickly. Some French didn't see the point in resisting the Germans and were willing to give up, which has become a common myth when describing French forces during World War II. After the British withdrawal, France had surrendered and established a Nazi-controlled government called Vichy France, led by World War I commander **Philippe Pétain**. There no doubt were French soldiers who wanted to surrender even if it led to Nazi rule; however, the myth ignores the reality that France did resist the Wehrmacht advance but was hindered by tactical blunders. It also ignores the reality that many French units fought exceedingly well in difficult

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circumstances, often with limited direction, supplies, or in the face of overwhelming odds. The creation of the myth and criticism directed at the French for surrendering is disrespectful to the efforts of French units in World War II.

Source 4.6 **Barlone, D. *A French Officer's Diary: 23 August 1939–October 1940* (2011), Cambridge University Press, Great Britain, p. 73**

> Everywhere the enemy advances; one feels that the Army is incapable of any further resistance. Probably it hasn't the means to continue fighting, for that was the case in Belgium. Never were the ranks broken there, never did the men shrink from any sacrifice. They were crushed beneath the weight of metal, paralysed by new tactics of which our Staff and the British had little foresight and still less knowledge. It has been said that they weren't ready to go to war à la 1914–18. But officers and men did their duty wherever they had the means of fighting.

G-S-C-E concept map

- **Generate** a list of ideas and initial thoughts that come to mind when you think about the reasons the Allies were defeated in the Battle for France.
- **Sort** your ideas according to how important they are, placing key ideas in the centre of your page.
- **Connect** your ideas by drawing lines between ideas that have something in common. In a short sentence between, explain how the ideas are connected.
- **Elaborate** on any of the ideas/thoughts you have written so far by adding new ideas that expand, extend or add to your initial ideas.

Continue generating, sorting, connecting and elaborating new ideas until you feel you have an effective visual representation of your understanding.

Summary

- The six-month period following the declaration of war by Britain and France became known as the Phoney War, or *Sitzkrieg* in Germany.
- German plans to invade France like the Schlieffen Plan of World War I were discovered. Erich von Manstein devised a new plan focusing on attacking through the Ardennes, while using diversionary attacks in Belgium and Holland.
- On 10 May 1940, the Germans launched their assault through the Ardennes and made rapid progress with the *Blitzkrieg* tactic.

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- As the French rushed to defend Belgium, their forces were split by the rapid-moving Panzers of General Heinz Guderian. This Sickle Cut, as it became known, left the French forces isolated in the north of France and Belgium, where they would be pushed back towards the sea.
- Belgium and the Netherlands surrendered after brutal fighting and heavy bombing.
- The British decided to withdraw the British Expeditionary Force back across the English Channel at Dunkirk – the evacuation was extremely successful.
- France was abandoned to its fate and quickly surrendered as Germany occupied Paris.
- A puppet government known as Vichy France was established, run by World War I hero, **Philippe Pétain**.

Key personalities and terms

Personalities

British Prime Minister **Winston Churchill** (1874–1965), was familiar with war with Germany, after enduring months of shelling in the trenches at Ploegsteert in Belgium in World War I. Churchill assisted in the creation of the Dardanelles plan of World War I, which aimed to force a revolt in Turkey following the notorious Gallipoli campaign. He was appointed Prime Minister in Britain after Chamberlain lost support for his leadership.



Figure 4.13 Winston Churchill



Figure 4.14 Leopold III

Leopold III (1901–1983) was the King of Belgium during the Nazi invasion of 1940. After World War I, Belgium felt better prepared to resist a German attack due to its strong defences, and therefore tried to maintain its neutrality in the war. When the Wehrmacht swiftly defeated Belgium's defences, Leopold elected to remain in Belgium with his troops, surrendering on 28 May 1940. He was held prisoner during the war, and liberated in May 1945.

Heinz Guderian (1888–1954) was a skilled German general who led a successful assault through the Ardennes Forest in 1940, and the opening attacks of Operation Barbarossa (on the Soviet Union) in 1941. After failing to overcome Soviet defences at Moscow, Guderian fell out of favour. Following the war, he was implicated in numerous atrocities but was released without charge by the United States.



Figure 4.15 Heinz Guderian

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Figure 4.16 Erich von Manstein

Erich von Manstein (1887–1973) is most well-known for his 'creation' of the Ardennes plan, although history has revealed this to be a collaboration of German generals. He was a Chief-of-Staff to General von Rundstedt in May 1940, obtaining the rank of General afterwards. As General, he was unsuccessful in the relief of Stalingrad but dealt the Soviet Union a savage 'backhand' at Kharkov. Post-war he was sentenced to 18 years in prison, but only served four.

Gerd von Rundstedt (1875–1953) was a German field marshal who achieved success in the Polish and French campaigns, although he was responsible for requesting the 'halt order' to stop German troops advancing on Dunkirk. After severe failures in the Soviet Union, he was transferred to the Western Front to prepare the defences on the French coastline. In 1945 von Rundstedt was charged with war crimes but never put on trial due to his poor health.



Figure 4.17 Gerd von Rundstedt



Figure 4.18 Erwin Rommel

Erwin Rommel (1891–1944) was a German general during the Battle of France who was renowned for the speed of movement his troops achieved. He commanded the forces deployed in the North African campaign, and the defences against the Allied landings in 1944, but was injured when a plane strafed his car. Fearing Rommel was responsible for an attempt on his life, Hitler forced him to commit suicide in 1944.

John Gort (1886–1946) was a British field marshal who commanded the English forces located on the European continent in 1940. Gort ignored the orders to attack southwards and support France, instead choosing to take his forces to Dunkirk for evacuation. This decision produced much debate about his skill as a commander, with some stating he abandoned France, while others argue he saved the British forces.



Figure 4.19 John Gort



Figure 4.20 Maurice Gamelin

Maurice Gamelin (1872–1958) was the commander of the French forces when Germany attacked on 10 May 1940. Critics charge him with leading a World War I-style defence in World War II, which led to his removal from command on 18 May 1940 after heavy French losses. He was charged with treason by the French puppet government, and imprisoned by Germany until the end of the war.

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Charles de Gaulle (1890–1970) was a respected veteran of World War I, who championed the creation of mechanised units in France between the wars. During the German invasion, he fought desperate counteroffensives despite the crumbling situation in France. de Gaulle fled to England to command the Free French Forces, and led the French government in 1944 after liberation by the Allies.



Figure 4.21 Charles de Gaulle



Figure 4.22 Henri Philippe Pétain

French Marshal **Henri Philippe Pétain** (1856–1951) was a World War I hero who led Vichy France during the Nazi occupation. This collaboration with the Nazis saw him charged with treason following the war, and sentenced to death. After consideration of his heroics at Verdun in World War I, and his old age, the charge was changed to life imprisonment.

Terms

Ardennes Forest: a densely forested area of rough terrain situated on the border between Belgium, France and Germany.

British Expeditionary Force (BEF): the name of the British forces in western Europe on the outbreak of World War II.

Collaborative government: a type of government which works with its occupier.

Decadence: a term used loosely by politicians, intellectuals and writers to criticise those aspects of France they did not like. There was no common definition of decadence in France.

Dyle Plan: the French plan to defend against a German attack by swiftly moving north and east to fight to protect Belgium and the Netherlands.

***Fall Gelb* (Plan Yellow):** the operational name given to Erich von Manstein's plan, which involved diversionary attacks on Belgium and the Maginot Line, while the main German force assaulted through the Ardennes region.

Fog of war: a term used to describe the chaos and confusion that occurs during war, or individual battles.

Ghost units: the name given to General Erwin Rommel's units, as they advanced so fast they could appear and vanish, like ghosts.

Operation Dynamo: the codename given to the evacuation at Dunkirk by British ships.

Sickle Cut: the name given to the German tactics which isolated French forces as they moved to defend Belgium and the Netherlands.

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Unconditional surrender: a form of surrender where one side admits complete defeat to the other. This differs from 'conditional surrender' where one side negotiates their surrender, and generally gains more favourable conditions.

Vichy France: the government which controlled France under German occupation.

Activities

Thinking historically

1. Describe the defensive plans of both France and Germany.
2. Discuss the role luck played in the formation of the German plan.
3. What kind of attack did the Allies expect, and how did the Germans mislead them?
4. To what extent was French and British planning at fault for their weak defences at the outbreak of World War II?
5. What occurred during the Sickle Cut of France?
6. Sequence the biggest challenges faced by the French. You can produce this on a spiral map, where the most important ideas are on the inside, and become less important as the map spirals outwards.
7. Why was Operation Dynamo significant for the British and, alternatively, for Germany?
8. Summarise Hitler's achievements in the first year of the war (September 1939 to September 1940).

Circle of viewpoints

- Students divide into groups of four.
- Each student is assigned a 'viewpoint' – German soldier, French soldier, British citizen, or the French government.
- Each student should consider the evacuation at Dunkirk from their point of view, using the following prompts:
  - I am thinking of … from the point of view of …
  - I think this person would hold these opinions of Dunkirk …
  - One question I have about this point of view is …
- Students share their different points of view in the group of four.

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Writing historically

1. Write a newspaper article for the London *Times*, describing the impact of the Battle of France and Dunkirk evacuation on British citizens.
2. Essay question: Evaluate the effective strategies and tactics employed by the Germans against France, England, Belgium and the Netherlands in 1940.
   - **a** Create a two-columned table.
   - **b** In one column, add the key strategies and tactics used by Hitler/the Wehrmacht.
   - **c** In the second column, add the battle or event which is evidence of this strategy and/or tactic.
   - **d** Compose an essay response to this question using the following guide:

STEAL paragraph style

Statement: Answer the question with a thesis statement which uses the words of the question.

Topic elaboration: Expand and build your argument.

Evidence: Refer to historical evidence, including historians if appropriate.

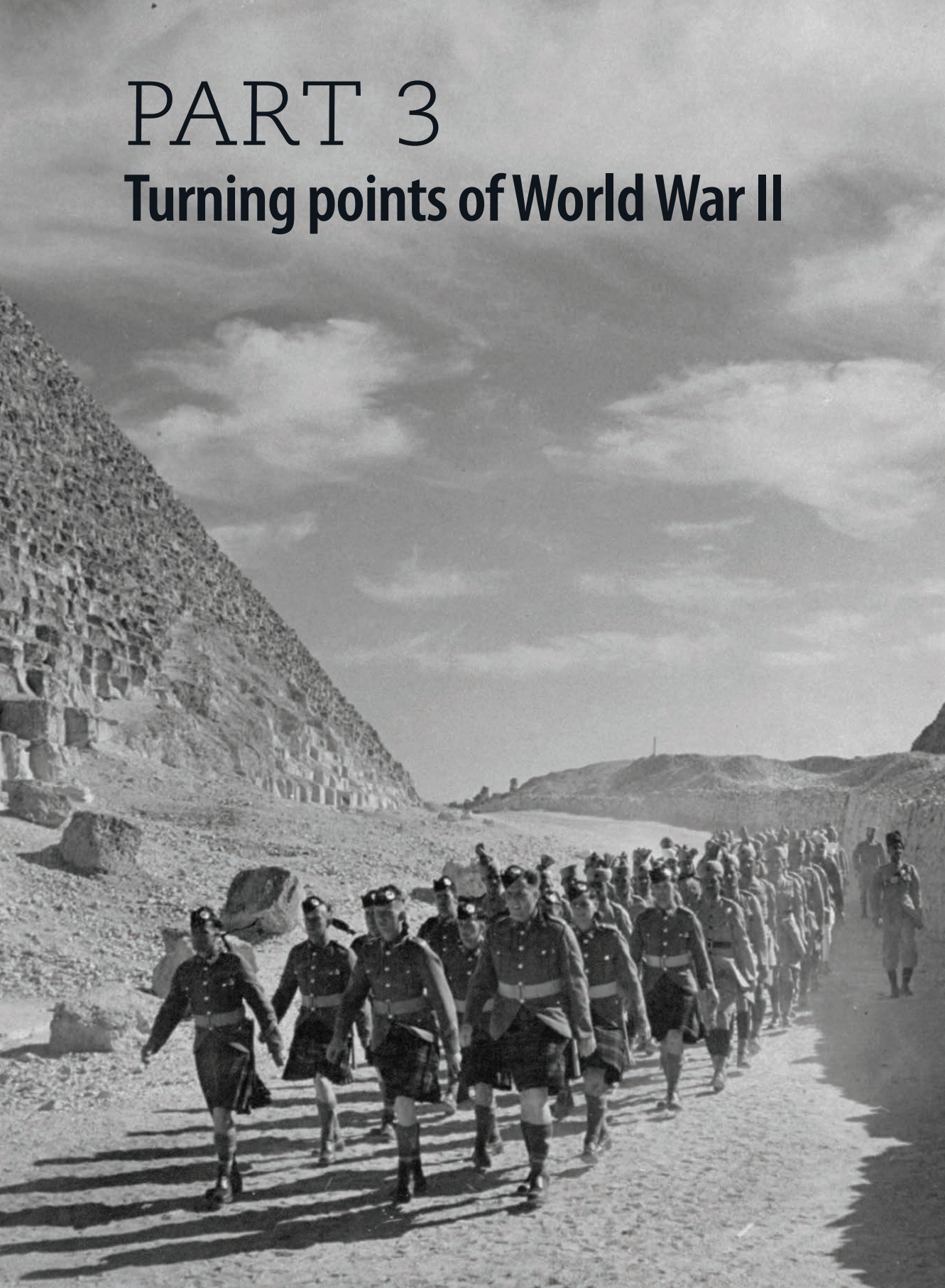
Analysis: Explain how your evidence helps you answer the question.

Linking sentence: Link your paragraph back to the question using the words of the question.

It is important to know that there are different styles of writing a paragraph which your school, or teacher, may use. Although the name of each structural element may change, they all follow the same rough guide.

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PART 3
Turning points of World War II



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5 The Battle of Britain

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- The Battle of Britain
- The air war and its effect

CHRONOLOGY

27 May 1940 to 4 June 1940	Dunkirk evacuations
22 June 1940	France surrenders at Compiegne
13 August 1940	The German Luftwaffe launches mass offensives against Britain
25 August 1940	The Royal Air Force bombs Berlin in retaliation
7 September 1940	Hitler orders the bombing of London to demoralise the British population and force the government to surrender
16 September 1940	The Luftwaffe begins night bombing of British cities
12 October 1940	Operation Sealion cancelled due to heavy losses of aircraft and a shifting focus to the Soviet Union

Question starts

1 Brainstorm a list of at least 10 questions about the Battle of Britain and Operation Sealion you want to have answered.

2 Use these question starts to help you think of interesting questions:

- Why …?
- How would it be different if …?
- What are the reasons …?
- Suppose that …?
- What if …?
- What if we knew …?

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- What is the purpose of …?
- What would change if …?

3 Review the brainstormed list and star the most interesting questions.
4 Select one or more of the starred questions to discuss with another student, explaining why you find this question most interesting.
5 Reflect on this process – what new ideas do you have about the Battle of Britain and Operation Sealion that you did not have before?

5.1 Across the Channel

Source 5.1 **Adolf Hitler giving a speech to an audience of nurses and social workers in Berlin, 4 September 1939; cited in Shirer, W. *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (1960), Simon & Schuster, New York, United States, p. 779**

> In England, they're filled with curiosity and keep asking, 'Why doesn't he come?' Be calm, be calm. He is coming! He is coming!

General Pétain's negotiations with the Nazis turned France from an enemy to a collaborator – leaving the British isolated by June 1940. As the Germans established their control across France, Hitler began planning the next phase of his attack. But now he was faced with a difficult choice: Did he risk an invasion of Britain across the English Channel?

Source 5.2 **A speech from newly installed Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, to the House of Commons on 18 June 1940; cited in Jefferys, K. *War and Reform: British Politics During the Second World War* (1994), Manchester University Press, UK, p. 51**

> I expect that the battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilisation … The whole might and fury of the enemy must very soon be turned on us. Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this island or lose the war. If we can stand up to him, all Europe may be free, and the life of the world may move forward into broad, sunlit uplands. But if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known or cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age, made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science. Let us, therefore, brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, 'This was their finest hour'.

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Source questions

1 What do you think **Winston Churchill** is trying to achieve by delivering this speech (Source 5.2)?

2 Do you agree with the sentiments of the source? Explain why.

Hitler's plan for invading Britain was codenamed **Operation Sealion**, but even though it had a name, it was quickly improvised following the defeat of France. The benefits were tempting. If Britain were forced from the war, Germany would gain control of the seas, therefore ensuring its ability to successfully acquire the resources and materials it needed to maintain the war effort. Securing the west allowed Hitler to turn to his ideological goal of annihilating the Communist threat in the east and obtaining *Lebensraum* for the German people. Hitler was aware of the risks involved in any attempt at occupying Britain, especially considering the significant amount of British and French troops successfully withdrawn from Dunkirk. The British people would be fighting to defend their homeland, and unlike the attack on France, the British could easily predict where the Germans would land, and plan appropriately. Hitler needed complete control of the skies over the British Channel, and landing sites in southern England before he could authorise an invasion. Naturally, **Hermann Göring** assured Hitler this could be achieved within months.

Occupation of French, Belgian, and Dutch airbases allowed the **Luftwaffe** to bring its planes closer to southern England. This provided the means to bomb selected targets along the coastline, such as ships in the channel, coastal ports and military fortifications. The Luftwaffe leadership needed to establish air superiority, and this was supported by Hitler's 'Directive Number 17', which required the Luftwaffe to target **Royal Air Force (RAF)** fighter bases and radar installations from 13 August. Hitler recognised that any future landing operation required absolute control of the air

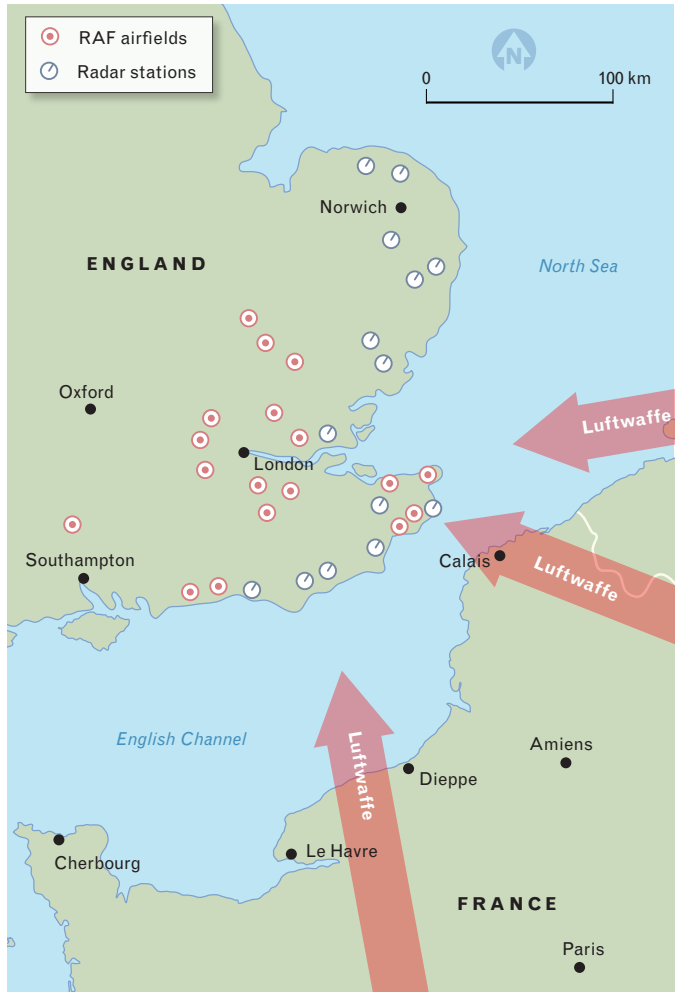


Figure 5.1 Luftwaffe attacks across the English Channel

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Figure 5.2 Pilots of 111th Squadron practise scrambling to board their Hawker Hurricane Mk1 monoplane fighters on 26 August 1939 at Northolt, London.

to succeed, and he targeted the RAF to establish this. Furthermore, he believed that the destruction of the military forces capable of defending Britain might decrease morale and support for the war, which would force Britain to negotiate.

By September, the RAF was slowly being ground down but showed no sign of capitulating. A total of 544 pilots were killed during the battle for the skies of Britain, with the average life expectancy for the pilot of a Spitfire (the staple British plane) being only four weeks. New recruits lacked the experience to fly skilfully, and exhaustion on both sides led to a steady increase in non-operational combat losses. Luckily for Britain, the impatience of Hitler brought the RAF relief. In September 1940, the Luftwaffe switched its targets from RAF bases, radar installations and factories, to cities. London and other cities, particularly in the industrial English Midlands, were targeted in an endless series of bombing attacks known as the Blitz. Initially, Hitler was reluctant to commit terror attacks on British cities, but bombing in Germany, conducted by Britain, filled him with a rage for revenge. As the war went on, bombing cities was justified by the Germans as a way to weaken British morale and force an end to the war.

For the RAF, the diversion from their bases was a welcome opportunity to rebuild, retrain and finally take the fight back to Germany. From this point, the Luftwaffe saw gradual increases in losses of both bombers and fighters over Britain. Hitler's dream of occupying Britain faded away, even as the bombs continued to fall on major cities.

Myths about the Battle of Britain still exist today. Historical events can be used by a country to unite its people, and support its own understanding of its culture. The Battle of Britain did this for Britain. Traditionally regarded as a victory over the Germans by the British, recent historical study has limited this exaggerated approach. Richard Overy described the Battle of Britain as a 'defensive victory', while other historians have played down its contribution as a 'turning point' in the war in Europe.

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Forczyk, R. *We March Against England: Operation Sea Lion, 1940–41* (2016), Bloomsbury Publishing, United Kingdom, p. 8 Source 5.3

> The mythology of the Battle of Britain and 'the Few' conveniently avoided mentioning that **Fighter Command** was virtually impotent to stop the Luftwaffe's night raids during the Blitz, which killed another 14,715 civilians in the next three months, or to prevent German long-range Fw-200 Condors from mauling convoys west of Ireland. Nor could 'the Few' do anything to prevent U-Boats or surface raiders from savaging British convoys during 1940–1941.

Overy, R. *The Battle of Britain* (2000), Penguin, London, Great Britain, pp. 121–2 Source 5.4

> The air battles were necessary to rouse the self-belief and staying power of people demoralised by the sudden collapse of democratic Europe in the summer of 1940. No one pretends that the Battle of Britain decided the war, or that it papered over the cracks that appeared in British morale and outlook in 1940.

5.2 Why did Britain triumph?

One of the biggest factors in the Luftwaffe's attack on Britain was the distance the planes were required to travel in order to successfully attack the RAF, radar installations, or industry. While the Messerschmitt Bf 109 was an excellent plane, it had a limited range, and was well matched by Britain's Spitfires. When attacks shifted to the cities, British industrial output quickly developed more Spitfires – in contrast to German industry, which struggled



Figure 5.3 Pilots of the 32nd Squadron relax on the grass beside their Hawker Hurricane Mk1 fighters on 29 July 1940, at Hawkinge near Folkestone, Kent.

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Figure 5.4 The first operational radar system installed anywhere in the world. The 185-foot tower could detect low-flying planes off the coast of Britain during World War II.

due to limited resources. Another element to this resource restriction was the fact that German pilots who were shot down were captured and imprisoned, while British pilots who bailed out could return in a new plane within days.

The distance German planes were required to travel meant they could be intercepted from numerous bases as they flew to their targets. Added to this, British radar developments meant German planes could be located and attacked. Heavy casualties were inflicted on unescorted bombing runs, where the Messerschmitts did not have the fuel to escort the raid the full distance to the target. The tactics the Germans employed were inferior to those of the British – the Nazis took too much risk for a small gain, and as a result, endured losses that affected their ability to fight the war in later years. Hitler and Göring are blamed for this, although other generals and commanders should have drawn upon their experience to resist these poor strategic choices.

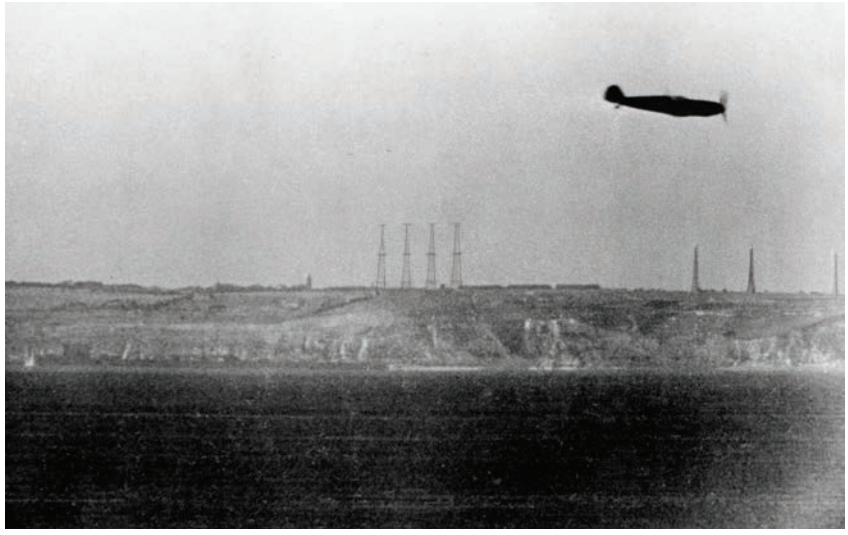


Figure 5.5 German Messerschmitt flying in front of radar towers on the British coast, October 1940

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5.3 How likely was Operation Sealion?

Directive from Adolf Hitler, 16 July 1940; cited in Showell, J.M. *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs, 1939–1945* (2015), The History Press, Gloucestershire, England, p. 116

Source 5.5



Video 5.3

Where Napoleon failed, I shall succeed (01:29)

Direct Number 16 – Operation Sea Lion

Preparations for the Invasion of England

As England, in spite of the hopelessness of her military position, has so far shown herself unwilling to come to any compromise, I have therefore decided to begin to prepare for, and if necessary to carry out, an invasion of England. This operation is dictated by the necessity of eliminating Great Britain as a basis from which the war against Germany can be fought, and if necessary, the island will be occupied. I therefore issue the following orders:

1 The landing operation must be a surprise crossing on a broad front extending approximately from Ramsgate to a point west of the Isle of Wight. Elements of the air force will do the work of the artillery and elements of the navy the work of engineers. I ask each of the fighting services to consider the advantage from their respective point of view of preliminary operations such as the occupation of the Isle of Wight or the Duchy of Cornwall prior to the full-scale invasion, and to inform me of the results of their deliberations. I shall be responsible for the final decision. The preparation for the large-scale invasion must be concluded by the middle of August.

2 The following preparations must be undertaken to make a landing in England possible:
   a) The British air force must be eliminated to such an extent that it will be incapable of putting up any substantial opposition to the invading troops.
   b) The sea routes must be cleared of mines.
   c) Both flanks of the Straits of Dover and the Western Approaches to the Channel, approximately on a line from Alderney to Portland, must be so heavily mined as to be completely inaccessible.
   d) Heavy coastal guns must dominate and protect the entire coastal front area.
   e) It is desirable that the English fleets both in the North Sea and in the Mediterranean should be pinned down (by the Italians in the latter instance), shortly before the crossing takes place; with this aim in view, the naval forces at present in British harbours and coastal waters, should be attacked from the air and by torpedoes.

3 The invasion will be referred to by the code name 'Sea Lion'.

Signed: Hitler **Initialled:** Keitel and Jodl

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Was Operation Sealion an effective plan established by German commanders, or was it simply a dream concocted to appease Hitler? No fixed plans existed for Operation Sealion when France was defeated, although it was briefly discussed on several occasions by Grand Admiral Raeder. The lack of planning reinforces a belief among historians that Hitler's priority was to bring Britain to the negotiating table after the fall of France. German command was not prepared for an invasion across the channel. The bulk of the French fleet was destroyed before the Germans could obtain it. This meant that the German flotilla consisted of barges and salvaged craft, many unpowered and requiring towing across the Channel. Tides and the limitations of daylight made this a risky undertaking, particularly as the Luftwaffe had not established air superiority, and so could not protect the flotilla from bombing. On top of this, German test runs of barge landings on uncontested beaches in the Netherlands were not reassuring.

Source 5.6 **Toland, J. *Hitler: The Definitive Biography* (1992), Anchor, New York, United States, p. 622**

He called for 'a speedy ending of the war' and suggested that Sea Lion was the most effective way to do so. But his assurance – or show of it – almost immediately began to dissipate. He warned that invasion across the Channel commanded by the enemy was no one-way trip as in Norway. There could be no element of surprise. How could they solve the problem of logistic supply? He went on and on, pointing out grave problems that Admiral Raeder (who was taking diligent notes) silently seconded.

Source 5.7 **Overy, R. *The Third Reich: A Chronicle* (2011), Quercus, Great Britain, p. 224**

There has been much debate over just how serious Hitler was about Operation Sea Lion. His preference was for Britain to voluntarily abandon the war, and to this end he encouraged the indirect strategy of economic blockade … Hitler reserved for himself the decision about whether to invade, and he was willing to do so only if the prospect of a cheap or quick victory could be created by the success of German air power. The confused nature of German strategy towards Britain was compounded with the emergence over the summer months of a possible new direction for German military ambitions.

Source questions

1. What insights does Source 5.6 offer on the decision of whether to invade Britain with Operation Sealion?
2. Source 5.7 describes the confused strategy of the Germans towards Britain. From your research on this topic, and the sources provided, discuss whether you believe this to be an accurate assessment.

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By 1941, Hitler's attention moved from the war in the west to a new campaign in the east. The timeframe for landings against Britain passed, and the German forces would never be in a position to even consider mounting an attack again. Britain had resisted the Luftwaffe, and by doing so, prevented Operation Sealion.

Hastings, M. *All Hell Let Loose: The World at War 1939–1945* (2012), Harper Collins, London, United Kingdom, p. 79 Source 5.8

As it was, however, the Luftwaffe's clumsy offensive posed the one challenge which Britain was well placed to repel. The British Army and people were not obliged to confront the Wehrmacht on their beaches and in their fields – a clash that would probably have ended ignominiously for the defenders.

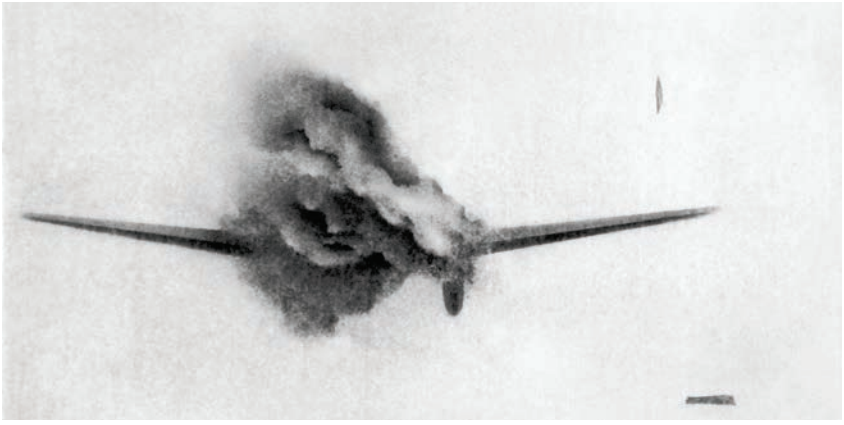


Figure 5.6 An exploding German Heinkel

Summary

- The Battle of Britain was a defining moment for the British in World War II. After the losses inflicted fighting in France, and the withdrawal of the British Expeditionary Force back across the English Channel, the morale of British citizens was very low.
- The British government faced a difficult choice – should they surrender to Hitler to avoid further losses and destruction?
- Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister, was adamant this would never happen, and that the British would fight Germany wherever they came.
- The attack on Britain came from the skies, as the German Luftwaffe commenced 'the Battle of Britain' against the Royal Air Force.
- Initial attacks were on radio stations, radio communication facilities and RAF bases.
- Despite enduring great losses, the RAF fought bravely to inflict damage on the Luftwaffe.

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- In September 1940, the Luftwaffe changed targets and began bombing British cities.
- The tactical change was a grave mistake, as the government rebuilt and resupplied the RAF, which led to increasing and unsustainable losses of German planes.
- The Battle of Britain was short, but stiffened British resolve to fight the war.
- Operation Sealion was shelved as the Nazis focused on the Soviet Union.
- The British successfully resisted Nazi Germany, even if they had not won. Now, Britain could be used as a staging point for future operations.

Key personalities and terms

Personalities



Figure 5.7 Hermann Göring

Hermann Göring (1893–1946) was a larger-than-life figure in Nazi politics. As commander of the Luftwaffe, Göring believed Britain's bases could be destroyed in four days, which paved the way for a sea-based attack. The inability of the Luftwaffe to prevent Allied bombing on German soil greatly decreased Göring's public image.

British Prime Minister **Winston Churchill** (1874–1965) is most well known for his impassioned messages to the British public declaring Britain would fight the Germans wherever they came. While Chamberlain was Prime Minister, Churchill spoke publicly about taking steps to counter Nazi aggression, and was therefore seen as the natural successor to Neville Chamberlain as Prime Minister. He was defeated in an election immediately following the war in July 1945.

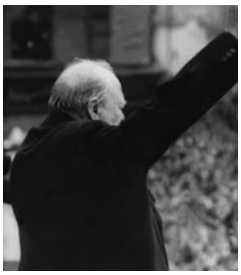


Figure 5.8 Winston Churchill

Terms

Fighter Command: a command of the RAF formed in 1936 to provide greater coordination and control of fighter aircraft.

Luftwaffe: the German Air Force under Hermann Göring.

Operation Sealion: the name of the proposed German invasion of Britain.

Royal Air Force (RAF): the RAF was formed during World War I, and would be the primary defender against the Luftwaffe during the Battle of Britain and the Blitz.

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Activities

Thinking historically

1. Research the strengths and weaknesses of the Royal Air Force and the Luftwaffe.
2. Identify the myths surrounding the Battle of Britain.
3. Outline the key reasons Operation Sealion did not proceed.
4. To what extent was Hitler's decision to switch from attacking the Royal Air Force to attacking cities a critical failure of judgement?

I used to think … now I think

At the start of this chapter, you made a list of questions you wanted to find an answer to regarding the Battle of Britain and Operation Sealion. After reflecting on those questions, compose two paragraphs:

1. The first paragraph should start with: I used to think …
2. The second paragraph should start with: Now I think …

Writing historically

1. Write an evaluation of the view that Germany's air attack on Britain was poorly planned and poorly executed.
2. Essay question: To what extent was the Battle of Britain a turning point in the outcome of the war?
   - Create a table of pros and cons discussing the reasons why the Battle of Britain was a turning point in the war, and reasons why it was not.
   - Using these reasons, create a thesis statement which responds to the question.
   - Write five topic sentences which you could use to start your paragraphs.

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6 North Africa

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- The nature of the war in Africa
- The Battle of El Alamein
- The significance of the conflict in North Africa to the European war

CHRONOLOGY

10 June 1940	Italy declares war on England and France
September 1940	Italy invades Egypt
October 1940 to January 1941	British counteroffensives in Africa
12 February 1941	German forces arrive in Africa under General Erwin Rommel
March 1941	German forces advance on Egypt after successive victories
12 April 1941	Australian forces besieged at Tobruk
21 January 1942	Rommel commences a new offensive in Africa
1 July 1942	The first Battle of El Alamein
7 August 1942	General Bernard Montgomery assumes control of the 8th Army in Africa
2 September 1942	Montgomery defeats Rommel at Alam Halfa
23 October 1942	The Allied offensive begins with Operation Lightfoot
11 November 1942	Axis troops forced from Egypt
9 March 1943	Rommel leaves North Africa
13 May 1943	German and Italian troops surrender in North Africa

3 – 2 – 1 bridge

This sequence is completed twice, once at the start of the chapter, and once at the end.

Compose your response to the following:

1. Three initial thoughts or ideas on the war in Africa.
2. Two questions you immediately have, which you want to be answered.
3. One analogy (for example: I think El Alamein was like …)

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Figure 6.1 A map of the North African campaign and invasion of Italy

6.1 El Alamein

In September 1940, the North African campaign, or Desert War, started. Mussolini entered the war against the Allies following the Fall of France, believing Italy could gain territory across Africa. But despite preparation throughout the 1930s, Italy was not well placed to wage war against the Allies in Africa, with only 700 000 troops and limited supplies. On 9 September, 215 000 Italians left their base in Libya to attack 36 000 British in Egypt. The Italians were repulsed despite their numerical advantage.

In February 1941, German forces under the leadership of General **Erwin Rommel** transferred to Africa to support Italy's defences. While wanting to assist an ally, Hitler also saw an opportunity to gain access to the **Suez Canal** by defeating the forces of the British Empire. The canal played a vital role in the transportation of resources from colonies across the Empire. If Germany could cut British access to the Suez Canal, they would be forced to take the longer journey around the Horn of Africa, which would expose their shipping to German U-Boats. Gaining control of the canal presented an opportunity for the Nazis to access resources through the canal, and potentially unite with their ally, Japan, to coordinate attacks across the globe.

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Rommel's arrival saw a swift turn in the fortunes of the British in the African campaign. Under the leadership of General **Archibald Wavell**, the Commonwealth forces were pushed from Libya into Egypt, with only the port of Tobruk halting the German advance due to staunch resistance from Australian troops. Rommel's **Afrika Korps** used the tactical superiority of the 15th and 21st Panzer Divisions to drive the British deeper into Egypt on 26 May 1941. About 50 000 men were lost as the Allied forces retreated to a small railway station known as El Alamein.

Rommel's attack left the British fearing they would be driven out of Egypt, and the Suez Canal brought under German control. Desperately, they fought to halt the advance at El Alamein – not aiming for victory, but simply to stop their deteriorating position and morale. The first battle at El Alamein presented challenges for both sides – the Allies were in retreat and looking to gain a foothold, while the Germans had stretched their supply lines to breaking point and were undersupplied. Men on both sides were exhausted.

On 1 July, the Afrika Korps began their attack on El Alamein. General **Claude Auchinleck**, who replaced General Wavell, coordinated the defences in a way the Axis forces found difficult to penetrate. The German advance was halted due to a combination of poor intelligence relating to the distribution of forces, bad luck from sandstorms and the pinning of Rommel under heavy artillery fire. Brutal fighting on both sides led to a stalemate across the next few weeks. Rommel realised the attack had faltered due to a lack of momentum and the exhaustion of troops, while the British could not successfully launch a counterattack against the strong German positions. By the end of July 1941, both sides opted to secure their defences.

After the first battle of El Alamein, General Auchinleck was removed from his position for political reasons. Churchill wanted an offensive from the British forces, while Auchinleck held to his view that the Germans were defensively established, and any attack would lead to significant loss of men



Figure 6.2 Italian tanks advancing in the El Kattara Depression at El Alamein

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and resources. After a visit from Churchill to Egypt in 1942, Auchinleck was relieved of command. General Harold Alexander became Commander-in-Chief of the Middle East, while Lieutenant-General **Bernard Montgomery** was appointed commander of the forces in Egypt.

In late August, both sides planned new offensives, with Rommel again seeking to reach the Suez Canal, while Montgomery wanted to drive the Germans back across the top of Africa. At night on 30 August, Rommel launched his ill-fated attack which the Allies resisted at Alam El Halfa. The Germans expected an immediate counterattack, but Montgomery took until 23 October 1942 to launch **Operation Lightfoot**. Successive operations pushed the Germans back to Tunis in May 1943. Despite some resupply of the Afrika Korps, and Hitler's orders not to retreat, Rommel led his forces in defensive engagements which inflicted significant casualties and resource losses on the Allies. During Operation Lightfoot, the Allies lost 13 500 men, while the Germans lost double that number. Likewise, the number of Allied tanks was reduced by half, while nearly all of the German tanks were lost. By 1943, approximately 600 000 German and Italian soldiers were prisoners of war.

Both Montgomery and Rommel had their reputations made in the deserts of Africa, and their lives shaped as a result. Montgomery went on to control Allied land forces during the recapture of France. Rommel was part of the planning for D-Day, but his trust with Hitler was broken when he refused the order to 'stand firm'. After a failed assassination attempt on Hitler, Rommel was implicated and forced to commit suicide to save his family.



Figure 6.3 A member of a German tank crew surrendering to British infantry at El Alamein, 27 October 1942

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6.2 The significance of the African campaign



Figure 6.4 A US Army transport plane carrying vital war supplies across Egypt

Video 6.2
Suez Canal
(00:33)

The contribution of El Alamein to the overall war effort is challenging to assess. This is due to speculation over how important control of the Suez Canal was to both the Allies and the Axis. What damage would have resulted to Britain if the canal had been seized? Would it have been deprived of resources? Would the Germans have been able to use the canal to bring much needed resources to Germany instead? These are very open-ended questions which promote historical debate.

Only a small percentage of the Wehrmacht fought in the African War: around four and a half divisions. Over 130 divisions attacked France in May 1940, which provides clear evidence of the smaller scope of the African campaign compared to the European theatre of war. But like the Battle of Britain, the significance of El Alamein does not lie in its direct impact on the war, but as evidence of what the British could achieve. Historian Richard Overy described the Battle of El Alamein as a 'defensive triumph', like the Battle of Britain. Both battles were early instances of the Nazis being stopped, first in the skies of Britain, then in the sands of Africa. This is what prompted Winston Churchill to declare: 'Before Alamein, we never had a victory. After Alamein, we never had a defeat.'

Was El Alamein significant to the overall war effort? Speculation over the 'what if' questions aside, El Alamein had three clear impacts. Firstly, it prevented the Germans from accessing the Suez Canal, which limited their resources and forced them to look for alternatives. Secondly, El Alamein saw the first engagement of American forces in the war. For both the British and the United States, the Desert War was a steep learning curve, and important preparation for the conflict to come in Europe. This experience was invaluable. Finally, victory at El Alamein allowed for the eventual removal of the Germans from Africa, and the establishment of a southern front by which to attack Italy. The battle went some way towards destroying the alliance between Italy and Germany, and the morale of the Italian people.

6.3 Historical views on El Alamein

The war in North Africa was not a decisive component of World War II, but it again demonstrated the Allies' willingness to resist Nazism. Like the Battle of Britain, it was a turning point for the morale of the Commonwealth forces, and a further setback for Adolf Hitler's dreams of global conquest.

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Evans, R. *The Third Reich at War* (2009), Penguin, United States, pp. 467–8 Source 6.1

> [El Alamein's] complete failure to disturb British control over Egypt and the Middle East denied the Third Reich access to key sources of oil. These failures once more signalled not only the fact that the British were determined not to give in, but also the massive strength of the far-flung British Empire, backed to an increasing degree by the material resources of the United States.

Field Marshal Erwin Rommel; cited in Hart, B.H.L. *The Rommel Papers* (1982), Ingram Publisher Services, United States, p. 507 Source 6.2

> The war in North Africa was decided by the weight of Anglo-American material. In fact, since the entry of America into the war, there has been very little prospect of our achieving ultimate victory.

Toland, J. *Hitler: The Definitive Biography* (1992), Anchor, New York, United States, p. 722 Source 6.3

> November proved to be a month of disaster for Germany with the enemy scoring victories in both East and West. Since conquest of Egypt was low among Hitler's priorities, he had made defeat in North Africa inevitable by failing to send Rommel sufficient supplies and reinforcements. With the pyramids practically in sight, the Desert Fox was forced into defensive warfare.

Overy, R. *The Battle of Britain* (2000), Penguin, London, Great Britain, pp. xi–xii Source 6.4

> In reality neither El Alamein nor the Battle of Britain was a clear-cut battle with a neat conclusion. This has not stopped historians from imposing clarity, nor has it dulled the popular perception that these were glittering milestones along the road to British military success. Both battles were really defensive triumphs: the one saved Egypt and prevented the collapse of Britain's global war effort, the other saved Britain from cheap conquest. It is avoiding defeat that we have applauded; victory came long afterwards, with more powerful allies in harness.

Shirer, W. *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (1960), Simon & Schuster, New York, United States, p. 840 Source 6.5

> The initiative had passed from Hitler's hands, never to return. It was his enemies who seized it now, and held it … [I]n the snows of Stalingrad and in the burning sands of the North African desert, a great and terrible Nazi dream was destroyed.

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Source 6.6 **O'Brien, P.P *How the War was Won* (2015), Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, introduction**

> Battles such as El Alamein, Stalingrad and Kursk did not win World War II; air and sea power did.

Source 6.7 **Overy, R. *Why the Allies Won* (2006), Vintage Publishing, London, England, p. 18**

> It was from this sorry foundation that the Allied powers first halted, then reversed, the apparently inexorable drive to conquest of their enemies, Germany, Italy and Japan. Between 1942 and 1944 the initiative passed to the Allies, and Axis forces experienced their first serious reverses – at Stalingrad and Kursk on the eastern front, at the battles of the Coral Sea and Midway in the Far East, and El Alamein in the Middle East.

Source questions

1. From the sources provided, identify the key reasons the Germans lost the campaign in North Africa.
2. Which source provides the clearest assessment of El Alamein's importance to the overall conflict in Europe? Justify your response.

Summary

- Like the Battle of Britain, the North African campaign was a defensive success for the Commonwealth forces.
- For strategic reasons, the Axis forces of Italy and Germany sought to take control of the Suez Canal in Egypt. This man-made canal allowed access from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean, allowing quicker travel times, and trading and resources opportunities.
- By securing the canal, the Germans could potentially access resources, while also linking with their ally, Japan.
- Despite initial successes for the invading German forces under General Erwin Rommel, the resolve of the Commonwealth forces eventually stiffened at El Alamein.
- The Allies managed to halt, and eventually drive back, the Axis forces.
- Despite continual fighting across the north of Africa into 1943, the Germans would not again threaten the Suez Canal.
- The German defeat in May 1943 gave the Allies greater control of the Mediterranean, and the ability to plan an assault on Hitler's ally, Italy.

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Key personalities and terms

Personalities

Archibald Wavell (1883–1950) was a veteran of the Second Boer War and World War I, who served as a British General in the North African campaign. After being relieved of his command in 1941, he moved to control operations in India, before becoming Commander-in-Chief of the Australian, British, Dutch and American forces resisting the Japanese.



Figure 6.5 Archibald Wavell



Figure 6.6 Erwin Rommel

German General **Erwin Rommel** (1891–1944) made much of his reputation in the North African campaign, where he became known as the 'Desert Fox'. The Allies spoke highly of Rommel, and regarded Africa as 'war without hate'. Much of this image of Rommel was propaganda by the Allies, to justify their initial losses and inspire the troops and home front as they won battles.

British General **Claude Auchinleck** (1884–1981) was Commander-in-Chief in India before switching positions with General Wavell in 1941 to command the North African campaign. After small initial victories, successive defeats meant Auchinleck was relieved of his position in favour of General Montgomery. He finished the war as the Commander of British forces in India, then Pakistan.



Figure 6.7 Claude Auchinleck



Figure 6.8 Bernard Montgomery

Bernard Montgomery (1887–1976) commanded the British 8th Army in the North African campaign, and achieved great victories against the 'Desert Fox', Erwin Rommel. He followed this with commands in Italy, the Allied landings in France, and against Hitler's final counterattack in the Ardennes. After the war, he held positions in Germany and NATO (North-Atlantic Treaty Organisation).

Terms

Afrika Korps: the name of the German forces sent to North Africa under Erwin Rommel.

Operation Lightfoot: the opening operation of Montgomery's plan to secure Egypt and drive the Axis forces back across North Africa.

Suez Canal: a man-made waterway constructed in 1869 through Egypt, between the Mediterranean and Red Seas.

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Activities

Thinking historically

1. Outline the sequence of events which occurred during the Battle of El Alamein.
2. What evidence exists that by the middle of 1941 the war was stabilising for the Allies and turning for the Germans?
3. Discuss why the Allied forces might have deliberately enhanced General Erwin Rommel's reputation.
4. How was fighting different in the North African campaign, in terms of the tactics used and the overall style?
5. Africa was the United States' first military commitment in World War II. Do you believe it was beneficial to fight this campaign, before committing forces to mainland Europe? Explain why.

3 – 2 – 1 bridge

This sequence is completed twice, once at the start of the chapter, and once at the end.

1. At the start of the chapter, you recorded your three initial thoughts on the Battle of El Alamein, two questions you wanted answered, and one analogy. Compose your response to the following:
   - Three concluding thoughts or ideas on the topic now that you have completed it.
   - Two questions you still have, which you want to be answered.
   - One analogy (for example: El Alamein was important/not important like …).
2. Pair with another student:
   - Explain how your understanding has changed from your first thoughts on the topic, to your deeper knowledge at the end (this is the bridge of your knowledge).

Writing historically

1. Explain whether you believe the African campaign was too far away from Europe to matter to the outcome of the war.
2. Research either General Montgomery or General Rommel. Compose a biography on the key events of the life of the one you chose.

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7 War in the east

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- Operation Barbarossa and the successes of 1941
- The Battle of Stalingrad and German losses
- The reasons for victory and defeat on the Eastern Front
- The Russian counteroffensives of 1943
- The significance of the Soviet campaign to the outcome of World War II

CHRONOLOGY

22 June 1941	The German invasion of the Soviet Union begins
July to August 1941	The Red Army suffers heavy defeats, including encirclements at Minsk, Smolensk and Kiev
8 September 1941	Siege of Leningrad begins
2 October 1941	German forces begin their approach to Moscow
7 December 1941	Japan attacks Pearl Harbor, bringing the United States into the war
17 July 1942	Battle for Stalingrad commences
28 July 1942	Soviet leader Joseph Stalin issues Order No. 227, 'not one step back'
23 August 1942	The German 6th Army enters Stalingrad
19 November 1942	Soviet counterattacks surround Stalingrad and trap the 6th Army
2 February 1943	Field Marshal Paulus surrenders Stalingrad after General von Manstein's attempt to relieve the 6th Army fails
5 July 1943	The Battle of Kursk begins
27 January 1944	The siege of Leningrad is lifted

7.1 Operation Barbarossa

By early 1941, the Wehrmacht successfully achieved its military objectives on mainland Europe. It had swiftly conquered Poland, the Low Countries and France. While the British Empire stubbornly resisted, it was in no position to counterattack the German forces in Europe, especially as they

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developed over 2500 km of coastal fortifications known as the 'Atlantic Wall'. Was the time right for **Adolf Hitler** to move to the second stage of his plan for conquest with an attack on the Soviet Union?

Source 7.1 **War Directive for Operation Barbarossa, given by Adolf Hitler; cited in Trevor-Roper, H. *Hitler's War Directives 1939–1945* (1964), Sidgwick and Jackson, London, England, pp. 93–4**

War Directive Number 21

Case Barbarossa

The German Armed Forces must be prepared, even before the conclusion of the war against England, to crush Soviet Russia in a rapid campaign …

The Air Force will have to make available for this Eastern campaign supporting forces of such strength that the Army will be able to bring land operations to a speedy conclusion and that Eastern Germany will be as little damaged as possible by enemy air attack. The build-up of a focal point in the East will be limited only by the need to protect from air attack the whole combat and arsenal area which we control, and to ensure that attacks on England, and especially upon her imports, are not allowed to lapse.

The main efforts of the Navy will continue to be directed against England even during the Eastern campaign.

In certain circumstances I shall issue orders for the deployment against Soviet Russia eight weeks before the operation is timed to begin.

Preparations which require more time than this will be put in hand now, in so far as this has not already been done, and will be concluded by 15 May 1941.

It is of decisive importance that our intention to attack should not be known.

Adolf Hitler.

Source 7.2 **Kershaw, I. *Hitler* (2010), Penguin, Great Britain, pp. 334–5**

On 3 December [Hitler] congratulated Field-Marshal Fedor von Bock on his sixtieth birthday and told him that the 'Eastern Question is becoming acute'. He spoke of rumoured links between Russia and America, and Russia and England. To await developments was dangerous. But if the Russians were eliminated from the equation, British hopes of defeating Germany on the continent would vanish, and Japanese freedom from worries about a Soviet attack from the rear meant American intervention would be made more difficult.

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Part of Hitler's reasoning was ideological. Hitler hated Communists, with the Nazi Party violently fighting them since the early 1920s. While most Communists were arrested following the Reichstag fire in Berlin, the Communist influence was still present in German society. Hitler wanted to wipe Communism out at its source, declaring on 22 June 1941 that 'it is necessary for us to take steps against this plot devised by the Jewish Anglo-Saxon warmongers and equally the Jewish rulers of the Bolshevist center in Moscow'. Apart from this desire, other practical reasons influenced the decision to war with the Soviet Union, particularly the need for key resources like oil. As the Afrika Korps were unable to seize the Suez Canal, Hitler cast his eyes to the Caucasus in the south of the Soviet Union. Not only would a victory against the Soviet Union be an ideological triumph, but also sustain the war effort against the British.

Many generals were uncertain about Hitler's plans, while others supported his territorial ambitions in eastern Europe. However, one unusual example of discontent stands out above all others – the saga of **Rudolf Hess**.

Evans, R. *The Third Reich at War* (2009), Penguin, United States, pp. 167–9 Source 7.3

[Hess] would fly to Britain to negotiate peace. Delivering an agreement would restore him to Hitler's favour and secure Germany's rear for the forthcoming attack on the Soviet Union … At six in the evening on 10 May 1941, he put on a fur-lined flying-suit, took off from the airfield of the Messerschmitt works in Augsburg and headed north-west, in the direction of the British Isles. Five hours later, Hess parachuted out of the plane near Glasgow … Approached by a local farmhand, he said his name was Alfred Horn, and he had a message for the Duke of Hamilton, whose home was in the vicinity … Summoned in response to Hess's request, Hamilton arrived at the Home Guard hut where Hess had been taken and was quickly convinced that he was face-to-face with the Deputy Leader of the Nazi Party. After the stress of his daring flight, Hess's mental confusion was such that he made no real attempt to discuss a separate peace with the Duke, and indeed he could think of nothing more than to repeat Hitler's vague 'peace offer' made the previous July. For the rest of the war, Hess was kept imprisoned in various places, including the Tower of London. His self-imposed 'mission' had been completely pointless. It reflected nothing but his own mental confusion and lack of realism.

Hitler himself knew nothing about Hess's flight [and] sanctioned a radio announcement that was broadcast at eight in the evening on 11 May 1941, taking up Hess's own suggestion and ascribing the flight to the Deputy Leader's mental derangement and hallucination … As soon as he received the news of Hess's defection, Hitler abolished the post of Deputy Leader and renamed Hess's office the Party Chancellery, to be led as before by Bormann.

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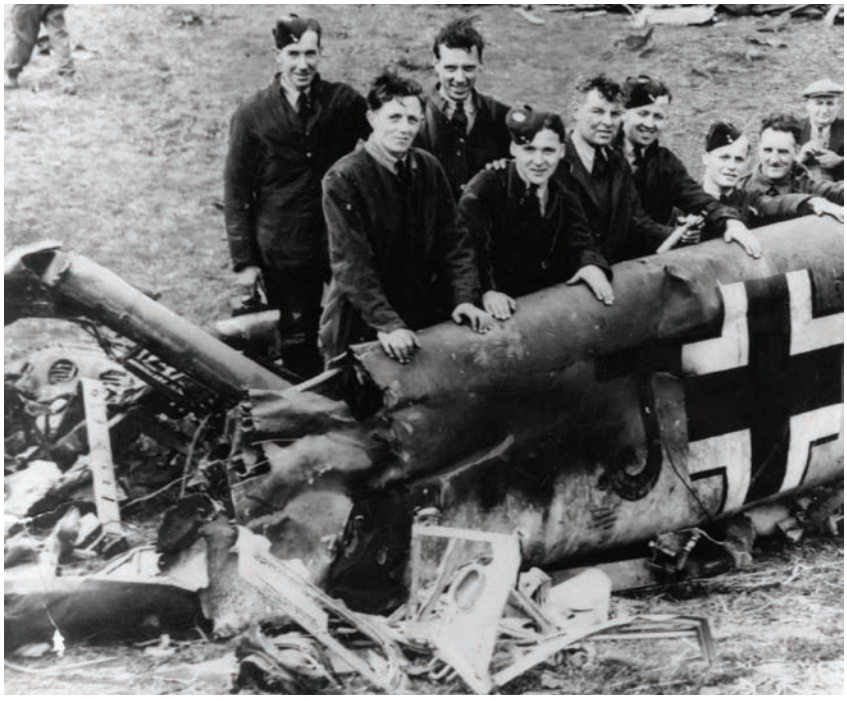


Figure 7.1 Hess's Messerschmidt crashed after he bailed out.

Step inside

In your workbook, respond to the three following points:

- What do you think Hess perceived (saw) about the war that required him to take the action he did?
- What did he believe would be the result of these actions?
- Suggest what Hess might care about that would lead him to take such an action.

7.2 Early success

Video 7.2
Propaganda tactics (01:04)

It is important to note that Operation Barbarossa was Adolf Hitler's idea, but the plan for the invasion was drawn up by **German High Command (OKH)**. These plans existed prior to the attack on France in 1940, as many generals openly supported the goal of invading the Soviet Union despite the tactical difficulties of such a campaign. The 'vastness of Russia' was well known, as it had led to the defeat of Napoleon when he invaded Russia in 1812. Also known was the fact that the Soviet Union endured extreme wet and cold spells, making it terribly difficult to fight. Only around 60 000 kilometres of roads had a hard surface, while the rest were vulnerable to cold and wet conditions. To the generals, these were not regarded as major obstacles, just challenges in need of clear planning.

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By June 1941, the Germans had amassed a force of three million men, 2700 aircraft and 3300 tanks. This totalled around 150 divisions, or 80% of the potential divisions Germany was capable of mustering.

Beevor, A. *Stalingrad* (2007), Penguin, London, England, p. 21 Source 7.4

> Seldom had an attacker enjoyed such advantages as the Wehrmacht in June 1941. Most **Red Army** and frontier units, having been ordered not to respond to 'provocations', did not know how to react. Even beyond the twelfth hour, Stalin still desperately hoped for a last chance of conciliation and was reluctant to allow his troops to strike back. The three Soviet armies stretched out along the frontier on Stalin's orders never stood a chance and their tank brigades behind were destroyed by air attack before they had a chance to deploy … General von Manstein's LVI Panzer Corps, advancing almost fifty miles a day, was nearly halfway to Leningrad and had secured the crossing of the river Dvina. This 'impetuous dash', Manstein wrote later, 'was the fulfilment of a tank commander's dream'.
>
> The Luftwaffe, meanwhile, had continued to annihilate Red Army aviation. By the end of the second day of fighting, it had increased its score to two thousand aircraft destroyed.

Like in Poland and France, Germany successfully employed its *Blitzkrieg* tactic in 1941. Using concentrated Panzer divisions, the Germans punched holes through weak points in the Soviet lines and forced mass encirclements. Generals Hoth and Guderian led the pincers of



Figure 7.2 A German Panzer division engages Soviet resistance, 22 June 1941.

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Figure 7.3 A German Panzer crosses a man-made ford beside a deliberately destroyed bridge.

an encirclement near Minsk (in modern-day Belarus), leading to the surrender of 300 000 soldiers and the destruction of 2500 tanks. The German army was roughly divided into three main groups: Army Group North had the objective of Leningrad in the north of the Soviet Union; Army Group Centre was to target the major cities of Minsk and Smolensk, before moving to the Soviet capital of Moscow; and Army Group South targeted the Ukraine, looking to secure its major industrial and agricultural areas, before moving towards the Caucasus.



Figure 7.4 German advances during Operation Barbarossa

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Caught unprepared, the Red Army reeled in the face of German technology and brutality. While the Soviet Union made rapid progress industrialising in the 1930s, it did not have the necessary resources, whether military or industrial, to effectively resist the Wehrmacht, and would not have them until **Lend-Lease** programs from the United States delivered these. Fuel was scarce, as were radios for communication, guns and artillery. The element of surprise created by the Wehrmacht ensured the Soviet forces were in disarray.

Lucas, J. *War on the Eastern Front: The German Soldier in Russia 1941–1945* (2014), Frontline Books, London, England, pp. 32–3 Source 7.5

> The first three waves had been destroyed by our fire … The machine guns became hot from continual firing and there were frequent stoppages to change barrels. Some of the men were mounted. These were Field Officers, I suspect, and one of them rode backwards and forwards along the lines of his men waving his arms and obviously urging them on. He was too good a target to miss … The number, duration and fury of those attacks had exhausted and numbed us completely. Not to hide the truth they had frightened us. Our advance had been no great strategic drive but an ordinary move on a fairly narrow sector and yet they had contested it for day after day and with masses of men … I think on that autumn day in 1941 some of us began to realise for the first time that the war against the Soviet Union was going to be bigger than we had thought it would be …

The German attacks did not fulfil all their objectives. Stalin took to the radio to deliver a calm speech urging all people to resist the Nazis however they could. Leningrad and Moscow became key staging points for this Soviet resistance. The rapid movement of German forces towards Leningrad placed it under siege by 8 September 1941, lasting until January 1944. Despite starvation, disease and constant shelling, the people of Leningrad followed Stalin's orders and resisted. Slowly, the momentum necessary for



Figure 7.5 People leave destroyed houses after German air raids on Leningrad.

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Blitzkrieg in the Soviet Union was lost against the stubbornness of the Russian people.

Joseph Stalin and the Soviet generals made many mistakes in their planning of the war, execution, and the tactics and strategies they employed. However, they knew one element of the eastern war favoured them significantly. If the Soviet Union could resist until the rains arrived, Germany would be forced to endure a Russian winter. ***Rasputitsa*** refers to the two seasons of the year when the roads in the Soviet Union are not accessible due to rain and mud. During Rasputitsa, all German movement would stop, giving the Soviet Union time to desperately withdraw its industry behind the Ural Mountains to the east, and rebuild and resupply its forces to resist the Nazis.



Figure 7.6 Wounded children in a Soviet hospital at Leningrad

Their plan succeeded. With Stalin ordering Moscow to hold at all costs, Chief of Staff **Georgy Zhukov** coordinated an effective defence of Moscow, which combined with widespread propaganda encouraging Soviet soldiers to sacrifice their lives for the cause. A short distance from Moscow, the Wehrmacht halted and was forced to endure a Russian winter when temperatures plummeted to well below zero. In Germany, **Joseph Goebbels** desperately sought to raise awareness of the soldiers' struggles by stating that 'those at home will not deserve a single peaceful hour if even one soldier is exposed to the rigours of winter without adequate clothing'. Even so, supplies of winter coats and boots did not reach the Wehrmacht forces until the winter thaw began. Exposure to the cold led to hypothermia and frostbite; it was not uncommon to see soldiers without their ears, nose, toes, fingers, or even eyelids. Desperate to save themselves from the cold, soldiers stole clothing from local civilians – what happened to them is unknown.

As 1941 drew to a close, the Soviet Union had another stroke of luck in its ability to resist Operation Barbarossa. In the east, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor at the start of December, drawing the United States into World War II. Troops stationed in the east of Russia to resist a potential Japanese invasion from Manchuria were now transferred to the west. These were troops familiar with winter warfare and ready to turn the tide. Operation Barbarossa had stalled, leaving Hitler enraged.



Figure 7.7 Stalin (middle) and Zhukov (right) at a 1945 victory parade in Moscow

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Moscow: Directorate for the Study of War Experiences, The General Staff of the USSR's Armed Forces, 1958–1960; cited in Glantz, D.M. *Operation Barbarossa – Hitler's Invasion of Russia 1941* (2001), The History Press, Great Britain Source 7.6

The Battle of Moscow completed the failure of Hitler's Blitzkrieg. It signified the ruin of all of the Nazi's leadership, military-political and strategic plans and doomed Germany to a prolonged war, which it could not successfully conduct.

7.3 Stalingrad

In southern Russia, Hitler looked to regain the initiative after Operation Barbarossa ground to a halt. To do this, he targeted the city which bore the name of his adversary – Stalingrad. In contrast to the strategic goals of ***Fall Blau* (Operation Blue)**, to gain vital resources in the Caucasus and potentially Azerbaijan, the attack launched against Stalingrad had limited value for Germany. All the successful components of *Blitzkrieg*, particularly speed and surprise, were lost at Stalingrad. It led to a titanic struggle for a city the Soviet Union, and Stalin, were desperate to hold.

In late June, the Wehrmacht forces commenced operations on the Crimean Peninsula before fighting their way to Stalingrad. On 23 August 1942, the German 6th Army moved on the city, under the leadership of Colonel-General **Friedrich Paulus**. The initial phase of the attack featured mass bombardments, with an estimated 1000 tons of bombs dropped on the city in 48 hours. It was reduced to rubble but did not surrender.



Figure 7.8 Nazi forces bombarded Stalingrad to rubble.

Through August and September, Soviet soldiers resisted despite devastating losses of approximately 200 000 men. With a small but steady stream of supplies transported along the Volga River, which ran beside Stalingrad, resistance continued. Stalin issued Order No. 227, declaring Soviet forces were to take 'not one step back'. Anyone found to retreat would face trial and execution. The street-to-street battles among the ruins of Stalingrad did not favour the Germans, as their tanks were rendered

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ineffective and exposed to Soviet mines, while troops feared snipers hidden among the rubble. Furious with the failures, Hitler removed his military leaders and assumed total control of the operation.



Figure 7.9 Red Army troops storming an apartment block amid the ruined streets of Stalingrad

As German casualties mounted, General Zhukov launched a counter-attack to encircle Stalingrad, known as **Operation Uranus**. The stretched German lines extending to the Volga River had been patched with Romanian and Italian units, units which shattered before the Soviet onslaught. Despite massive losses, the Red Army encircled Stalingrad, trapping General Paulus's 6th army in a 'pocket'. Paulus requested permission from Hitler for his forces to break out of Stalingrad, but the Führer refused, devising a plan where the Luftwaffe would resupply the trapped forces in Stalingrad, while General von Manstein would lead an attack on the encircling Soviet forces. But both plans failed at great cost, leaving the 6th Army trapped at Stalingrad as winter arrived.

Source 7.7 **Infantryman, Wilhelm Hoffmann – 26 December 1942; in Chuikov, V. *The Beginning of the Road* (1963), Macgibbon & Kee, London, England, p. 254**

> The horses have already been eaten. I would eat a cat; they say its meat is tasty. The soldiers look like corpses or lunatics. They no longer take cover from Russian shells; they haven't the strength to walk, run away and hide.

The Soviet leaders realised they did not need to capture Stalingrad, only ensure the German forces did not receive supplies. Realising his forces were slowly dying, General Paulus requested Hitler's permission to surrender.

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Figure 7.10 General Paulus after surrendering Stalingrad

Again, the Führer rejected the plea, and in a devious move, promoted Paulus to Field Marshal as no German Field Marshal had ever surrendered. Paulus ignored the promotion and surrendered the 6th Army on 31 January 1943. German troops maintained the fight in small pockets until March, but over 100 000 troops became prisoners of war in the first major triumph of the Soviet Union over Germany.

Walsh, S. *Stalingrad: The Infernal Cauldron 1942–1943* (2013), Amber Books, London, England, p. 170 Source 7.8

> Stalingrad was not simply a military defeat; it was a catastrophe. The eyes of the world had been fixed upon the drama unfolding on the Volga, and the Wehrmacht's aura of invincibility was shattered forever as the scale of the German defeat became apparent. Two German armies, Paulus's 6th Army and Hoth's 4th Panzer Army, had been destroyed and Richthofen's Air Fleet 4 brought to the point of collapse. In Germany, three days of national mourning were declared and a deep conviction in the superiority of German arms was replaced by a profound, if rarely acknowledged, fear of defeat. To the peoples of the Soviet Union, Stalingrad represented the first moment of triumph in a bitter war for survival, replacing dark nightmares of defeat at the hands of the Nazis with the conviction that victory, although it would not come easily, would eventually come.

Source questions

1. Describe the different responses to the battle of Stalingrad in the Soviet Union and Germany.
2. Would you agree that Stalingrad was a 'catastrophe'? Explain your response.

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Of the 100 000 prisoners of war, only 5000 returned to Germany post-war. Starvation and violence among Soviet forces were commonplace – why would captured soldiers receive better treatment? On top of this, the brutality of the German advance through the Soviet Union was well known, and Soviet officers had little desire to punish their troops who committed crimes against German prisoners of war. Most of the surrendered soldiers were forced to walk to their imprisonment in Siberia, a location hundreds of kilometres away. Exposure during winter killed many, especially considering their poor state of health after being trapped in the Stalingrad pocket for months. The Soviets would use General Paulus for anti-Hitler propaganda, and as a witness at the **Nuremberg trials**.

For the Soviet Union, the resistance in the north at Leningrad, centre at Moscow, and south at Stalingrad, was now complete. The battles had a horrendous toll, with over six million Soviet casualties by the conclusion of the battle of Stalingrad, and two million in Operation Blue alone. Despite these figures, the Soviet Union successfully repelled the German *Blitzkrieg*, and could now set about preparing its counterattack.

Claim, support, question

- Make a **claim** (or thesis) about the importance of Stalingrad to the war in the east.
- Identify **support** for your claim – things you have researched, or know to support your claim.
- Ask a **question** related to your claim that you would need to research further.

7.4 Defeat in the east

German war planners identified clear threats from the Soviet Union, but convinced themselves the invasion would only take the summer. They were aware of the need to move swiftly towards their objectives before the winter came, and believed that any attack would trigger the collapse of Communism and the removal of Stalin. The opposite occurred. German High Command, and Hitler, seriously underestimated their adversary in the east.

Similar to Napoleon's invasion, the vastness of Russia posed serious challenges to the German forces. As Russia had poor roads and limited rail, transporting food, troops, clothing, weapons and armaments was a **logistical** nightmare. This was before the weather made it even more difficult. The employment of a **scorched earth** policy hindered the ability of the Wehrmacht to forage for supplies.

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The speed of the Panzer attacks, which worked so effectively in Poland and France, now posed huge problems for the trailing infantry who struggled to maintain the pace tanks and trucks could set. While this split Soviet forces effectively, it also created gigantic encirclements filled with Soviet troops not necessarily willing to surrender. These encirclements needed to be defeated, which slowed the advance further. Many historians view Hitler's decision to hold his army outside of Moscow as a turning point in the conflict, as it further slowed the German advance and gave the Red Army the one thing it needed most – time to prepare. Time was the biggest ally of the Soviets, providing the chance to move their industry behind the Ural Mountains and rapidly develop tanks, guns, planes, artillery and rocket launchers. More importantly, it gave the generals a chance to prepare battlefields, train men and develop tactics for resistance.

Stalin used threats of execution, imprisonment and propaganda to maintain Soviet resistance. His refusal to surrender, made at the expense of Russian lives, was integral to the resistance to Nazism. Retreat saw a soldier shot, and potentially also his family. This fear bought Russia the time to mass-produce its weaponry, and for winter to hinder the invaders. The population suffered immensely but contributed to Stalin's achieving his goals.

Finally, the brutal treatment of civilians and POWs hardened resistance to the Germans. Many countries under the Soviet sphere of influence were little more than slave states, ones who should have welcomed liberation by the Nazis. But the German ideas of racial superiority, and the manner they treated foreigners, meant these small countries did not have a chance to throw off the Communists. The killing squads known as the ***Einsatzgruppen*** committed atrocities behind German lines, such as the 30 000 massacred at Babi Yar in the Ukraine. This ensured civilians in conquered territories not only refused to fight for the Nazis, but actively resisted them.

7.5 Tactical and technological resistance

The Soviet Union of 1943 was different from that of 1941. Halting the Germans at Stalingrad and Moscow, and the continued resistance at Leningrad, allowed time for the growth of industry and production. This was directly supported by the Allied Lend-Lease program, which outfitted the Soviet Union with equipment like radios, telephones and cabling. The Lend-Lease program supported the growth of the Soviet military by allowing them to focus on the production of key technologies. Tank construction began in mass numbers – of the **T-34** in particular – while planes, artillery, rockets and anti-tank guns were also developed. The newly equipped Soviet army, while inexperienced, was now able to match the Germans for modern firepower.

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Figure 7.11 The ZiS-3 anti-tank gun

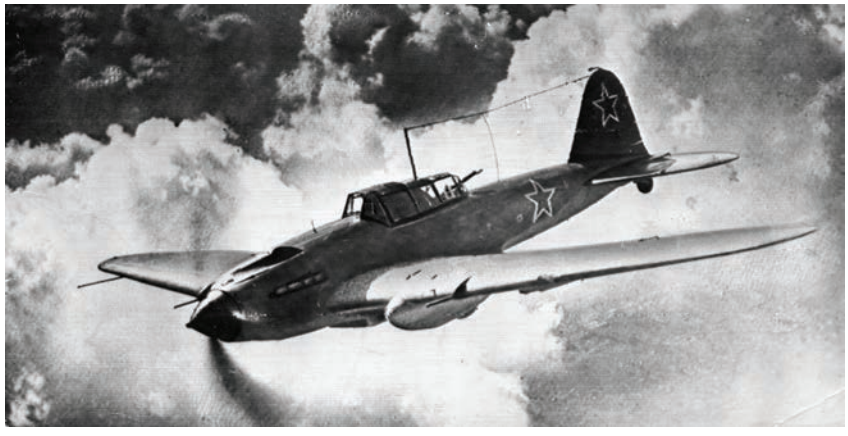


Figure 7.12 The Ilyushin Il-2 Sturmovik 'Storm Bird'

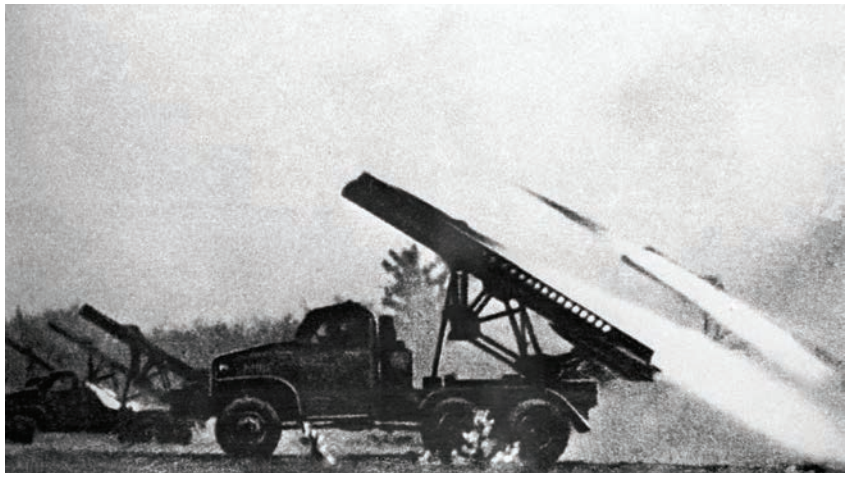


Figure 7.13 A Katyusha multiple rocket launcher fires at German forces during the Battle of Smolensk.

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Figure 7.14 Two T-34 tanks and infantry advancing

The Soviet Union's victory at Stalingrad instilled them with a renewed sense of purpose, resistance and, finally, a desire to drive Germany back. The death toll was huge, but the Soviet population made allowances for losses, which they politicised as sacrifices for the great cause. While German command desperately sought a way to respond to the new Soviet threat, Army Group South of the Wehrmacht buckled under the pressure of the Soviet army's assault from Stalingrad. With greater resources, technology and manpower available to it, the Red Army looked to take decisive steps and drive Germany off Soviet soil. As the Red Army advanced through Kharkov, Field Marshal Erich von Manstein drew together his remaining units to counter advancing Soviet forces and retake the city. Caught unaware, the Soviet forces were routed, with minimal losses to the Germans. The Wehrmacht had not conquered Russia, but it was no easy force to defeat. Elated at this surprise victory, Hitler began planning a new attack to regain the initiative in the war, this time at Kursk.



Figure 7.15 Adolf Hitler at the Führer Headquarters (*Wolfsschanze*) near Rastenburg in East Prussia, in conversation with his ministers and generals

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Source 7.9 **Penrose, J. *D-Day, the Companion* (2017), Bloomsbury Publishing, London, England, p. 15**

> While still suffering from the Russian offensive that bagged the 6th Army at Stalingrad, [the Wehrmacht's] capabilities allowed it to conduct von Manstein's famous 'backhand' response. This counterstroke sent the Russian Army reeling back in retreat, allowing the Germans to recapture the important city of Kharkov, and stabilize the front.

The Soviet Union had advantages which were strengthening its ability to wage war. The first of these was a growing awareness of the tactics necessary for defeating German forces, which Soviet generals called **deep war**. These tactics developed through a change in the leadership style of the Red Army. No longer were appointments made based on connections to the Communist Party, but on skill. Stalin stepped back as overall commander and took the advice of his generals. His lack of direct combat experience hindered the Soviet Union in the opening attacks of Operation Barbarossa – but this would not be the case for the counterattacks. Finally, the Red Army started to gather intelligence which would allow a planned and prepared response to the Wehrmacht's movements.

7.6 The Battle of Kursk

Desperate to retake the initiative in the war against the Soviet Union, Hitler looked to his generals for a plan of attack. After his success at Kharkov, von Manstein devised Operation Citadel – a plan to attack a salient around the city of **Kursk** with the remaining Panzers, and newly acquired Tiger tanks. Despite how quickly the plan was created, Hitler delayed its implementation while more tanks moved to the front. It would be a fateful choice, as Soviet intelligence concluded Germany would attack the Kursk salient, and they took the time to prepare the battlefield with defences.

Source 7.10 **Overy, R. *Russia's War* (1999), Penguin, London, UK**

> The salient bristled with anti-tank traps made from stakes cut from the local forests. Artillery and anti-tank guns were set so that German armour would be met by a veritable 'curtain of fire'. Over 400,000 mines were laid. Streams were dammed up, so that floodwaters could be released, trapping enemy tanks. A gigantic obstacle course stretched out for miles across the rich farmlands and orchards. Dotted here and there were a hundred and fifty airfields; fifty dummy air bases were built to draw the attention of the enemy. When all was complete, 1,336,000 men, 3,444 tanks, 2,900 aircraft and 19,000 guns were moved into place. 'It was … a huge, truly titanic task.'

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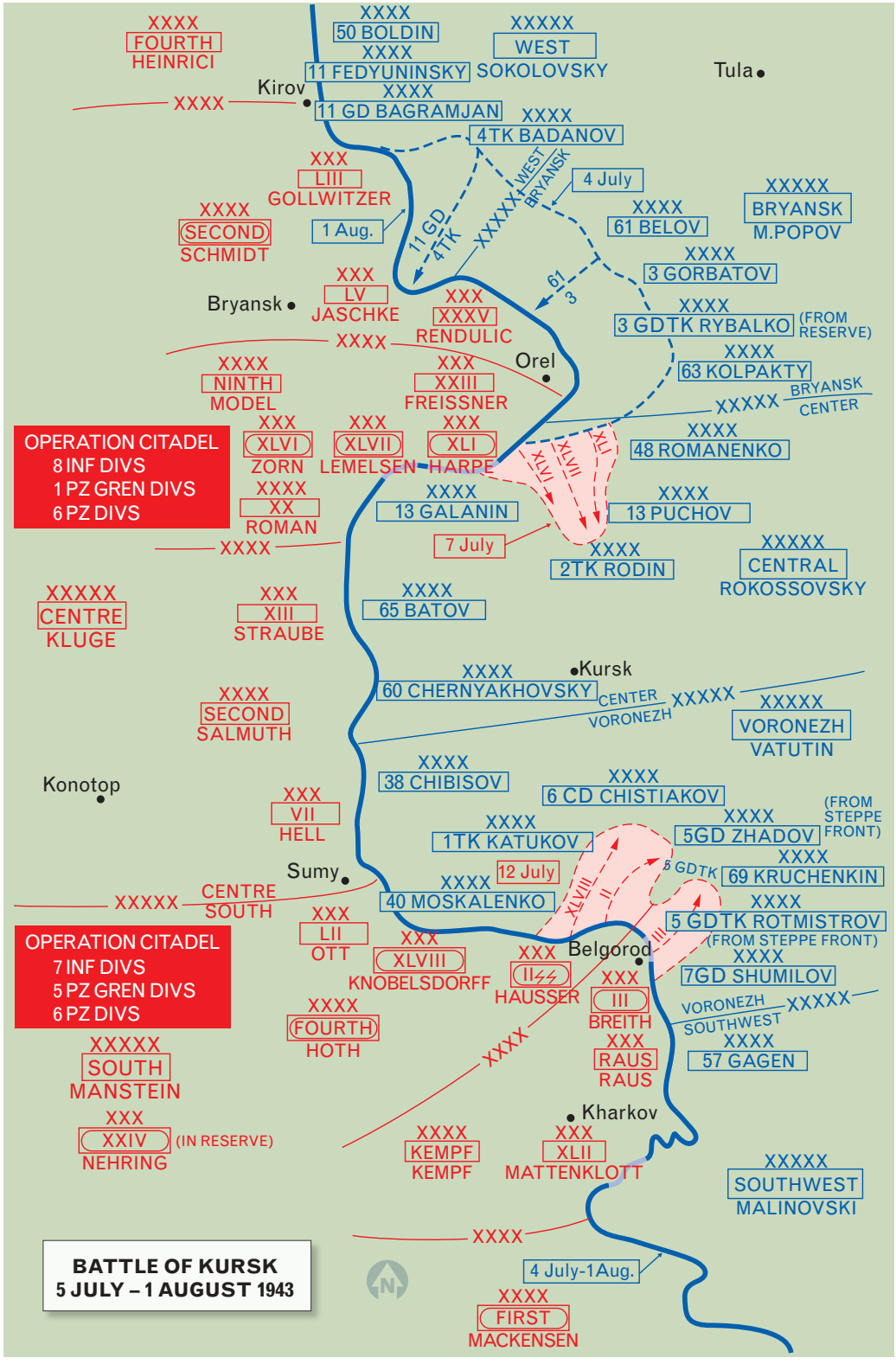


Figure 7.16 Map of the Battle of Kursk

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On 5 July 1943, Nazi forces advanced on the Kursk salient to attack over 1.5 million Soviet soldiers. The two prongs of the German offensive immediately met with resistance, despite the losses they inflicted upon the Red Army. Like Stalingrad and Moscow, Kursk exposed the weakness of the Wehrmacht against prepared defences. Without the element of surprise to break through the enemy's lines, limited progress was made. By 19 July, Soviet soldiers had repelled the bulk of the German advances and were starting to push the 'prongs' back. Hitler, fearing an invasion of Italy by the Americans, called off the battle and withdrew units to fight in Italy.

Germany suffered over 200 000 casualties, with the Soviet total at 850 000. Over 2000 aircraft were shot down to Germany's 850, a large figure, although the effectiveness of the Soviet air force dramatically increased from prior engagements. Kursk achieved its fame as the largest tank battle ever, with over 700 German Panzers and assault guns destroyed. For the Red Army, this figure came in at a staggering 6000 tanks and assault guns. Unlike the Soviet Union, however, German losses could not easily be replaced.



Figure 7.17 Soviet forces attack at Kursk, 1943.

Kursk was another failure for German High Command, compounded by the Soviet counterattack which followed their withdrawal from the salient. North and south of Kursk, the Red Army pushed into the Ukraine. Some historians have suggested Hitler is to blame for the loss at Kursk by delaying von Manstein's plan, which allowed for the Soviets to construct their defences. This matches the criticisms of Hitler for his delay in ordering the attack on Moscow, and his poor choices during *Fall Blau*. Whether this is true or not is debatable. By this stage, Soviet production and recruitment had increased to the point where there was little the Wehrmacht could do

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to resist the onslaught, whether at Kursk or elsewhere. The last attempt by the German army to stabilise its front lines failed – now Germany fought a desperate retreat on numerous fronts.

7.7 Historical views on the Russian campaign

The importance of the Russian campaign has been debated by historians. They focus on two aspects: the initial German thrust of Operation Barbarossa in 1941, and the gradual Soviet counterattacks which followed.

Kirchubel, R. *Operation Barbarossa: The German Invasion of Soviet Russia* (2013), Bloomsbury Publishing, London, England, p. 369 Source 7.11

Many of Barbarossa's senior leaders had served on the Russian Front during 1914–17, and knew that even the Tsar's bungling army had still fought that of the Kaiser to a stalemate. Yet these same men believed a force smaller than that required to subdue France in 1940 would only need a couple of months to conquer the earth's largest nation and army. The Wehrmacht's leadership might have gained some valuable tactical lessons from the 1940 Western Campaign, but it had learned all the wrong operation and strategic ones. Unlike the campaigns in Poland and France, the Soviet Union's vastness dissipated the Blitzkrieg's shock value.

Stahel, D. *Operation Barbarossa and Germany's Defeat in the East* (2009), Cambridge University Press, Great Britain, p. 124 Source 7.12

Given the Luftwaffe's high losses and related difficulties in attempting to subdue England from the air in 1940, it seems absurd to believe that those efforts could be matched in 1941, while at the same time embarking on a war with the scale and scope of Barbarossa.

Beevor, A. *The Second World War* (2012), Weidenfeld & Nicolson, Great Britain, p. 343 Source 7.13

The fate of the fronts at Stalingrad, in the Caucasus and in Egypt was closely linked. A grossly over-extended Wehrmacht, relying excessively on weak allies, was now doomed to lose its great advantage of *Bewegungskrieg* – a war of movement. That era was finished, because the Germans had finally lost the initiative. Führer headquarters, like Rommel in North Africa, could no longer expect the impossible from exhausted troops and unsustainable supply lines. Hitler had begun to suspect that the high water mark of the Third Reich's expansion had been reached.

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Source 7.14 **Walsh, S. *Stalingrad: The Infernal Cauldron 1942–1943* (2013), Amber Books, London, England, pp. 46–7**

It is estimated that between 22 June 1941 and 31 December 1941 the Red Army suffered upwards of 6 million casualties, 3 million prisoners of war and tank losses of 21,391. However shocking, they could be replaced and the Red Army retrained. It would take time, but the Red Army had survived.

Source 7.15 **Whittock, M. *A Brief History of the Third Reich* (2011), Constable & Robin, London, England, p. 286**

Clearly, a major part of the blame for the disaster lay with Hitler. By November, confident of victory, the attention of the Führer had shifted towards the oil fields of the Caucasus and he was content to leave Moscow to be strangled by an encirclement. And, while it was Hitler's determination that had prevented the crisis before Moscow turning into retreat and rout, it was his overconfidence that had launched Germany into that crisis in the first place. But the blame lay wider than this. Errors by senior generals played their part too.

Source 7.16 **Matthew, R. *Stalingrad – The Battle that Shattered Hitler's Dream of World Domination* (2014), Arcturus, London, England, pp. 6–7**

The battle was a disaster for almost everyone involved, but it was Adolf Hitler who came out of it worst. His plans for the conquest of the Soviet Union were destroyed at Stalingrad … If Hitler had failed to win the war in the west during the Battle of Britain, it's equally clear he lost the war in the east at Stalingrad.

Source 7.17 **McCauley, M. *Stalin and Stalinism* (2008), Routledge, London, United Kingdom, p. 153**

Germany's greatest defeat was a turning point. From now on it was not a matter of how the war would end, but when.

Source 7.18 **Frieser, K.H. *Germany and the Second World War – The Eastern Front 1943–1944* (2007), Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, p. 7**

Any discussion of German conduct of the war in the months and years after Stalingrad must start from the basic premise that, on any reasonable view, Germany was no longer able to win the war.

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Overery, R. *Why the Allies Won* (2006), Vintage Publishing, London, England, p. 104 Source 7.19

It has always been a temptation to signify Stalingrad as the turning-point of the Second World War … But it was not a decisive victory on its own. It demonstrated a remarkable improvement in the operational skills and battle-worthiness of Soviet soldiers and weapons. The awesome scale of the carnage on both sides, fighting to the death for a city that no longer existed, indicates the special character of the savage contest between invader and victim. The victory had a moral and psychological impact well beyond the significance of the strategic triumph. It laid the foundations of Soviet self-belief for battles in 1943 that were really decisive.

Source questions

1. Assess the reasons for the Soviet Union's victory in the sources provided.
2. After reading the sources, compose a paragraph explaining which historian's view you support and why.
3. Likewise, write a paragraph explaining which historian's view you do not agree with, and why.

Summary

- Operation Barbarossa was a defining moment in the history of World War II.
- Stalin reacted with disbelief when told Hitler had invaded in 1941.
- Soviet forces struggled to respond to the massive assault of three armies (Army Group South, Centre and North), who used *Blitzkrieg* tactics to make rapid progress into the Soviet Union.
- The Red Army forces were encircled in massive 'pockets', where they were bombed into surrender.
- Army Group North surged north to Leningrad (today St Petersburg) and placed it under siege.
- Army Group South encountered stiff resistance at the city of Stalingrad.
- Army Group Centre, preparing an assault on Moscow, was halted in order to support Army Group South at Stalingrad. This delay, before it resumed its attack, allowed for Stalin to consolidate his forces and prepare defences west of Moscow.
- Resources from the United States and Britain flooded into the Soviet Union as the Allies desperately sought to prevent the Soviet Union surrendering.
- The Red Army bravely resisted the German attacks, leaving the Wehrmacht forces outside of Leningrad, Moscow and Stalingrad as the harsh Russian winter set in.
- Stalingrad was as far as Germany ever progressed into the Soviet Union, as Operation Uranus encircled Stalingrad, and General Paulus surrendered.
- The Soviet Union followed its victory at Stalingrad with a successful defence at Kursk.
- In the largest tank battle of the war, the Soviet Union rolled back the last desperate German offensive in the east, and prepared the stages for a broad front of attacks into 1944 and 1945.

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Key personalities and terms

Personalities



Figure 7.18 Adolf Hitler

Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) was responsible for the push to attack the Soviet Union. The initial successes achieved Hitler's objectives of removing the Communist threat, as well as European Jewry, but his choice in holding Stalingrad at all costs ultimately sacrificed the entire 6th Army. Hitler's gamble to remove the Soviet Union failed with the counterattack arriving in 1944 and 1945.



Figure 7.19 Joseph Stalin

Joseph Stalin (1878–1953), the leader of the Soviet Union, could not believe reports Hitler had attacked in 1941. As a result, he made numerous poor choices which affected the Red Army's ability to wage war. However, from 1942 onwards, Stalin placed his trust in commanders like Georgy Zhukov, who was able to fight an effective campaign while Stalin focused on the politics of international relations.



Figure 7.20 Rudolf Hess

Rudolf Hess (1894–1987) was a loyal Nazi supporter until his peculiar flight to England in 1941. Imprisoned with Hitler at Landsberg after a failed coup in 1924, Hess assumed the role of Deputy Führer in 1933 and was third in line to the position of Führer. Hess flew a Messerschmidt to England during the war, where he hoped to make peace. Instead, he was imprisoned until committing suicide by hanging in 1987.



Figure 7.21 Joseph Goebbels

Joseph Goebbels (1897–1945) is regarded as the voice of Nazi Germany due to his role as Hitler's Minister for Propaganda. Goebbels was an avid anti-Semite, and devoted to Hitler even as he fell out of favour as the war progressed. As defeat loomed for the Third Reich, Goebbels travelled to Berlin with his wife. When Hitler committed suicide, they soon followed, killing their children as well.



Figure 7.22 Georgy Zhukov

Georgy Zhukov (1896–1974) was a veteran of World War I and the Russian Civil War. As a decorated military officer, he was promoted to the position of General and coordinated the defence against the Germans at Moscow and Stalingrad. Zhukov's efforts during the Russian counterattacks of 1944 and 1945 saw him placed with the responsibility of accepting the German surrender.

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Colonel-General **Friedrich Paulus** (1890–1957) achieved celebrity after becoming the first German Field Marshal ever to be captured alive. Paulus was an able commander during World War II, but was trapped with his army in Stalingrad and ordered by Hitler to stay. He chose to surrender instead, and spent the war in Soviet captivity where he became critical of Nazi Germany. Paulus moved to Dresden in 1953 before dying in 1957.



Figure 7.23 Friedrich Paulus

Terms

Deep war: a Soviet military tactic which favoured multiple attacks on a front line with mechanised units, rather than one 'war-ending' battle.

***Einsatzgruppen*:** Nazi death squads responsible for mass killings of enemy forces, civilians, or Jewish people, behind the main lines of the Wehrmacht forces.

***Fall Blau* (Operation Blue):** the name for the German offensive in southern Russia which targeted the oilfields of the Caucasus.

German High Command (OKH): the *Oberkommando des Heeres*, or German High Command of the Army, was responsible for the planning of Operation Barbarossa.

Kursk: a salient in the Soviet line near the city of Kursk, which resulted in the largest tank battle of World War II.

Lend-Lease: the Allied program for ensuring the Soviet Union remained in the war, by supplying it with resources and technology to resist the Germans.

Logistics: the organisation of troop movements, supplies, equipment and accommodation which must occur to support soldiers fighting on the front lines.

Nuremberg trials: the trials conducted post-war to bring high-ranking Nazis to justice.

Operation Uranus: the name of the 1942 Soviet counterattack which encircled the German 6th Army in Stalingrad.

***Rasputitsa*:** a period of heavy rain which made Russian roads impossible to travel.

Red Army: the name for the military forces of the Soviet Union.

Scorched earth: a policy of destroying everything as an enemy advances, in order to deprive them of resources or infrastructure.

T-34: a plain but effective Soviet tank, which combined speed, defence and firepower.

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Activities

Thinking historically

1. How would the German army have felt by early 1941?
2. Create a table of the pros and cons for Hitler attacking the Soviet Union. Write a conclusion on whether you believe Hitler needed to take this risk.
3. What was Directive 21/Operation Barbarossa?
4. In pairs, evaluate the six key risks of Operation Barbarossa. Once you have six, switch pairs and share your answers with another student.
5. Describe Operation Blue and Operation Uranus. What was the outcome of these campaigns?
6. What were the statistical costs of the Battle of Stalingrad?
7. Why is Kursk a historically significant battle?
8. Create a for and against table for the quote by Winston Churchill: 'the eastern front ripped the guts out of the German Army'.

Headlines

If you were to write a sequence of headlines for the Eastern Front capturing the most important aspects that should be remembered, what would these headlines be?

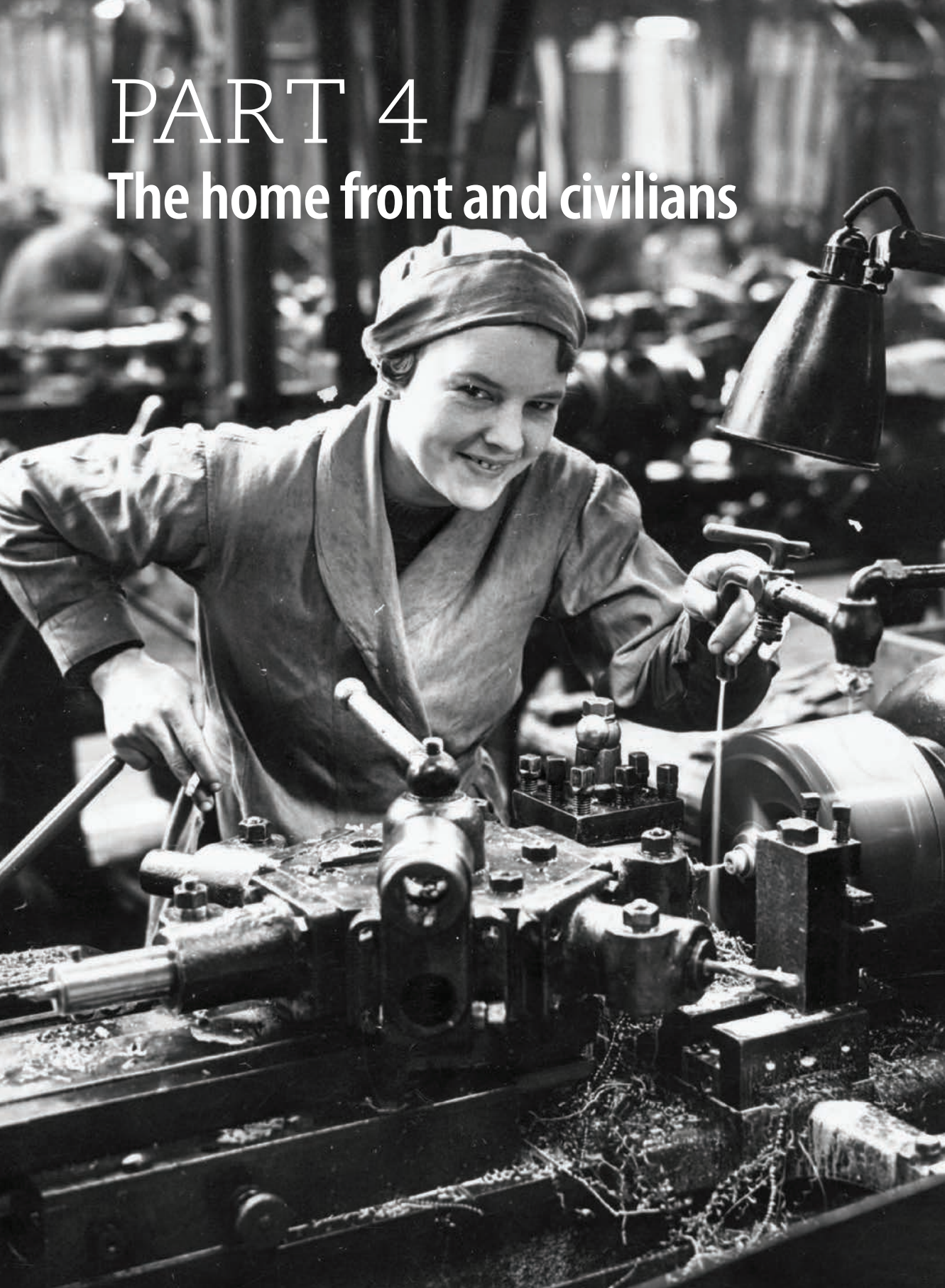
- Sum up the German campaign in the Soviet Union with a series of headlines for a newspaper. They should date from before Operation Barbarossa, after the first six months, during Stalingrad and after Stalingrad.
- Reflect – how would these headlines demonstrate the changing nature of the war in the east for Germany, including the support and morale of its army and civilians?

Writing historically

1. Imagine you are a German general critiquing Operation Barbarossa and its outcome. Write a letter to Hitler explaining the problems and challenges faced by the armies in Russia, and your suggested advice.
2. The Battle of Britain, El Alamein, Operation Barbarossa and Stalingrad are all described by various historians as 'turning points' in the war. Write a detailed assessment of which event you believe is the turning point, with justifications of your choice.

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PART 4
The home front and civilians



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8 The Holocaust

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- The nature and effects of the Holocaust in Nazi-occupied territories

CHRONOLOGY

1 September 1939	The invasion of Poland by Germany commences
8 October 1939	Germany establishes a ghetto in Piotrków Trybunalski, Poland
October to November 1939	German Jews are transported to Poland and forced into ghettos across major cities
May 1940	The Auschwitz concentration camp opens
21 June 1941	Operation Barbarossa begins, with *Einsatzgruppen* travelling behind the front lines to commit atrocities, many against Jewish people
29 September 1941	33 771 Jews are murdered across a two-day period at Babi Yar, in the Ukrainian city of Kiev
22 October 1941	The Odessa Massacre leads to the murder of over 100 000 Jews
20 January 1942	The 'Final Solution' is proposed at the Wannsee Conference, with the mass extermination of Jews beginning in concentration camps
3 November 1943	In Poland, over 40 000 Jews are removed from labour camps and murdered
27 January 1945	Auschwitz–Birkenau is liberated by Soviet forces

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Elie Wiesel, a holocaust survivor of the Auschwitz concentration camp; cited in Supple, C. *From Prejudice to Genocide: Learning about the Holocaust* (2007), Trentham Books, United Kingdom, p. 290 Source 8.1

> The language to describe the Holocaust does not exist. The more I study, the less I understand.



Figure 8.1 The entrance to Auschwitz

See, think, wonder

Create a three-columned table with the titles See, Think and Wonder.

1. List what you can **see** in Figure 8.1 in the first column. (I can see …)
2. Using this list, write down what these words make you **think** about. (I think …)
3. In the final column, create a list of ideas which may not directly be in the image, but you now **wonder** about? (I wonder …)

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8.1 Persecution of the Jews

Sometime in 1941, the Nazi Party settled on a plan for the eradication of the Jews. By this stage, the Nazis had significantly reduced the Jewish population in Germany, leaving around 214 000. With the outbreak of war in 1939, new laws were introduced which imposed curfews, limited Jewish movement within cities, introduced reduced food rations and restricted purchases from general stores. Jewish property was confiscated, especially of those people still within prison camps after ***Kristallnacht***. In September 1941, Jews over the age of six were forced to wear the yellow Star of David, and by 1943 they were removed entirely from the protections of German law.

Source 8.2 **Speech of Heinrich Himmler to senior SS officers in Posen, 4 October 1943; cited in Stackelberg, R. & Winkle, S. *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook: An Anthology of Texts* (2002), Taylor & Francis, Routledge, London, England, p. 370**

> I also want to talk to you quite frankly on a grave matter. Among ourselves it should be said quite frankly, and yet we will never speak about it publicly … It was the natural tactfulness that is, thank God, inherent in us that made us never discuss it among ourselves, never speak of it. It appalled everyone, and yet everyone was certain that he would do it again the next time if such orders are issued and if it is necessary. I mean the evacuation of the Jews, the extermination of the Jewish people. It is one of those things that is easily said – 'the Jewish people are being eradicated' every party member says, 'that's quite clear, it's in our program, elimination of the Jews, and that's what we're doing, wiping them out'.

8.2 Concentration camps and death camps



Video 8.2
Auschwitz (02:13)

With the success of the Wehrmacht, more Jews fell under German control and were transported to concentration camps controlled by **Heinrich Himmler** and **Reinhard Heydrich**. The Third Reich organised mass deportations under **Adolf Eichmann**, coordinating the transfer of 100 000 Jews from German-controlled Polish territory in the winter of 1939–40. Approximately 42 000 Jews were deported from Austria and Czechoslovakia to **ghettos** in Lodz and Warsaw in 1941 – from these ghettos they were later moved to extermination camps. Jews who were deported to Belarus were shot by the ***Schutzstaffel* (SS)** after their arrival. By May 1943, Germany declared itself to be free of Jews, with less than 20 000 in the country. Some of these were mixed-blood marriages protected from deportation, while others were in hiding with non-Jewish Germans, resisting the Third Reich however they could.

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Figure 8.2 Ghettos in eastern Europe

Aroneanu, E. *Inside the Concentration Camps: Eyewitness Accounts of Life in Hitler's Death Camps* (1996), translated by Whissen, T., Praeger Publishers, United States, p. 5 Source 8.3

> We arrived in the middle of a pitch black night. Visions of horror. Visions of terror. The most tormented hours of my imprisonment … The reception of the jailers, accompanied by their huge, well-trained wolfhounds. We were so afraid our legs buckled. We knew we would never leave this place. The boxcars were forced open and the SS guards stormed in. Shouting wildly, they prodded us with rifle butts and bayonets and beat us with clubs, then set the dogs loose on us. Those who fell and could not get up were ripped apart … Right there by the train the SS killed most of the children.

By 1940, the Nazis had created an intricate web of 40 000 concentration camps across Nazi-controlled Europe, but these camps had different purposes. Not all were constructed as extermination or **death camps**; some

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Figure 8.3 Polish Jews are deported to concentration camps via train.

were forced **labour camps** to support the Reich's war needs. Six camps, located in occupied Poland, were constructed to serve the needs of the **Final Solution** – Chelmno, Belzeç, Sobibor, Treblinka, Majdanek and **Auschwitz–Birkenau**. Of these, Chelmno featured a mobile gassing unit, while Majdanek and Auschwitz–Birkenau were both labour and extermination camps.



Figure 8.4 Concentration camps located across Europe

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Figure 8.5 Conditions in the huts at the Dachau concentration camp



Figure 8.6 A memorial established in the Auschwitz gas chamber. The walls have a blue residue from the Zyklon B gas used in the extermination.



Figure 8.7 Zyklon B, a cyanide gas used as the killing agent at the Auschwitz death camp

Table 8.1 Deaths in concentration camps

Death camp	Active	Death toll
Chelmno	8 Dec 1941 – March 1943, June 1944 – end of war	Estimate 150 000
Belzeç	17 March 1942 – Dec 1942	430 000 – 500 000
Sobibor	16 May 1942 – 14 Oct 1943	200 000 – 250 000
Treblinka	22 July 1942 – Oct 1943	700 000–900 000
Majdanek	1 Oct 1941 – 22 July 1944	Estimate 78 000
Auschwitz–Birkenau	May 1940 – Jan 1945	Estimate 1.1 million

Source: Saul Friedlander, *Nazi Germany and the Jews* (2014), Hachette UK; Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (2002), Yale University Press

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Source 8.4 **Aroneanu, E. *Inside the Concentration Camps: Eyewitness Accounts of Life in Hitler's Death Camps* (1996), translated by Whissen, T., Praeger Publishers, United States, p. 9**

The children, even the infants, were tattooed. When the Russians liberated the camp, they found a two-week-old baby with a number tattooed on its arm.



Figure 8.8 A group of child survivors at Auschwitz

Source 8.5 **John Glustrim of the 333rd Engineers upon discovering a concentration camp; cited in Abzug, R.H. *Inside the Vicious Heart* (1985), Oxford University Press, United Kingdom, p. 53**

My first impression of it was the odour. The stench of it was all over the place and there were a bunch of very bewildered, lost individuals who came to me pathetically at the door in their unkempt uniforms to see what we were doing and what was going to be done about them. They were staying at the camp even though their guards and staff had fled because they didn't know where to go or what to do. They had heard news that the Americans had taken over that area and they were waiting for somebody to turn theirs back straight again and they were just lost souls at that time. Well, my feeling was that this was the most shattering experience of my life.

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Eisenhower, D. *Crusade in Europe* (1984), Doubleday, New York, United States, p. 408 Source 8.6

I have never felt able to describe my emotional reactions when I first came face to face with indisputable evidence of Nazi brutality and ruthless disregard of every shred of decency … I have never at any other time experienced an equal sense of shock.

Major Richard Winters, upon encountering victims of the Holocaust; cited in Ambrose, S. *The Victors: Eisenhower and His Boys – The Men of World War II* (1998), Simon & Schuster, United States, p. 337 Source 8.7

The memory of the starved, dazed men, who dropped their eyes and heads when we looked at them through the chain-link fence, in the same manner that a beaten, mistreated dog would cringe, leave feelings that cannot be described and will never be forgotten.



Figure 8.9 Holocaust survivors

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Figure 8.10 A German girl expresses horror at the sight of the decomposing bodies of slain victims. Germans from Namering were ordered by officers of the 3rd US Army to view the exhumed bodies of 800 slave labourers, murdered by the SS.



Figure 8.11 The notorious words at the entrance to the concentration camp: '*Arbeit Macht Frei*' – work sets you free

Source questions

1. Using the sources and figures provided in this chapter, describe the experiences of Jewish people during World War II.
2. The walls of some rooms in the concentration camps were stained blue. Why?
3. Explain why the Allies would have ordered German citizens to view the concentration camps, as demonstrated in Figure 8.10.

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Summary

- German persecution of Jewish people developed progressively through the 1930s, starting with policies designed to exclude them from society, before moving to boycotts, identification, and eventually arrest and removal.
- Initially, Hitler was satisfied if Jewish people simply left Germany, and used his policies to try to force people to leave.
- When war broke out this progressed to arresting Jewish people, who were deported and placed into concentration camps, or gathered into closed-off areas of a city known as ghettos.
- Towards the end of 1941, this policy appears to have changed, with extermination becoming the goal of six concentration camps at Sobibor, Treblinka, Auschwitz, Majdanek, Belzeç and Chelmno.
- These camps sought to systematically destroy the Jewish people in a genocide which came to be known as the Holocaust.
- Other mass killings occurred across Poland and the Ukraine, such as the Babi Yar and Odessa massacres.

Key personalities and terms

Personalities

Adolf Eichmann (1906–1962) was a member of the SS and major coordinator of the Final Solution. He worked to transfer Jews to the concentration camps where they were exterminated. After the war, Eichmann fled Germany to Argentina, where he was sensationally captured by Israeli Special Forces (Mossad), put on public trial and hung in 1962.



Figure 8.12 Adolf Eichmann



Figure 8.13 Heinrich Himmler

Heinrich Himmler (1900–1945) was an avid Nazi supporter and key figure in the Holocaust. Himmler established the concentration camps with Reinhard Heydrich through the 1930s, oversaw the construction of death camps and created the ***Einsatzgruppen***. At the end of the war, Himmler was arrested by British forces, but committed suicide by cyanide while in custody.

Reinhard Heydrich (1904–1942) was another high-ranking SS member and architect of the Holocaust. Described by Hitler as 'the man with the iron heart', Heydrich organised *Kristallnacht*, eliminated opposition through murder in conquered countries and oversaw the *Einsatzgruppen*. He died in 1942 after a daring attack by Czech resistance forces.



Figure 8.14 Reinhard Heydrich

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Terms

Auschwitz-Birkenau: Auschwitz was a concentration camp created in Poland in 1940, before additions in 1941 turned Auschwitz–Birkenau into a notorious death camp.

Death camp: a prison camp designed with the specific intention of killing its occupants.

***Einsatzgruppen*:** Nazi death squads responsible for mass killings of enemy forces, civilians, or Jewish people, behind the main lines of the Wehrmacht forces.

Final Solution: the name used by Heinrich Himmler to describe the deliberate murder of Jewish people.

Ghetto: a closed-off area of a city where a minority group is forced.

Holocaust: the deliberate slaughter of Jewish people during World War II.

***Kristallnacht*:** the 'Night of Broken Glass' on 9 and 10 November 1936, where Nazis attacked the synagogues, homes, businesses and schools of Jewish people.

Labour camp: a type of prison which forced occupants to work in harsh conditions, often leading to their death.

***Schutzstaffel* (SS):** initially founded in 1925 as Hitler's bodyguard, the SS became the elite of Nazi followers, and undertook duties such as fighting in the armed forces, surveillance, enforcing racial policies, or controlling the concentration camps.

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Activities

Thinking historically

1. How did the *Einsatzgruppen* contribute to the war aims of Nazi Germany?
2. Describe the difference between a ghetto, a labour camp and a death camp.
3. Select a ghetto. Research and compile a page of notes on the ghetto of your choice, focusing on location, experiences and resolution of the ghetto.
4. Where were the death camps located?
5. Why is there a discrepancy in some figures for the overall death toll of Jews during the Holocaust, or at specific sites like Auschwitz?

Stop, look, listen

Consider the following claim: Adolf Hitler always planned to exterminate the Jews.

- **Stop:** Do you agree with this claim? Define the two sides of the claim from a list of facts and uncertainties.
- **Look:** Find sources which either support or disprove the claim. Where will you look? Consider obvious and non-obvious places.
- **Listen:** Hear what the sources tell you with an open mind and evaluate how these sources affect the claim.

Writing historically

1. Compose five questions you would ask a Holocaust survivor if you were to conduct an interview with one.
2. Essay question: Assess the impact of Nazi occupation on European Jews.
   - Compose an essay response to this question using the following STEAL guide:

STEAL paragraph style

Statement: Answer the question with a thesis statement which uses the words of the question.

Topic elaboration: Expand and build your argument.

Evidence: Refer to historical evidence, including historians if appropriate.

Analysis: Explain how your evidence helps you answer the question.

Linking sentence: Link your paragraph back to the question using the words of the question.

It is important to know that there are different styles of writing a paragraph which your school, or teacher, may use. Although the name of each structural element may change, they all follow the same rough guide.

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9 Civilians in Britain

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- The impact of the Blitz in Britain
- Social and economic effects of the war on civilians in Britain

9.1 The Blitz

After the initial failure of the German Luftwaffe to defeat the British Royal Air Force, the Nazis turned to a new tactic to force Britain from the war – the heavy bombing of cities. Hitler hoped Britain would withdraw from the war as its cities were annihilated and civilians killed. But he was wrong – the English population united behind their leader Winston Churchill to maintain the war effort.

Most bombings occurred on the port cities of London, Southampton, Portsmouth, Hull, Liverpool and Bristol, although this did not mean other cities were spared, especially those with industrial capacity. While bombing was predominantly done at night from planes overhead, as the war progressed the Nazis also experimented with the **V1** and **V2 rockets**, and incendiary bombs. Great Britain endured the Blitz from September 1940 to spring 1941, before a slight reprieve occurred when the Luftwaffe transferred to the east in preparation for an assault on the Soviet Union.



Figure 9.1 An aerial view of London after heavy bombing, 1940

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There was little the British public could do to counter the Blitz. In September 1939, the government publicly announced a 'Blackout' plan, which sought to prevent German bombers from using the lights of cities to aim their bombs. Windows were blacked out, and systems were designed to prevent light escaping when doors were opened. Car headlights were adjusted to only display through small slits, which made driving challenging as streetlights were also turned off. Stripes were painted on stairs, lamps and trees to increase their visibility when road deaths doubled in London during the Blackout.

The seriousness of the Blackout was reinforced by police who could arrest and fine those who breached the rules. This could include smoking, if the Blackout failed on a house, if matches were lit in public, or permitted lights were not projected downwards. Public backlash did force the government to decrease the severity of its policies, such as allowing small lights which had to be turned off during a raid.



Figure 9.2 'Look Out in the Black-Out', poster, 1939–1945

Despite the instigation of the Blackout, many cities took extreme damage from aerial bombing. One of the worst bombing raids was at Coventry on 14 and 15 November 1940. The city was laid waste, with over 500 civilians killed and roughly the same number injured. Approximately 60 000 homes were destroyed when incendiary bombs triggered a firestorm, which fire crews still struggled to extinguish the next day. The annihilation of Coventry is remembered as a defining feature of the Blitz, but this is only partly due to its destruction. Coventry has become a conspiracy theory, with suggestions the British government, and Winston Churchill, let Coventry be destroyed in the hope it would build sympathy with the Americans, and maintain the appearance that the Allies had not cracked the German **Enigma code**. The evidence does suggest that Churchill was given information after a deciphered Enigma code message revealed Coventry to be the main target, as did other sources of information. The controversy stems from the fact that no evacuation was ever ordered.



Figure 9.3 Workers paint stripes on streetlights during the Blackout.

Due to the success of German bombing, Britain was forced to devise a way to protect its civilian population. Anti-aircraft guns were installed in cities, as well as large searchlights to detect planes – but these offered only a small sense of security.

To protect its citizens, Britain focused on several different methods, including evacuation, relocation of key personnel and industry, and building air-raid shelters. The outbreak of war in Poland saw the mass

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Figure 9.4 Anti-aircraft guns in Hyde Park go into action as London practises a daylight raid during air defence exercises, August 1939.



Figure 9.5 A National Archives poster encouraging evacuation of children from London



Figure 9.6 Children evacuated from a British city

relocation from cities to the countryside of children, mothers with babies, and the infirm. This was based on the simple theory that Germany would target the cities, while it had no reason to bomb the countryside. For Britain, relocating significant portions of the population was a new concept; however, the fate of Guernica in the Spanish Civil War revealed the destruction which could be reaped upon a city. In World War I, Germany conducted Zeppelin raids across England, killing over 500 civilians. This experience, combined with Guernica, led politicians to realise Germany could inflict such horrors on civilians and precautions needed to be taken.

About 1.5 million evacuees left the cities of England for the countryside in a giant logistical challenge. Of these, around 670 000 were schoolchildren, 400 000 mothers or young children, and 3000 pregnant mothers. These evacuees needed to be housed in small villages or communities, which required the generosity of volunteers, or church and women's organisations. The reality was that they struggled to cope with the influx of so many people, and designated arrival areas, particularly around train stations, were crowded with children.

The separation felt by children as young as three could be extreme, but what choice did their parents have? The war effort had to continue across the country, as jobs needed to be completed to support the soldiers. This forced parents to remain in the cities while they desperately sought to keep their children safe. The anxiety this caused for both children and parents is difficult to imagine, and while some children found safe and secure families to care for them, others did not. The voluntary nature of evacuations also ensured that many children were still in the cities and exposed to the risk of bombing.

The social displacement of children had broad effects on British society. After the war, the London Return Plan sought to bring children home, but many refused outright, having lived in the countryside for six years. Other children could not return home, due to the loss of both their parents or the destruction of their houses. Sadly, other children were not wanted by their parents, who had lived without them for six years. Approximately 5000 children remained in the countryside post-war.

For those children who did not leave the major cities, they joined the general population in seeking to use air-raid shelters to protect themselves from German bombings. Those who could afford to left the cities to live in hotels or travel to country homes. Some adventurous people simply camped in the country each night, waiting for the bombing raids to pass. However, many civilians were afraid of leaving their homes, and

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did not have the capability to travel out of the cities. For these people, the government built free, or cheap, air-raid shelters.

Family air-raid shelters could be purchased and installed in a backyard, such as the Anderson Shelter, which consisted of a steel frame with a corrugated iron roof. The shelter was designed to be half buried in the ground before extra dirt was piled over the roof to provide resistance from any bomb or falling debris. About 1.5 million were used by families to escape the bombings, but they could only be used by those who had enough space in their backyard to install one. For those without, the Morrison Shelter was designed as a large steel cage, which could be installed within a house to offer similar protection.

While the Anderson and Morrison Shelters could be installed for families, they did not provide any protection for people on the street when an air-raid siren sounded, or those who could not afford one. To address this, communal shelters sprang up, which could accommodate up to 50 people who simply 'walked in' as needed. These shelters were of various designs, with some clearly not able to withstand either a direct impact of a bomb or the force of one landing nearby. Basements and underground spaces were signposted for passers-by to enter. In the large cities, others chose to shelter in the London underground train system known as 'The Tube'. These deep tunnels provided solid protection from the bombing above. Despite initial fears from the government that this would delay trains, it was clearly the preference of Londoners as Tube shelters became more coordinated. Shelter marshals organised gas masks, toilets and first aid, while 22 000 bunks were fitted across London.

About 62 000 British civilians were killed from air raids during World War II, with half of this total from London. More than 86 000 people were seriously injured, with 2.25 million people becoming homeless and incalculable damage done to individual properties. While no German forces landed on English soil, the Blitz caused mass disruption to British society and had a severe psychological impact on many. Paranoia was strong, particularly the fear that Germany would deploy its known stockpile of poison gas on cities. Thankfully, this was a threshold Hitler never crossed.



Figure 9.7 Evacuated London children playing in a field with their caretakers



Figure 9.8 Women, girls and babies – lying on the top shelf – in an air-raid shelter run by the Salvation Army in Clapton, east London, 5 October 1940



Figure 9.9 The Dallison family leave their Anderson Shelter to view the wreckage caused by a nearby bomb explosion.

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Figure 9.10 British citizens take shelter in the subway tunnels under London, which was bombed every night for 11 weeks.

With the outbreak of war with Germany in September 1939, the British civilian population was faced with changes to its economic and social well-being. Nobody emerged unscathed, whether young or old, rich or poor, in the city or country – everyone was impacted to some degree. Children's education suffered, as schools were closed and evacuations occurred. Added to this was the fact that male teachers were often conscripted, which prevented schools from functioning properly, if they could open at all. The psychological effect was scarring for many, not just those who lost family in the bombing raids, but also those who were forced to endure separation. The actual mental health impact is extremely difficult to calculate.

Source 9.1 **Levine, J. *The Secret History of the Blitz* (2015), Simon & Schuster, United Kingdom**

> Life was dangerous, hard, and lived in the shadow of invasion and death. It was also exciting and shot through with optimism. People pulled together and helped strangers; they broke rules and exploited neighbours. They bonded with, and stole from one another, they grew to understand and to dislike each other. They tolerated without complaint and they complained without tolerance. They were scared and fearless, coped and they cracked. They lost all hope, and they looked to the future. They behaved, in short, like a lot of human beings … there was no single reaction nor a reliable formula to predict behaviour. [I]t must always be borne in mind that large numbers of people were faced with a period of brutal and intense terror that is almost unimaginable today.

The four C's

In your workbook, complete the following:

- **Connections:** What connections do you draw between the experiences of people during the Blitz and your own life? Think about what issues British civilians may have experienced, and whether you have experienced similar difficulties.
- **Challenge:** What ideas, positions or assumptions does Source 9.1 challenge?
- **Concepts:** What key concepts or ideas do you think are important and worth holding on to, or remembering, from the text?
- **Changes:** What changes in historical attitudes, or thinking, does the text suggest?

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Figure 9.11 A German V2 rocket ready for launching at Cuxhaven in Luneburg district, Lower Saxony, 1945

From 1943, the German bombing raids on Britain decreased as the Soviet Union's counterattack in the east gathered momentum, and the Luftwaffe was urgently transferred to this front. For Hitler, this was a chance to deploy his new technology against England. Firstly, there was the V1 rocket in 1944, known as the 'doodlebug' due to the sputtering sound it made when in flight. This was followed by the first intercontinental missile, the V2 rocket, which was deployed on 8 September 1944. Over 1000 V2 rockets fell on England, bringing silent death from up high. Unlike the V1, civilians did not know they were coming. Fearing the impact on civilian morale if they learned of the new German weapons, the government disguised these explosions as gas leaks.

Video 9.2
The Blitz
(01:18)



Figure 9.12 V2 Rocket crater near Palmer's Green Station, 7 November 1944

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9.2 Propaganda and control of the message



Figure 9.13 Prime Minister Winston Churchill delivered a speech on BBC radio in which he famously declared: 'I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat ... What is our aim? ... Victory, Victory at all costs – Victory in spite of all terrors ...'



Figure 9.14 A 1940s British propaganda poster headed 'Maneater'. It features a caricature of Adolf Hitler as he gnaws on bones while sitting among a pile of skulls labelled France, Greece, Romania, Yugoslavia, Poland and Belgium.

From the declaration of war with Germany, Great Britain tightly controlled the messages delivered to the public. After a period of restless inactivity during the 'Phoney War', the defeat of France stunned the population. Despite this, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill was quick to celebrate the 'victory' at Dunkirk and declare all English people would 'fight them on the beaches' if necessary. Churchill's speeches demonstrate the way the government swiftly sought to control the narrative of the war.

Like Germany, Britain employed a **Ministry of Information (MOI)** which oversaw all aspects of the media. This included radio broadcasts, speeches, productions, newspapers, journals – anything which could be printed, spoken, viewed, or presented to the public. Unlike the controlling nature of the German system, censorship of the media was self-enforced, meaning that each company or person censored their own work after guidelines were issued by the MOI. If a piece dealt with an issue identified in the MOI guidelines, then it needed to be submitted for review before publication or presentation. The Ministry of Information then removed any information it thought could harm the war effort. Soldier's letters also passed through the Ministry of Information, with information about battles, conditions, locations, or the general horrors of war removed.

Across all of society, national propaganda was issued to help control the perception of Germany and the war. These ranged from clearly biased pieces about Hitler eating corpses, to reasons to support the Blackout or get involved in the total war effort. The government encouraged support for the war and the sacrifice of the population to ensure victory. From 1940, the government tried to instil as much truth as possible into its propaganda to increase its effect. One key mode of delivery was the radio broadcasts of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). With a focus on truthful, positive

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propaganda, the BBC was able to build itself a reputation as a reliable source of wartime news, and was even tuned into by Germans. It grew rapidly from 1939 to 1944, with its staff almost tripling, and its coverage was widely tuned into across Britain. In contrast to negative propaganda or German newscasts, the BBC presented statements of fact about the war effort, battles and casualties, allowing British people to understand the state of the war and the sacrifices involved.



Figure 9.15 A British wartime poster appearing in the streets of London, 16 September 1939

Source questions

1. Discuss the impact of viewing the propaganda poster of Hitler chewing on bones (Figure 9.14).
2. What is the purpose of the message on the wall (Figure 9.15)?
3. Is this an example of propaganda? Justify your response.
4. How consistent is Figure 9.15 with other sources from the time?

9.3 Legislation

Like all countries involved in the war, Britain underwent broad legislative changes during (and before) World War II. The first of these was the ***Emergency Powers Act*** of August 1938. Sensing war on the horizon, the British government created a law which gave it certain powers if war broke out. These were diverse, such as calling up reservists, taking control of property, searching property, or arresting suspected Nazi informants – these were all tasks the government would not be able to do without the war setting.

The ***Military Training Act*** passed in April 1939, making it compulsory for all men aged between 20 and 21 to undertake six months of military training. With the declaration of war, this act was replaced by the ***National Service (Armed Forces) Act 1939***, which made all men aged 18 to 41 eligible for **conscription** into the armed forces of Britain. The *Military Training Act* went some way to preparing the British forces, but even after its implementation and the outbreak of war, Britain could only muster around 900 000 soldiers. Conscription across 1939 and 1940 saw 1.5 million men join the army, which grew further when the maximum age limit was increased to 51 years old, from 41. Men did protest their conscription, with over 20 000 men who were eligible for national service refusing to attend. Over 25 000 **conscientious objectors** refused to serve on the front, and undertook support roles, while another 6000 were jailed for refusing to serve at all. In December 1941, the *National Service Act* was expanded to include women, allowing all unmarried women aged between 20 and 30 to be eligible for conscription, and all men required to do national service until the age of 60. These adjustments to the Act were not designed to conscript women and

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old men to fight but to force them to complete work to support the armed forces, such as policing, or in factories, if required.



Figure 9.16 After the Prime Minister announced conscription, thousands of Englishmen rushed to join the army voluntarily in London, 5 January 1939.

This idea of using older men and women to do tasks to support the war effort was made into law by the Registration of Employment Order, which made men over 41 and women over 21 register for work. This was expanded by the Essential Work Order in March 1941, which gave the government power to declare work areas 'essential' and lock employees to their job. They could neither be sacked nor resign without permission from a Ministry of Labour National Service Officer. Industries described as essential grew to include anything related to engineering, ship and aircraft building and maintenance, railways, mines and construction. Overall, Britain was very successful in getting its population to engage in the total war effort, as a third of its civilians were employed in it by 1944.

Another British legal change was the ***Treachery Act*** of 1940, which allowed the government to impose the death penalty for spying or espionage in Britain, or imprisonment for lesser crimes. It led to 16 people being shot by firing squad under the conditions of the Act, including British subjects.

It is worth noting that despite Great Britain presenting itself as a unified and strong community during the Blitz, this myth does not entirely match the reality. The law courts were forced to deal with numerous cases of looting, or theft. This included stealing items from bombed houses, stealing ration books, or using the **black market** to purchase goods. The most despised offenders were fire wardens or members in defence jobs who stole – the people caring for the vulnerable who suffered loss of property

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or life. Criminals also recognised the authority these figures commanded and dressed as fire wardens to steal from bombed houses. Gang activity, prostitution and murder all increased during the Blitz too.

9.4 Economic impacts and rationing

Sacrifice was a common theme to British propaganda, and this extended to the economy as well. One of the key issues which Great Britain faced was appropriate rationing. Britain was highly dependent upon trade with its colonies, with only 30% of British food produced within the country. For the government, this created an immediate issue. Was Britain going to be able to import enough food for its people, and its soldiers fighting the war, with German U-Boats seeking to destroy Allied shipping? Politicians quickly realised the need for rationing.

In 1939, rationing was focused on fuel as stockpiles were needed for the war effort. By 1940, food rationing was introduced using a ration book system where citizens could exchange coupons for food. This typically consisted of an egg, small amounts of tea, butter, sugar, cheese, bacon and margarine. Flour and products for making bread were severely limited, and meat entered the ration system later in the war.

Complaints were made by those who were well off, but these were limited. The government embarked upon a broad campaign of propaganda to focus civilians on the fact that soldiers needed the most rations in order to survive. Propaganda extended to popular figures such as Dr Carrot and Potato Pete, who encouraged people to 'go easy on the bread, have a potato instead'. Specialised cookbooks were printed, and pamphlets distributed with instructions on how to cook meals from rations, or establish a home vegetable garden.

As the war continued, many goods became harder to find, were rationed, or were taxed at a higher rate by the government. Luxury objects were particularly difficult to locate, unless the black market was used. This growing industry further counters the myth of public unity which supposedly developed during the war, as people sought to find tobacco, cigarettes, alcohol, food, or even chocolate for themselves. People who sold on the black market became known as 'spivs', a word whose origin is lost to history. Spivs faced stiff fines of £500 and a five-year jail sentence if they were caught



Figure 9.17 A photograph of a tray containing weekly rations of sugar, tea, margarine, 'national butter', lard, eggs, bacon and cheese, 1942

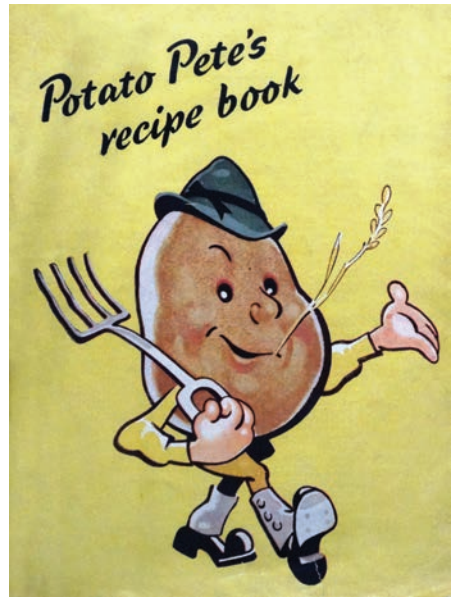


Figure 9.18 'Potato Pete's Recipe Book', produced by the Ministry of Food in the 1940s, contained 12 pages of potato recipes.

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selling goods on the black market. However, arrests were uncommon. It was unlikely a person who could afford to buy from the black market and therefore purchase luxury goods was going to inform the authorities. That would result in the end of their supply.



Figure 9.19 Three young children enjoying a carrot on a stick, 24 July 1941

9.5 The role of women



Figure 9.20 A British propaganda poster encouraging women to support the war effort by working in factories



Figure 9.21 A propaganda poster encouraging women to help produce food

The introduction of conscription was partly designed to draw women into war-related work, but it is important to note that thousands of women voluntarily joined the war effort prior to this. The government was concerned these numbers were not large enough, and wanted to develop a program to ensure broader participation in the total war effort. These legal changes placed women in a diverse range of activities, much like World War I.

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Table 9.1 A table of women's roles during World War II

Role	Duties	No. of women
Special Operations Executive	This organisation for women dealt with espionage. Trained female agents were parachuted into Europe as spies, or with plans of sabotage. It was an extremely risky task with the likelihood of capture, and torture, very high.	3200
Industry	Women were involved in chemical manufacturing and machinery, as well as naval and aeronautical construction.	1 900 000 +
Auxiliary Territorial Service	A branch of the army for women aged between 17 and 43. Under the ATS, women assisted as nurses, drivers, police, or controlled searchlights during the Blitz.	214 000
Women's Royal Naval Service	The 'Wrens' as they were called, were a branch of the navy which formed for women in World War I. They generally completed clerical work, or worked as telegraph radio operators, couriers, radar operators, signallers, or intelligence officers.	74 000
Women's Auxiliary Air Force	The WAAF was a branch of the air force where women participated. Apart from clerical responsibilities, women in the WAAF could also transport goods as a pilot, perform aircraft and balloon maintenance, or balloon surveillance.	181 835
Women's Land Army	Women performed a variety of agricultural duties which allowed men to join the war effort. These could range from working on farms to rat catching. The 'Timber Corps' branch felled trees and worked the sawmills.	80 000
Women's Voluntary Service	Contributed by coordinating evacuations, organising shelters or running food kitchens.	1 000 000+
Civil Defence	Women could participate in the Civil Defence by joining the Women's Auxiliary Fire Service, the Women's Auxiliary Police Corps and the Air Raid Precautions services.	350 000



Figure 9.22 Women of the Forestry Commission section of the Women's Land Army (WLA) carry logs on their shoulders near Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, 1 December 1941.

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Source questions

1. Describe the activities women are shown completing in Figures 9.20 to 9.22.
2. Table 9.1 demonstrates the variety of tasks women undertook during World War II. In what area do you think women made the greatest contribution to supporting the war? Justify your response.
3. How difficult do you personally believe it was for women to maintain the household, care for children and contribute to the war effort? Explain why.
4. Assess how important the contribution of working women was to the overall war effort in England.

On top of work duties to support the war effort, many women became the sole carer of children if a father was conscripted, volunteered, or worked long hours. While this was largely consistent with traditional values from the time, the isolation these mothers felt was a new component. Further compounding the emotional struggles for mothers was the Blitz, leaving their children exposed to bombing or separated by evacuation. Many women had to deal with this trauma on their own.

It is only natural that the increasing responsibility and independence for women led to broader social and cultural changes. The traditional view of a mother raising children at home, and only working until they were either married or had their first child, was displaced by the needs of World War II. While this shift occurred during World War I, conscription of women into service accelerated this further. Some of these changes were simple, such as women wearing trousers as opposed to skirts, or changing their hairstyles. Other changes included a greater sense of empowerment within their own life, such as their choices over sexual partners, or their desire for a voice in the politics of Great Britain.

Summary

- Britain endured the devastation of German bombing during the Blitz, from September 1940 to the spring of 1941.
- The government imposed a Blackout in the hope the absence of light in cities would prevent Nazi bombers from locating their targets.
- Citizens lived with the fear of bombing, which led to the mass evacuation of children, pregnant women and some mothers to the countryside of England.
- Britain went through diverse social changes, such as rationing of food and essential items, and legal changes which required people to train for six months at 20 years old.
- Conscription was introduced for anyone aged 18–41, while work programs existed for women 20–30 years old and all men up to 60 years old.
- Some people objected to participating in the war effort; but, generally, everyone in Britain was encouraged to support the British soldiers, whether this was through fighting, farming, or working in a factory.

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Terms

Black market: an 'underground' trading market for goods which are rationed or in short supply.

Conscientious objectors: people that refused to participate in the war effort, or be conscripted, often due to personal or religious beliefs.

Conscription: a government policy which forces citizens (mostly men), usually aged between about 18 to 45, to join the armed forces of their country.

***Emergency Powers Act*:** an act passed through the British parliament to allow the government to make laws during the war.

Enigma code: an encrypted message which the Germans used to code communications.

***Military Training Act*:** an act which made it compulsory for men to undertake six months of training between the ages of 20 and 21.

Ministry of Information (MOI): the government department created on the outbreak of World War II, which dealt with publicity and propaganda.

***National Service (Armed Forces) Act 1939*:** an act which allowed for conscription of men aged 18–41.

***Treachery Act*:** this introduced the death penalty for spying, or imprisonment for lesser crimes.

V1/V2 rockets: known as Hitler's miracle weapons, the V1 and V2 (vengeance weapons) were rockets tipped with explosives which were used on British cities.

Activities

Thinking historically

1 What was the Blackout?
2 The lives of children were severely impacted by the Blitz. Explain how.
3 Evaluate how British society responded to the Blitz.
4 Analyse the key legislative changes (legal changes) in England during World War II.
5 The BBC was regarded as a reliable broadcaster. Why?
6 How important were the speeches of Winston Churchill to maintaining morale?
7 Outline the main jobs women undertook during the war.

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G-S-C-E concept map

- **Generate** a list of ideas and initial thoughts that come to mind when you think about the home front in Britain, its conditions, and the contribution to the war effort of civilians.
- **Sort** your ideas according to how important they are, placing key ideas in the centre of your page.
- **Connect** your ideas by drawing lines between ideas that have something in common. In a short sentence between, explain how the ideas are connected.
- **Elaborate** on any of the ideas/thoughts you have written so far by adding new ideas that expand, extend or add to your initial ideas.

Continue generating, sorting, connecting and elaborating new ideas until you feel you have an effective visual representation of your understanding.

Writing historically

Write a reflection on the key ideas you have learned regarding changes to the British home front during the war. Explore whether these matched your previous assumptions of what the war was like, prior to undertaking this topic.

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10 The German home front

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- The impact of the bombing on Germany
- The social and economic effects of the war on civilians in Germany

Question starts

- Brainstorm a list of at least 12 questions about the German home front, and its conditions, that you would want to have answered.
- Use these question starts to help you think of interesting questions: Why …? How would it be different if …? What are the reasons …? How is it similar to …? What if …? What if we knew …? What is the purpose of …? What happened …?
- Review the brainstormed list and star the questions that seem most interesting.
- Select one or more of the starred questions to discuss with another student, explaining why you find this question most interesting.
- Reflect on this process – what new ideas do you have about the German home front, and its conditions, that you did not have before?

10.1 The early years to total war

The reaction of the German people to the outbreak of war in 1939 was quite different from that of 1914. Many supporters of the Nazis, or Nazi Party members, responded to the news with jubilation, believing Hitler to be leading Germany back to its rightful position of power in Europe. Others, however, greeted the news with a sense of dread. The horrors of World War I were etched in the memories of a generation of Germans, who understood the consequences of another world war.

Prior to 1943, the German economy was not mobilised. Instead, industrial production was focused on a quick victory. Hitler was determined to maintain home front morale and avoid the catastrophic collapse that

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Figure 10.1 A propaganda poster from 1936, encouraging women to pursue family life

occurred at the end of World War I, which he was largely successful in achieving due to the Wehrmacht's ability to conquer Poland, France and the Low Countries. Apart from basic rationing measures, Germany continued as it had in the pre-war period. This meant that, unlike the Soviet Union and Britain, the Nazis did not switch their economy towards total war until the last years. The Nazis maintained their control over industry and resources through various Nazi department leaders. Women were kept from the workforce to focus on raising children, as the Nazis sought to keep their population happy and maintain the status quo of their policies.

The Wehrmacht's invasion of the Soviet Union placed great pressure on Germany's economic and military resources. By 1943 Germany was forced into a total war effort – Britain still resisted, the Africa Korps had been defeated after El Alamein, the United States was now in the war and, worst of all, defeat was looming in Russia. On 18 February 1943, Joseph Goebbels announced this switch in a famous speech at the Berlin Sportpalast where he declared that 'total war means a shorter war'. One of the biggest changes to Germany's production in this time came about due to the appointment of **Albert Speer** as Armaments Minister. Remarkably, Speer was able to maintain German production despite Allied bombing in 1944 and 1945. Women were welcomed back to the workforce as every man was needed for the looming defence of Germany. Slaves from conquered territories were worked to death in labour camps to assist production.

10.2 Bombing of Germany

The bombing of British cities was matched by the Allies through 1940, and towards the end of the war. Churchill was adamant that bombing was effective, stating on 3 September 1940: 'the Navy can lose us the war but only the Air Force can win it … The Fighters are our salvation, but the Bombers alone provide the means to victory.' While questions have been raised about the morality of these actions, the reality is that they played a very significant role in bringing the war to an end. Throughout World War II, over 400 000 German civilians died as a result of the air raids conducted by the Allies.

Allied bombing was coordinated by Air Marshal Sir **Arthur 'Bomber' Harris**. Putting aside questions of morality, the Allies developed a plan for bombing German cities, while also targeting industrial areas and military facilities. To do this, the Allies employed both tactical and saturation

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bombing – tactical bombing aimed for a specific target while saturation bombing aimed from broad areas across a city.

Directive of Air Officer Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Air Force, Arthur Harris; cited in Terraine, J. *Right of the Line: The Role of the RAF in World War Two* (2010), Pen and Sword Military, London, England, p. 474 Source 10.1

> It has been decided that the primary object of our operations should now be focussed on the morale of the enemy civil population and in particular the industrial workers … We are bombing Germany city by city and ever more terribly in order to make it impossible for her to go on with the war.

Until 1944, the bombing of German cities had a limited impact on German production, with estimates placing the overall decline in production at only 5%. The destruction to German cities, however, was terrible. Over 70% of both Dresden and Berlin were destroyed, with 3.6 million houses reduced to rubble. In 1944, the Allies switched their bombing campaign away from cities to military and industrial targets, which devastated German production. Ball bearings, fuel, oil, synthetic products, tanks, aircraft – many key areas of production underwent significant decreases as railways, roads and bridges were targeted.



Figure 10.2 Hamburg was heavily bombed by the Allies, 2 August 1943.

Both during and following the war, many questions have been raised about the bombing campaign in Germany. Historians have questioned the effectiveness of the bombing campaign, or the extent to which it contributed to the Allied victory in Europe. Further arguments have focused on the nature of the bombing raids, particularly whether they were war crimes conducted against a civilian population. This was, after all, the ultimate impact of bombing cities – it was designed to kill civilians or destroy their homes, therefore weakening the morale of the German population and their desire to sustain the war. Women and children, babies, those who were not active Nazis, even those resisting Nazism – they were all caught up in the large bombing raids on cities. Was this a crime, or was it justified as the way to end the war and save lives overall?

Allied bombing of German cities during World War II was directed at civilians, as much as at military or strategic targets. Hamburg's death toll was approximately 50 000 people from five consecutive days of

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saturation bombing. Dresden suffered immensely when a firestorm was triggered throughout the city in February 1945, with approximately 25 000 dead (although these estimates range to 39 000). Overall, 1.18 million tonnes of bombs landed on German soil to devastating effect. Did the German bombing of Allied cities justify this devastation in return? This is a question that politicians from the time, and historians today, are divided upon.

Moral questions aside, the bombing raids did have some impact on Germany's industrial ability but this was mostly at the end of the war. By 1944, Germany had 300 aircraft and limited ability to produce more, in comparison to the Soviet Union's 12 000. Allied bombing can be considered a primary cause for the Allied victory in Europe as it limited, then destroyed, German's industrial ability, which was essential to the overall victory.

Source 10.2 **Overy, R. *Why the Allies Won* (2006), Vintage Publishing, London, England, p. 163**

> Though there should be necessary arguments over the morality or operational effectiveness of the bombing campaigns, the air offensive appears in fact as one of the decisive elements in explaining Allied victory.



Figure 10.3 The destruction of the inner areas of Dresden was comprehensive.



Figure 10.4 Dresden in 1946 as it commenced rebuilding

Claim, support, question

- Make a **claim** (or thesis) about the legality of the bombing of Germany.
- Identify **support** for your claim – things you have researched, or know to support your claim.
- Ask a **question** related to your claim that you would need to research further.

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British and German cities experienced similar changes during the war as a result of the bombing. Both enacted a Blackout period, encouraged their citizens to build bomb shelters, and introduced air-raid precautions and fire services. By 1942, the Germans had evacuated large numbers of children. Hitler Youth leader Baldur von Schirach announced that 335 409 children and teens were evacuated to Hitler Youth camps, while nearly 900 000 mothers and children left the cities. These numbers continued to grow as Allied bombing intensified from 1943. The emotional impact of these events was severe for families, as their children left and their homes were lost. Families fled cities in one of the largest refugee movements ever to occur, and one which only increased at the end of the war, as civilians fled the vengeance of the Red Army for the relative safety of the Allies.



Figure 10.5 A German poster from 1943 depicts a skeleton hurling bombs from an Allied aircraft. Translation: 'The enemy sees your light! Blackout!'.

10.3 Rationing

Rationing in Germany began before the attack on Poland, targeting foods like meats and fats, as well as soap and textiles. Clothing was soon rationed in November 1939. The War Economy Decree established a rationing system based upon points, with the number of points each citizen was given dependent upon their profession. The system was quite generous, with some poor people having access to more food than prior to the war. The Weimar Republic government had created an extensive welfare program, which the Third Reich continued through coupon payment to families of soldiers. But as the fighting in Europe continued for a number of years, a stricter rationing system was introduced, which favoured people involved in jobs necessary for the war effort. Fresh food, meats and luxury items like chocolate became very difficult to obtain, as did cigarettes and alcohol. Shortages were common, and shops displayed decorations of items to provide a false impression of the level of supply, and therefore maintain the morale of citizens.

The black market grew steadily in Germany as limits on goods tightened. Those with money were willing to purchase products, particularly luxury items, at a higher cost. Black marketeers formed networks where they could trade and sell their products at a higher rate, and profit greatly. As the war went on, farmers became unhappy that they starved



Figure 10.6 A ration card from Nazi Germany

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while those in the city ate their contributions. Many refused to sell their crops and instead turned to the black market to make greater profits. For Germans who could not afford the black market, or access food due to shortages, they creatively used substitute foods to overcome shortages. Flour or bread was combined with peas, potato meal, barley or chestnuts to last longer.

10.4 Propaganda, terror and repression



Figure 10.7 A **Waffen SS** recruitment poster: 'Join at 17 or older', 1941

Video 10.3
Promoting the Nazi Party (00:15)

Propaganda was a key component of the Nazi seizure and consolidation of power, and it is no surprise they used it to control the messages their population received in order to maintain support for the war. The **Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda**, under the control of Joseph Goebbels, was tasked with the role of censoring, monitoring and presenting propaganda in all areas of the media. One of its key targets was to ensure that the German population supported the war effort by either enlisting, working, or sacrificing through embracing rations. To do this, it produced a series of propaganda posters encouraging people to support the Führer, join the war effort, or to convince them that victory was not far off. Initially, German successes filled the population with a sense of achievement and strengthened their loyalty to the ideas of Nazism. But as the war continued, it became more difficult to stop the spread of dissatisfaction in society. This was where fear was used to suppress any opposition or resistance to Nazism.



Figure 10.8 Poster of German propaganda, 1941: 'The Führer order: to believe, obey and fight!'



Figure 10.9 Nazi propaganda poster, showing a helmeted soldier in front of swastika flags, with the slogan in German, 'Victory Will be Ours!'

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Figure questions

1 What information do these propaganda posters (Figures 10.7 to 10.9) reveal about the war?
2 Using these posters as evidence, explain how important personal loyalty to Hitler was in the Wehrmacht or SS.

A saying often attributed to Adolf Hitler Source 10.3

> Terrorism is the best political weapon for nothing drives people harder than a fear of sudden death.

A saying often attributed to Heinrich Himmler Source 10.4

> The best political weapon is the weapon of terror. Cruelty commands respect. Men may hate us. But we don't ask for their love; only for their fear.

Control was a basic component of the Nazi regime, and they sought to extend their control across all areas of society. This included the police and law courts, films, the arts, architecture and music. National Socialist ideology was to be embedded in all areas of society, and this process was overseen by various Nazi Party officials like Heinrich Himmler or Joseph Goebbels. But creating laws and regulations was only half of the task before the Nazis – the other half was the enforcement of these laws. Resistance, or those who did not show outward conformity to the Nazi worldview, was immediately met with severe consequences.

Dams, C. & Stolle, M. *The Gestapo: Power and Terror in the Third Reich* (2014), Oxford University Press, United Kingdom, p. xi Source 10.5

> [T]he Secret State Police was anything but secret. Its methods were publicised very early on in the Nazi-controlled press, the idea being that all 'opponents' of the Nazi state should be perfectly aware of whom they would be dealing with if they did not adapt to the new conditions. Nor did the Gestapo hide its workforce behind a veil of silence … on the Day of the German Police Gestapo officers stood on street corners and took part in the Winter Relief collections.

The ***Gestapo (Geheime Staatspolizei)*** was the police force taken over by Hermann Göring in 1933, upon his appointment to the position of Minister for the Interior. Exerting his influence, Göring spread Nazi ideology throughout the police in order to radicalise law enforcement – those who disagreed were removed from their positions. The Gestapo was given powers to surveil, arrest, 'interrogate' and intern political enemies.

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Throughout 1933 and 1934, this primarily consisted of Communists and dissenters who were interrogated and placed into concentration camps across Germany. During the war this expanded to include anyone who resisted the Nazis, or even those who did not actively support it. Anybody who made it into internment was treated brutally.

Inter-party conflict developed between the SS and Gestapo when Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich gained control of the police force in each state (bar Prussia, where Göring had created the Gestapo). Göring countered this by opening a branch of the Gestapo in each state. This situation was common under Hitler's leadership, reflecting a Social Darwinism – Hitler believed that the strong would survive in battle. Indeed, Heinrich Himmler won out, and eventually assumed control of the Gestapo in April 1934. From 1934, the Gestapo expanded its surveillance operations, to 20 000 people by 1938. September 1941 saw the introduction of the Night and Fog Decree which gave the Nazis the ability to arrest and detain anyone without a trial. This spread fear throughout the German population that they may be the Gestapo's next target – which could be true, as over 700 000 Germans were arrested and sent to concentration camps by 1945.

After the war, the presence of the Gestapo was used as a justification for the actions of many Germans. They claimed to have not been avid supporters of National Socialism but had toed the line, for fear that not doing so would lead to Nazi sympathisers reporting them to the Gestapo in a process called denunciation. There was no legal process where the Nazis required their citizens to denounce each other, but denunciations spread like a contagion throughout Germany, instilling fear in many. Would anyone criticise the Nazis if they could be caught by the Gestapo and imprisoned? Would they plan resistance if this led to their death? The Gestapo stopped dissent and resistance across Germany simply through its presence. It reached a point where Hitler himself admitted to his Justice Minister that 'we are living in a sea of denunciations and human evil … so that someone denounces another and simultaneously puts himself forward as his successor'.

Source 10.6 **Burleigh, M. *The Third Reich: A New History* (2001), Hill & Wang, United States, pp. 304–305**

The motives of denouncers were myriad, although certain patterns emerge. Most of them were ordinary citizens, not Nazi enthusiasts. A certain self-important type, who liked gossip, snooping and flitting around authority figured frequently, tarting up malice in the guise of bounden duty to the national collective. So did individuals with deep-seated personal grudges and resentments, who were impervious to stigmas still adhering to such ungentlemanly conduct. Merely contemptible in normal democratic

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conditions, such individuals become lethal in totalitarian dictatorships such as Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union … After the war, the view that the Gestapo had been omnipotent was a convenient alibi for many Germans of various political persuasions. Although the Gestapo deliberately affected an air of sinister omniscience, like most police forces, it was reliant upon co-operation from individual members of the public, whether as volunteer part-time agents or as ad hoc informers … What should not be entirely overlooked is that the combination of a police force liberated from all legal restraints and licensed denunciation meant a climate of fear.

Kershaw, I. *The End: The Defiance and Destruction of Hitler's Germany* (2012), Penguin, London, United Kingdom, p. 162 Source 10.7

The Nazi regime remained an immensely strong dictatorship, holding together in the mounting adversity and prepared to use increasingly brutal force in controlling and regimenting German society at more or less every point. It left little room for opposition – recognizably as suicidal as it was futile. With varying degrees of enthusiasm, ranging from the hundred-percenter hold-out-to-the-last contingent down to the majority simply going through the motions, officialdom – high and low – continued to do its duty. Here, too, most civil servants could not see any alternative. So the bureaucratic wheels kept turning, and with them the attritional grind of controls was sustained. No matter, however trivial, was beneath their attention. Amid the myriad concerns of local civil servants, as they tried to cope with huge social dislocation after air raids, refugee problems, housing shortages, food rationing and many other issues, they never lost sight of the need to complete forms and have them officially stamped for approval.

Source questions

1 Describe the motives of people reporting to the Gestapo, as evident in Source 10.6.
2 How did the structure of the Nazi government lead to social changes, and challenges for the general population?

10.5 Changing lives of women

German society had experienced vast upheaval since World War I. The Weimar Republic ushered in social changes for women, who broke away from their conservative and traditional roles in the home. These ideas were challenged by Hitler in the 1930s, who viewed mothers as the key to raising Aryan children, and he used propaganda and public statements to ensure this occurred. There are two problems for any historian who looks at the changing roles of women in the Nazi period. Firstly, understanding the Nazi

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policies and what they aimed to achieve; secondly, understanding whether these policies were actually implemented. The second of these questions is particularly challenging to answer, as what the Nazis said did not always match the reality of what they did, or what happened.

The policies of the Third Reich in the 1930s focused on removing women from employment, which would suggest that most, if not all, women returned to their homes, or found a 'suitable' profession. But the Nazis did not directly forbid women from working and despite Hitler's continual statements of women's role in the home, their contribution to the workforce rose from 1.3 million in 1933 to 1.8 million in 1938. As the war again committed the men of Germany to battle, much responsibility for agriculture and industry fell upon the shoulders of womenfolk. During the war, the Reich government adjusted its priorities for women to suit its needs. The evidence suggests that women had diverse roles during the war, with responsibilities in factories, the government, or supporting roles for the war effort.

While the initial contribution of women to the war effort was low, 52% of those employed in 1942 were female. Following the defeat at Stalingrad and the gradual turning of the war, the Nazis realised the need to engage women in the workforce to a greater degree. Three million women aged between 17 and 41 were expected to participate, but only 900 000 registered to undertake war work. Many of these women went to work in factories producing munitions, weapons, tanks or planes, while women



Figure 10.10 Women constructing barrage balloons which floated into the sky while trailing cables. They became obstacles for Allied aircraft.

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from the ***Bund Deutscher Madel*** were employed in agricultural work under a plan to increase farm production in East Germany.

Germany had no plans to use women as frontline fighters, but 160 000 women did perform support or **auxiliary duties** for the Luftwaffe, Wehrmacht or Kriegsmarine. These duties were clerical or administrative in nature; however, some women were deployed to man anti-aircraft defences or searchlight control across the cities.



Figure 10.11 A woman works on an instrument panel in an aeroplane factory in Germany, approximately 1940.

Overy, R. *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia* (2005), Penguin, London, Great Britain, p. 508 Source 10.8

> [T]here still exists a popular myth that German women were not recruited to war work as they were in the other warring powers, an assertion that rests largely on a statistical illusion. Women in Germany had always made up a large proportion of the workforce, particularly in agriculture, where, as in the Soviet Union, they ran the farms while the men worked in industry or transport … Women in Germany played a major part in keeping the war effort going, as they did in the Soviet Union.

In 1939 there were nearly 40 million women in Germany, and 13 million of these women became members of the Nazi Party. This figure steadily increased from 1939 to 1945, despite the changing fortunes of the war. Throughout the war, women were involved in all sorts of duties: nurses, secretaries, farmers, industrial workers, even guards on prison camps – like all in Germany, joining the Nazi Party gave women greater opportunities to advance their careers in these professions. Women such as **Gertrud Scholtz-Klink,** who led the National Socialist Women's League and was a devoted follower of Hitler and Nazism, could make a successful career for themselves through their commitment to Nazi policies.

Irma Grese is another example of a typical German girl indoctrinated into Nazism. After twice failing to become a nurse, Grese joined the Nazi Party and accepted work at the Ravensbruck Concentration Camp, where she stayed until March 1943. From there, Grese was transferred to Auschwitz–Birkenau, where she became known for her savagery, committing horrendous acts against female prisoners. After the war, she was arrested and tried at Nuremberg. Numerous prisoners provided testimony of abuse suffered at her hands, and the physical and mental scarring they endured as a result. This weight of evidence led Grese to be found guilty of torture and murder and sentenced to hanging. She remained unrepentant of her crimes and died by hanging on 13 June 1945.

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Questions about the role women played in supporting the Nazi regime and, by extension, the Holocaust, are quite complex. In the post-war period, women typically replied that they were not Nazis, they'd simply helped the war effort of their country. If they had joined the party, they told Allied interviewers they did so to advance their career, that was all. However, a weight of historical evidence suggests that women either knew, or chose not to know, about the treatment of Jews. What is clear is that many German women were just as responsible for the atrocities of the Third Reich as men.

Summary

- Like Britain, Germany experienced severe bombing during World War II, with the mass destruction of several of its cities, such as Dresden.
- Germany did not commit to total war until around 1943, when Britain still resisted in the west, and the war started to turn in the east.
- Germany experienced a period of extreme social change when the Nazis came to power, and this continued during the war.
- Initially, this related to Blackouts, and evacuation of children from cities, but expanded to strict rations and a growing black market.
- Due to the nature of German government, Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels had strict controls on the 'message' that was delivered to the German people, whether this related to the war and its successes or failures, or just Nazi policies and ideologies.
- Any resistance could attract the attention of the Gestapo, the police unit responsible for ensuring German people supported Hitler and the war. Anti-Nazi behaviour could result in arrest, imprisonment, beatings and potentially death.
- Women were heavily involved in the Third Reich, whether as active members of the Nazi Party or supporting the effort through war work.

Key personalities and terms

Self-described as Hitler's only friend, **Albert Speer** (1905–1981) was an architect who used his position in the Nazi Party and personal connection to Hitler to obtain several high-ranking positions. He was tasked with redesigning Berlin as 'Germania', and appointed Reich Minister of Armaments and War Production, where he successfully increased production despite bombing. During the post-war trials, Speer worked with the Allies in return for a lighter sentence of 20 years imprisonment.



Figure 10.12 Albert Speer



Figure 10.13 Arthur 'Bomber' Harris

Air Marshal Sir **Arthur 'Bomber' Harris** (1892–1984) was the Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Air Force Bomber Command. He was responsible for the implementation of bombing raids against German cities, infrastructure and civilians. Harris preferred broad bombing rather than targeted, which has led some historians to regard him as Arthur 'Butcher' Harris.

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Figure 10.14 Gertrude Scholtz-Klink

Gertrud Scholtz-Klink (1902–1999) was an avid supporter of Adolf Hitler and Nazi ideology. She actively encouraged women to follow Nazi policies such as getting married, having extra children and being subordinate to the men of the Third Reich. After the war, she escaped and hid until 1948, when she was tried and arrested twice for a total of 48 months in prison. She was an avid supporter of Nazism until her death.



Figure 10.15 Irma Grese

Irma Grese (1923–1945) was sometimes called 'the Dog of Auschwitz', or the 'Beautiful Beast' due to her supervision and treatment of inmates at the Auschwitz and Bergen–Belsen concentration camps. Here she assisted the infamous Dr Josef Mengele during the 1940s. She was arrested, tried and executed following the war.

Terms

Auxiliary duties: any duties which support the carrying out of a broader role, such as nurses supporting doctors, or secretaries supporting lawyers.

***Bund Deutscher Madel*:** a branch of the Hitler Youth movement which targeted young women for indoctrination into Nazi ideology.

Gestapo *(Geheime Staatspolizei)*: the Nazi secret police who enforced terror and repression on German society.

Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda: the German ministry created in 1933 which ensured all elements of the media delivered a pro-Nazi message.

Waffen SS: the military branch of the *Schutzstaffel* (SS).

Activities

Thinking historically

1. Create a table of the similarities and differences between the experiences of civilians on the British and German home fronts.
2. Describe the two types of bombing used – tactical and saturation.
3. Research and create a list of the places bombed by the Allies in Germany.
4. Why did the bombing of Dresden attract such public attention?
5. Evaluate the cost and impact of Allied bombing on Germany.
6. Discuss the view that the bombing of cities by the British and Americans was a war crime.

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Connect, extend, challenge

- **Connect:** How does the information on the German home front connect to your understanding of home fronts during World War II?
- **Extend:** What ideas extended or pushed your thinking in new directions?
- **Challenge:** What is still challenging or confusing for you to get your mind around? What questions, wonderings or puzzles do you now have?

Writing historically

1 Essay question: How significant was the bombing campaign to winning the war?

- Create a two-columned table.
- In one column, add the key elements of the aerial campaign.
- In the second column, add the battle or event which demonstrates the significance of this tactic.
- Compose an essay response to this question using the following guide:

STEAL paragraph

Statement: Answer the question with a thesis statement which uses the words of the question.

Topic elaboration: Expand and build your argument.

Evidence: Refer to historical evidence, including historians if appropriate.

Analysis: Explain how your evidence helps you answer the question.

Linking sentence: Link your paragraph back to the question using the words of the question.

It is important to know that there are different styles of writing a paragraph which your school, or teacher, may use. Although the name of each structural element may change, they all follow the same rough guide.

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11 The Soviet home front

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- The impact of the bombing in the Soviet Union
- The social and economic effects of the war on civilians in the Soviet Union

Conservative estimates put the death toll for Soviet civilians as the highest during the war. In the Nazi-occupied territories, approximately 13.6 million civilians died, including 2.1 million who entered forced labour camps. In Russia, many died as part of the 'sacrifice' for total war. From these hardships and losses, the Soviet Union redefined itself from a country that nearly lost World War II to the Axis powers to an industrial and military superpower to rival the United States.

From the beginning of Operation Barbarossa, Soviet soldiers and civilians were exposed to great hardship. A study of Leningrad, which was placed under siege by Army Group North from September 1941 to January 1944, reveals the extent of this suffering. Within the city, rations shrunk daily as there was no ability to resupply, leading to mass starvation and the death of one million residents, a third of the population of Leningrad. Civilians endured regular bombing attacks by the Luftwaffe or shelling from artillery. While all modern research suggests Leningrad is an extreme experience of the Russian people in World War II, it does demonstrate what life was like for many when Germany invaded.



Figure 11.1 Soviet women digging trenches at Leningrad

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11.1 Evacuations

When war broke out, the Soviet Union was not prepared for the German forces that swept across their territory. No initial evacuations were possible, but as news travelled of the Wehrmacht forces, and a temporary slowing of their assault at the **Battle of the Bloody Triangle** in June 1941, mass evacuations were organised. These first targeted people useful to the Soviet Union, such as Communist officials or skilled workers and their families – as well as the equipment they were skilled at using. The evacuation of industry was very important for the manufacturing sector, where Stalin needed every skilled worker to produce weapons and technology to resist the Nazis. Evacuations were conducted by train to areas behind the Ural Mountains – an area the Germans could not reach with bombers.

Basic evacuation of some children did occur, particularly Jewish and orphaned children. But while there is some evidence of relocation of civilian populations, Stalin also ordered entire cities to stand fast and resist the Nazi threat. Soviet propaganda from both during and after the war claims Stalin's orders strengthened the resolve of its people to resist the invasion.



Figure 11.2 Dismantled factory machinery ready to be shipped to the Urals

11.2 Rationing

The Wehrmacht's invasion quickly occupied key farming and industrial land across Russia. The northern reaches of the Soviet Union were ice and snow bound, while the dominant feature of central Russia was the Ural Mountains. With a large proportion of its food-producing territory swiftly invaded, the Soviet Union was forced to adopt a structured rationing

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system based on need – simply put, the soldiers needed more food and were supplied with more. The civilians were forced to endure small rations based on the type of labour they performed for the government. Workers in defence production and the energy, metallurgy, rubber, rail and water transport sectors were provided with larger quantities of rations compared to general civilians. The government did attempt to protect young children and nursing mothers, but the lack of overall food made it very difficult for the most vulnerable to be cared for.



Figure 11.3 School students assemble machine guns in Leningrad.

11.3 Women

World War I saw a shift in the roles of women in Russia, although this largely reversed by its conclusion. Once again in World War II, women filled key roles in the economy and, in contrast to many other countries, fought in the armed forces.

Women played a vital role in farm production across Russia, with four out of five workers on a collectivised farm being women. The Soviet Union adopted a 'no work, no food' policy, as part of its drive to inspire, or force, citizens to contribute to the total war effort. As a result of this change, the proportion of women rose to 60% of the total workforce by 1944. It is also estimated that between 800 000 and 1 000 000 women served in the Soviet armed forces, with many distinguishing themselves in combat. For the Soviet Union, this was a common experience, but one overlooked by western historians and journalists. Primary sources from Poland describe their shock at discovering their liberators were led by women – even young ones. At the peak of their involvement in 1943, women made up 8% of the Soviet army, with 500 000 seeing duty directly at the front. Many women served in the three female units created in the air force.

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Figure 11.4 Soviet poster encouraging women to commit to the war effort



Figure 11.5 A women producing armaments in the Soviet Union

Step inside

In your workbook, respond to the three following questions:

- What would a woman in Soviet Russia be able to perceive (see) about the war?
- What might these women believe they could do?
- What might they care about which would prompt them to take such action?



Figure 11.6 Roza Shanina (left) was credited with 59 confirmed sniper kills.

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Noggle, A. *A Dance with Death: Soviet Airwomen in World War II* (1994), Texas A & M University Press, United States, p. 11 Source 11.1

> The three regiments flew a combined total of more than thirty thousand combat sorties, and of the ninety-two women who were bestowed the title 'Hero of the Soviet Union' in recognition of their outstanding service to their country in the Second World War, nearly one-third were airwomen. There were at least three fighter aces among the women pilots, and two of the regiments received the coveted 'Guards' designation – an honour not given lightly, even during the war.

Female pilot, Yekaterina Budanova; cited in Strebe, A.G. *Flying for Her Country: The American and Soviet Women Military Pilots of World War II* (2007), Greenwood Publishing Group, United States, p. 34 Source 11.2

> I am now devoting my entire life to the struggle against the vile Nazi creatures ... If I am fated to perish, my death will cost the enemy dearly. My dear winged 'Yak' is a good machine and our lives are inseparably bound up together; if the need arises, we both shall die like heroes.



Figure 11.7 Russian female fighter pilots Lilya Litvyak (1921–1943) (left), Katerina Budanova (1916–1943) (centre) and Mariya Kuznetsova (1918–1990) (right), all of the 437th fighter regiment, plot flight plans on the tailplane of a Yakovlev Yak-1 fighter plane, 1942.

Source questions

1. Outline the insights these sources offer on the contributions of women to the war effort in the Soviet Union.
2. Suggest reasons why women may have played such an active role in the Soviet armed forces in comparison to other Allied countries.

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11.4 Propaganda



Figure 11.8 A World War II Soviet poster depicting the Red Army and air force, 1941. The text reads: 'For the Motherland, For Honour, For Freedom!'



Figure 11.9 A Soviet poster showing a grateful young boy protected by his rescuer. The caption reads: 'We Wait for You, Soldier-Liberator! Let's Free all Soviet People from Fascist Prison.'

Video 11.2
Propaganda (03:00)

The Eastern Front was a campaign where two different ideologies sought to dominate each other (**Fascism** and **Communism**). These ideologies were part of the story each country told about its experiences during the war, which makes it extremely difficult to research the history of this time, particularly in regard to the extent of suffering Russia endured. This was due to both the effective secrecy and propaganda of the Soviet Union, which disguised its hardship, mistakes and tragedies. Instead, the Communists promoted the myth of a heroic victory to instil national pride, initially to resist the Germans who were still a threat on the Eastern Front, and in the post-war period to consolidate support for Communism.

Propaganda in the Soviet Union matched Germany, Britain, or the United States to some extent, but it did have peculiarities. **Joseph Stalin** had complete control of Soviet propaganda, and focused on certain ideas which were central to the war effort. Among these was the concept of 'the motherland', which stood in direct opposition to 'the fatherland' of Germany. Ideas about accepting death and sacrificing oneself in the 'Great Patriotic War' or at the battle of Stalingrad, were common, as was reference to the superiority of the Soviet way of life. Soviet propaganda removed key facts, which can be seen through the absence of mention of other Allied successes during the war. The key role of military and resource aid supplied by the United States under the Lend-Lease program was downplayed, if not ignored. In the minds of citizens exposed to this propaganda, this was the Soviet Union's war alone, which it fought on its own merits.

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Figure questions

1 From Figures 11.8 and 11.9, and your own knowledge, explain how important motivational propaganda was to the Soviet Union.
2 Analyse the emotions which are contained in the propaganda posters. Explain why these emotions were important to express in posters.

Summary

- When the Germans launched Operation Barbarossa, the Soviet Union was caught by surprise. This meant it made limited preparations on the home front to prepare for the war effort, and was simply forced to endure through 1941 into 1942.
- Occupied territories suffered atrocities committed by the Wehrmacht and the *Einsatzgruppen*, who followed behind to conduct mass executions.
- Some children and mothers were evacuated prior to the arrival of the Wehrmacht forces, but most Soviet citizens were caught in the war.
- At the siege of Leningrad, citizens were trapped in the city to endure the cold, disease, bombing or shelling, and starvation.
- Stalin's words were broadcast and published, instilling the citizens of the Soviet Union with a desire to resist – and they did so at Stalingrad.
- Morale grew as winter set in, supported by propaganda exploiting the heroism of the Red Army. This propaganda encouraged sacrifice, whether by eating less food, giving away clothing to soldiers, or dedicating more time to working.
- Women took on extra responsibilities usually performed by men, while some even joined the front lines as fighters, snipers or pilots.
- Soviet forces fought with the mentality that no sacrifice was too great for Mother Russia.

Key personalities and terms

Personalities

Joseph Stalin (1878–1953) was the key figure in the Soviet home front. He reassured the Soviet people on the radio, instilling a belief they would win the war despite heavy losses. This message was underpinned by broad propaganda and the threat of terror. All of this had the added benefit for Stalin of securing his position of authority in the Soviet Union.



Figure 11.10 Joseph Stalin

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Terms

Battle of the Bloody Triangle: a large tank battle in Ukraine, 1941.

Communism: a type of government with no class structure where the 'state' owns everything and redistributes it to its people.

Fascism: a political system based on a very powerful leader, state control and being extremely proud of country and race.

Activities

Thinking historically

1. Did the Soviet Union evacuate people? Discuss why it did, or did not.
2. Compose a PowerPoint of the key changes to Soviet society during the war.
3. The Soviet Union had a different style of leader to England and France. Do you agree that this played a key role in the Soviet Union not surrendering? Justify your response.
4. The Soviet Union embraced the idea of sacrifice. How did it do this, and why?
5. Assess the difference between the contributions of women in Soviet Russia and Britain.

G-S-C-E concept map

- **Generate** a list of ideas and initial thoughts that come to mind when you think about the social changes in the Soviet Union during the war.
- **Sort** your ideas according to how important they are, placing key ideas in the centre of your page.
- **Connect** your ideas by drawing lines between ideas that have something in common. In a short sentence between, explain how the ideas are connected.
- **Elaborate** on any of the ideas/thoughts you have written so far by adding new ideas that expand, extend or add to your initial ideas.

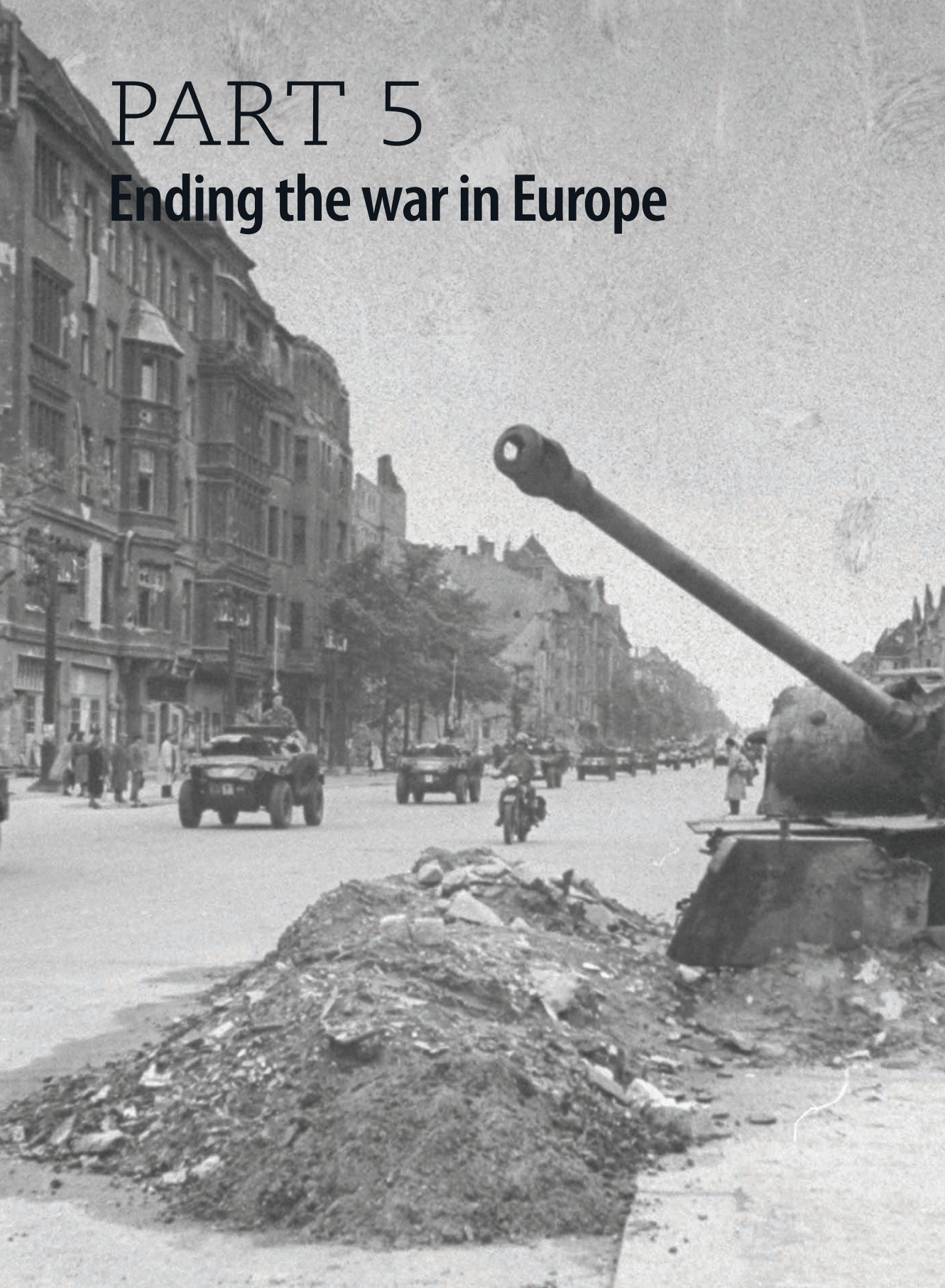
Continue generating, connecting and elaborating new ideas until you feel you have an effective visual representation of your understanding.

Writing historically

1. Create a three-columned table to compare and contrast the experiences of Soviet, German and British civilians in World War II.
2. Write an analysis of which country you believe endured the harshest conditions during the entirety of the war, and why this was the case.

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PART 5
Ending the war in Europe



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12 War in the west: 1944

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- D-Day and the liberation of France
- The last German counteroffensive at the Ardennes
- Effective strategies and tactics of the Allies
- Significance of the campaign in the west to the outcome of World War II

CHRONOLOGY

3 September 1943	Mussolini is removed from power after an armistice is signed, but soon reinstalled by the Nazis who occupy Italy to continue fighting in the south
4 June 1944	Rome is liberated by Allied forces
6 June 1944	Allies launch D-Day landings in France
25 June 1944	Allied forces finally break out from the Normandy area after intense fighting
25 August 1944	Paris is liberated
17 September 1944	Operation Market Garden begins in Belgium and the Netherlands
16 December 1944	Hitler launches the final German offensive at the Battle of the Bulge
22 March 1945	The Allies cross the Rhine River into Germany

12.1 D-Day

The campaign in Russia stretched the Soviet Union to the brink of defeat. It bore the brunt of the German forces, with the absence of fighting on mainland Europe allowing **Adolf Hitler** to focus his divisions in the east. Stalin implored both Winston Churchill and President **Franklin Delano Roosevelt** to launch an invasion of the mainland to open a second front, knowing that Hitler would be forced to transfer units to the west. For their part, the Allies recognised that any invasion of the French, Dutch or Belgian coastlines would come at a huge expense. They were not ready, nor

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would they be until 1944, but they were willing to create plans to invade Italy in 1943 after securing North Africa. Unfazed, Stalin used the 1944 conference at Tehran, in Iran, to secure an Allied pledge for an invasion come the spring of 1944.

Allied war planning considered the need for an amphibious operation on mainland Europe from 1943, codenamed **Operation Overlord**. Commanders quickly recognised the scale of an invasion, not only in the number of troops required to effectively penetrate the German defences, but also the logistical challenges. Following the Battle of Britain, the Allies steadily increased their control of the air – they were capable of reliably bombing German cities and industrial targets, and had enough fighter planes to defend an invasion fleet. But the nature of landing troops on the coastline of Europe meant aerial supremacy was not enough to secure a **beachhead**. The Allies needed a way of ensuring the Germans did not expect their attack, which was difficult, considering that Hitler and German High Command anticipated the Allies' desire to open another front in the west.

In order to maximise their chances of confusing the Germans, the Allies commenced **Operation Bodyguard**, a series of operations designed to deceive the Germans into thinking the Allies were attacking a location other than the beaches of Normandy on 6 June 1944. Part of this was Operation Fortitude, which was further divided into Fortitude North and South. Fortitude North involved a 'fake' build-up of troops, tanks and resources around Edinburgh, which suggested to the Nazis that the Allies intended to invade Norway. Fortitude South involved the same approach in the south of England, leading the Germans to conclude that the Allies were seeking to invade the port of Calais rather than the beaches of Normandy.

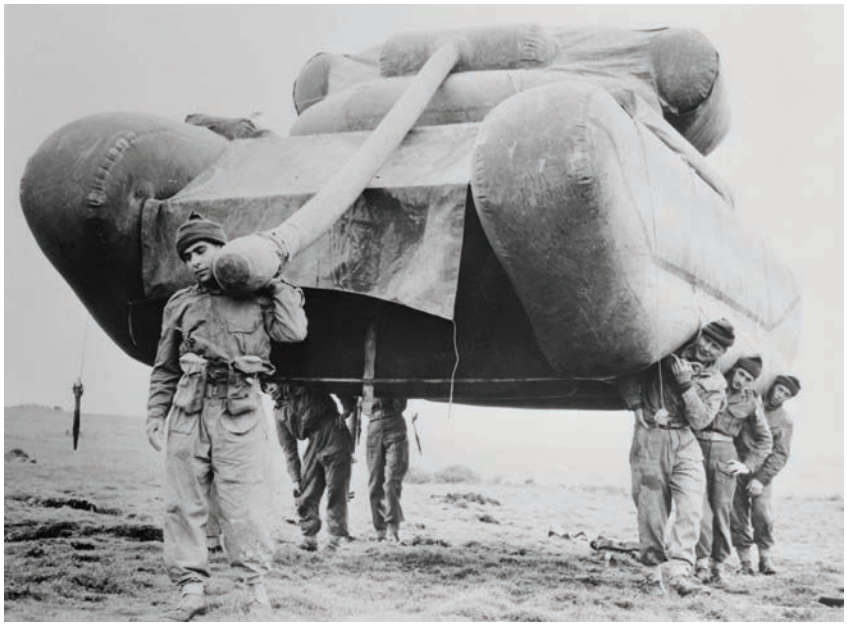


Figure 12.1 British soldiers moving an inflatable decoy tank

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Before **D-Day**, the Allied **disinformation** operations left the Germans with no real understanding of where the attack would land. They relied on the **Atlantic Wall** as a broad defensive measure, with Panzers stationed near Paris to respond to the location of the attack. Erwin Rommel wanted these situated closer to Normandy, but Hitler overruled him, and crucially left the Panzers far from the beaches, while ordering they were only to be relocated by his word alone. The defence of the coastline was further complicated by the fact that Axis forces in the area had been stripped of weapons and manpower, with the best units moved to the Eastern Front to combat the Soviet Union.

Over 300 000 (including navy) Commonwealth, American, Canadian and an array of forces from occupied countries prepared to launch. These forces had individual targets depending on which beach they disembarked at, or where they were deployed as a paratrooper. The beaches codenamed Utah, **Omaha**, Gold, Juno and Sword were targeted as landing sites along the French coastline of Normandy.

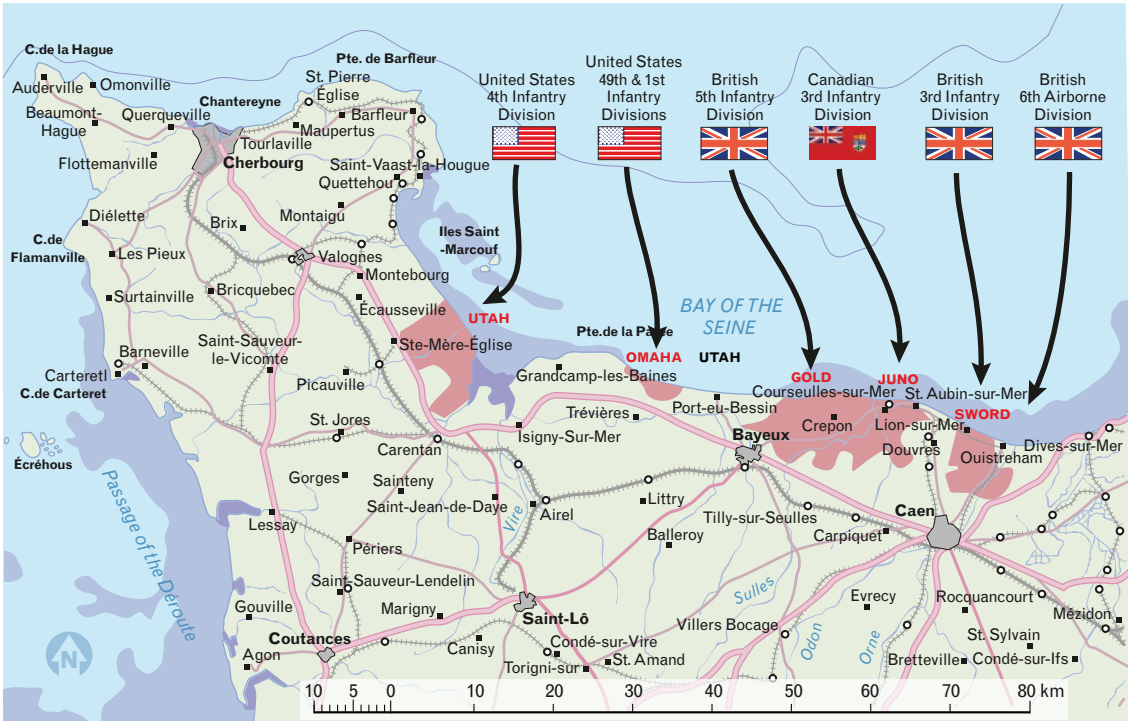


Figure 12.2 D-Day landings targeting specific beaches in France

On 6 June 1944, the invasion force left England. After spotting a gap in the weather from a weather station in Iceland, the Allies decided to risk the tides and swell. Fortunately for them, the Germans reached the opposite conclusion. General Erwin Rommel returned to Berlin to celebrate his wife's birthday after seeing German weather reports. The attack achieved its

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first objective: surprise. Although caught unaware, German resistance once the Allies were in sight was fierce, despite aerial and naval bombardments.

The D-Day campaigns are remembered in history as one of the greatest logistical achievements ever to unfold. Around 155 000 troops successfully disembarked or parachuted to engage the German forces in combat, against strong winds, large waves and vigorous defence. The Allies successfully gained a beachhead but failed to achieve any of their broader objectives for D-Day, which extended well beyond the beaches to French cities. The landings were a success, but the challenge of dislodging the Germans from France was still before the Allied forces.

Winters, R. *The D-Day Companion: Leading Historians Explore History's Greatest Amphibious Assault* (2009), Bloomsbury Publishing, New York, United States, p. 119 Source 12.1

By the time that June 6 had become a defining day in history, the Allies had managed to insert onto the continent of Europe over 155,000 men – 75,215 across the British and Canadian beaches, 57,500 across the American sector, and 23,000 by parachute and glider. Altogether, Montgomery had eight divisions and three armored brigades ashore despite tenacious German resistance. Moreover, Allied deception plans had been so successful that the Germans had barely begun to react to the invasion by the day's end. Only one German division, the Hitlerjügend, would arrive the next day. The Allies were well on the way to winning the battle of the build-up before it had begun. In the end, Overlord's success rested entirely on the success of Allied amphibious forces in securing the five bridgeheads, through which Allied armies and supplies could pour over the coming months.

Claim, support, question

- Make a **claim** (or thesis) about the success of the D-Day landings.
- Identify **support** for your claim – things you have researched, or know to support your claim.
- Ask a **question** related to your claim that you would need to research further.

12.2 Experiences of D-Day and the Normandy campaign

Depending on where a soldier was situated, they could have entirely different experiences of D-Day and the campaign which followed. All sources, however, tell the same story of the scope and sacrifice of the Allies as they attempted to gain a foothold in Europe.

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Source 12.2 **Beevor, A. *D-Day: The Battle for Normandy* (2009), Penguin, London, United Kingdom, pp. 27–8**

It took forty minutes to load the planes, for heavily burdened paratroopers needed help to get up the steps, almost like knights in armour trying to mount their horses … A sergeant mounted first to go to the front of the plane and the platoon commander last, as he would lead the way. The sergeant would bring up the rear so that he could act as 'pusher' to make sure that everyone had left and nobody had frozen. One trooper asked the sergeant if it was true that he had orders to shoot any man that refused to jump. 'That's the orders I've been given.' He said it so softly that everybody became quiet.



Figure 12.3 Paratroopers land on La Manche coast on 6 June 1944.



Figure 12.4 US troops of E Company wade ashore on Omaha Beach after disembarking from the USS *Samuel Chase*.

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A soldier in the 116th Infantry on the western part of Omaha beach; cited in Bowman, R. *Bloody Beaches* (2013), Pen and Sword, United Kingdom Source 12.3

As the ramp went down we were getting direct fire right into our craft, my three squad leaders in front and others were hit. Some men climbed over the side. Two sailors got hit. I got off in water only ankle deep. I tried to run but the water suddenly was up to my hips. I crawled to hide behind the steel beach obstacle. Bullets hit off of it and through my pack missing me. Others hit more of my men.

[I]f you slipped under the metal ramp you would be killed as it crashed down. In some places men leaped off and found the water over their heads. Many did not know how to swim at all. In desperation, the majority who fell into deep water dropped their weapons and wriggled out of their equipment to survive. Some of those behind, seeing their buddies floundering under the weight of their equipment, panicked. Many were hit in the water, good swimmers or not. Screams for help came from men hit and drowning under ponderous loads ... There were dead men floating in the water and there were live men acting dead, letting the tide take them in.

A soldier of the 1st Division wrote home describing the beach landing; cited in Beevor, A. *D-Day: The Battle for Normandy* (2009) Penguin, London, United Kingdom, p. 96 Source 12.4

I've never in all my life prayed so much ... It was awful. People dying all over the place – the wounded unable to move and being drowned by the incoming tide and boats burning madly as succeeding waves tried to get in … I've never seen so many brave men who did so much – many would go way back and try to gather in the wounded and themselves got killed.

Hastings, M. *Overlord: D-Day and the Battle for Normandy 1944* (2015), Pan Macmillan, London, United Kingdom, p. 315 Source 12.5

Sergeant Helmut Gunther, of 17th Panzer-grenadiers, each day watched his company of the reconnaissance battalion whittled away without hope of replacements: Hahnel, who was killed by small-arms fire in their first battle; Heinrich, his veteran chess partner, who died on the Carentan road; Dobler, who took over a platoon when its commander was killed and was shot in the head as he jumped from the ditch to lead a counter-attack. All these old friends and many more were gone: 'I used to think – "What a poor pig I am, fighting here with my back to the wall".' Yet Gunther's self-pity was mixed with astonishment that the survivors stood the strain and the losses so well, and fought on. He was astounded that the Americans did not break through their line in early July.

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Figure 12.5 The scope of the D-Day Operation at Omaha beach. Barrage balloons keep watch overhead for German aircraft while scores of ships unload men and materials for the next phase of the campaign.

Source questions

1. How difficult was landing on the beach during D-Day? Provide quotes from the sources as evidence of your conclusion.
2. Outline the information that can be extracted from Figure 12.5.
3. Would you describe the D-Day campaign as effective? Explain why/why not.

12.3 Breakout

Allied losses on the beaches were relatively light. An estimated 2500 died on D-Day, although this could have been much more severe. Rommel had stated that the first 24 hours of the campaign would be decisive. Poor air **reconnaissance**, blocked radar and poor communications hindered the Germans, as well as their belief that the weather prevented an attack. The Allied disinformation campaign had successfully fooled the Nazis.

Some historians place the blame for the Allied success at Normandy on Hitler, who did not give either of his Field Marshals (von Rundstedt or Rommel) greater ability to make decisions. Despite Rommel's protests, the XII SS Panzer Division lay near Paris waiting for orders to deploy – orders that did not come while Hitler was asleep. Whether this would have any impact on the prevention of the landings is debatable, as the inability of the Nazis to control the air limited the Panzers' ability to travel along roads. When they did, they became easy targets for Hurricanes and Mustangs overhead, as Rommel himself found out when strafed by a plane while traversing a French road.

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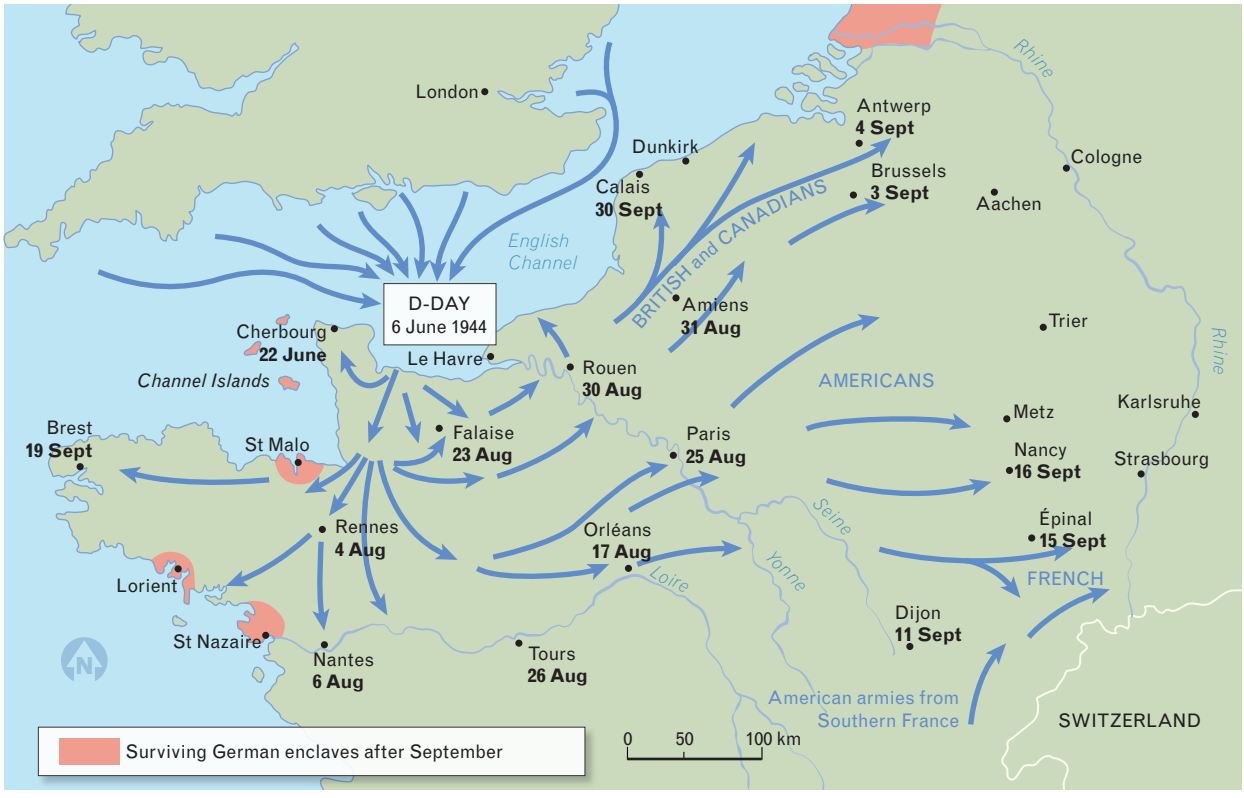


Figure 12.6 Allied attacks from England and into France

The deceptions from Operation Bodyguard led the Nazis to believe that even when the Normandy attacks began, they were simply a diversion for a larger attack at Calais. By the time this view changed, the Allies created a beachhead and were progressing to the next phase of their attack. This is not to say that the Germans fought poorly. Depleted by troops transferred to the Eastern Front, the Axis forces still resisted bravely. The city of Caen was targeted to be captured by Montgomery on the first day – this would not occur for months. Villers Bocage was the scene of a Tiger tank attack which inflicted horrendous damage on British Sherman tanks – conducted by *one* Tiger only. The XII SS Panzer fought valiantly and violently on numerous occasions, particularly against the Canadians. Fierce battles were fought around Carentan, St Lo, and all the way to the seaport of Cherbourg. The Axis were skilled at fighting in the hedgerows of France while the Allies were on a steep learning curve. At numerous times, Allied leaders questioned the commitment or courage of their units when faced with resistance from the Germans. This was all done despite naval bombardments and the Germans' thin resources and a lack of air power.

D-Day led to one of the larger Allied movements with the attempted encirclement of the **Falaise Pocket** – the US forces moving south under General **Omar Bradley** created a pincer with the Allied forces finally

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moving past Caen. As the Axis forces desperately streamed through the Falaise Gap, Allied aircraft mercilessly bombed and strafed the retreating forces. The encirclement was completed on 21 August 1944, trapping 50 000 Germans inside, who surrendered. While a success, the number of trapped soldiers could have been double with greater tactical aggression by the Allied generals.

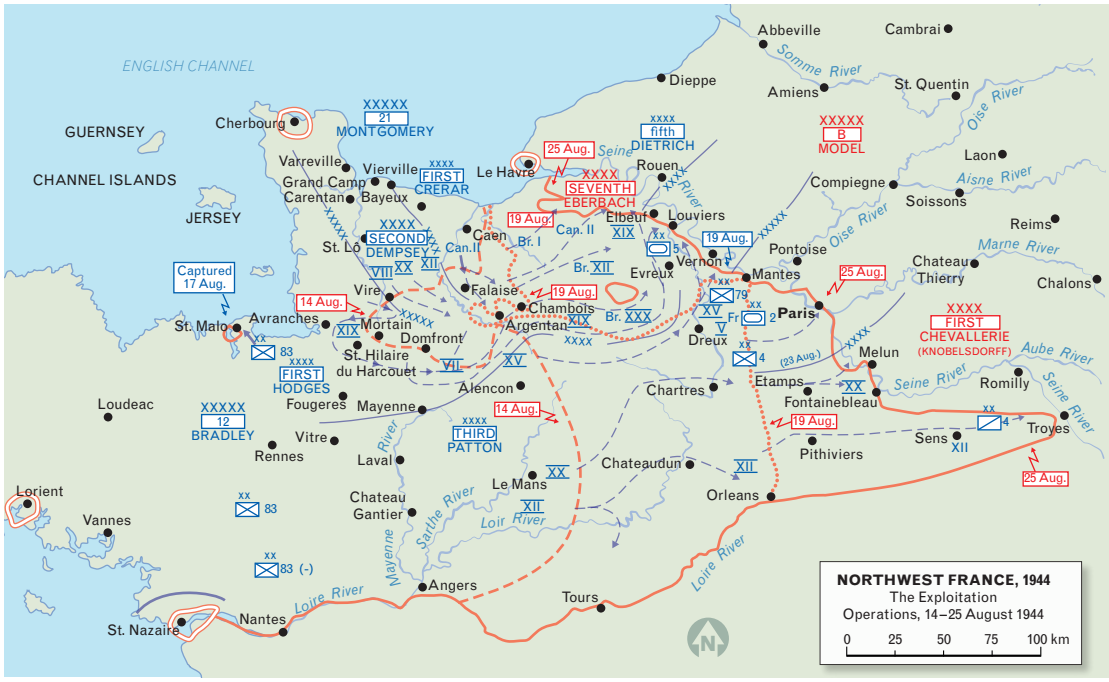


Figure 12.7 The Falaise Pocket, with the retreating German forces and the pincers of the Allied movements

At the end of July 1944, more than one million Allied combat and support troops had arrived in France. Fighting continued with no sign of a peace, despite the Wehrmacht progressively being pushed towards its own soil. The Atlantic Wall was breached and Hitler's 'Fortress Europe' mentality was no longer credible. German troops shifted tactics and fought a mobile war as they attempted to cause damage while retreating. By September 1944, the Allied leaders were filled with confidence the war would soon be over. While their confidence was high, troops struggled with the realities of combat, including the death of friends and fatigue. The Allies continued their march towards Germany but at great cost.

Source 12.6 **Hastings, M. *Overlord: D-Day and the Battle for Normandy 1944* (2015), Pan Macmillan, London, United Kingdom, p. 317**

It had become brutally apparent to every man in First Army that service in an infantry unit was an almost certain sentence to death or wounds. The top sergeant in Corporal George Small's anti-aircraft battalion routinely

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threatened jesters: 'One more crack like that and you'll find yourself in the infantry'. The unfortunate 90th Division suffered replacement of 150 per cent of its officers and over 100 per cent of enlisted men in its first six weeks in action. Typical tank casualty figures showed that in June alone, the 712th Battalion lost 21 out of 74 in 16 days of action, the 746th 44 out of 51 in 23 days, the 747th 41 out of 61 in 10 days. In July, the 712th lost 21 out of 68 in 16 days, the 756th 51 out of 91 in 29 days. Temporary or permanent losses from 'battle fatigue' had reached an alarming 10,000 men since D-Day …

12.4 Operation Market Garden

Despite the successes on D-Day, and in eventually rolling back the Germans from France, not all Allied operations were successful. For the Allied commanders, warfare which involved such intricate use of air, naval and ground forces was a new experience with a steep learning curve. Montgomery's experiences fighting the Axis forces in the deserts of Africa were valuable, but the scope of conflict in Europe was gigantic. At times, like the Falaise Pocket, the Allies were too cautious. At other times, they were too aggressive and suffered heavy losses as a result – one such campaign was Operation Market Garden.

Market Garden was devised to gain control of ports across Belgium and the Netherlands. The Allies encountered a logistical problem as they expanded their territorial control away from the beaches of Normandy. While the beaches proved adequate for delivering troops, the huge supplies could only be provided by deep-water ports at which Allied ships could dock. As a temporary measure to combat this, artificial ports called **Mulberry** A and Mulberry B were constructed at Omaha Beach, but this was still not enough, especially as Mulberry A was destroyed in a storm. Attempts to capture Cherbourg fared poorly, with the Germans sabotaging the port to prevent Allied use. With these setbacks, Montgomery was forced to set his sights on targets further afield.

Market Garden was launched on 17 September, with 35 000 paratroopers dropped over the Netherlands in the biggest airborne operation in history. Their objectives were key bridges, canals, or strategic targets, such as Arnhem, or the bridge over the Maas River. The Allies were acting under the impression that German forces were withdrawing from the area in the face of further attacks. But this was far from the truth. The 9th and 10th SS Panzer Divisions were nearby conducting repairs, and aggressively responded to the outgunned airborne divisions' arrival. Bad weather further hindered the troops as they were forced to fight to their objectives after being dropped far away from them. With radio communications ineffective, paratroopers sought to secure and hold key targets against overwhelming German forces

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Figure 12.8 An American supply truck crosses Mulberry A onto Omaha Beach in Normandy, June 1944.

while they awaited relief by rapidly advancing Allied troops. But again, planning did not match the reality, as German resistance slowed the advance of the main army, forcing the airborne divisions to hold objectives with no relief in sight and ammunition running out. When they surrendered on 27 September, the Germans took 6000 prisoners, while over half the 35 000 dropped soldiers became casualties.

The failure of Market Garden delivered the first major German success since D-Day, but, more importantly, it allowed for the consolidation of the Reich's forces around Aachen and the Scheldt Estuary. This decision would haunt the Allies, as the Germans held the Belgian coastline for several months, delaying the opening of the Belgian port of Antwerp until late November and, in turn, further preventing Allied resources from arriving.

Source 12.7 **Hastings, M. *Armageddon: The Battle for Germany 1944–45* (2015), Pan Macmillan, London, England, p. 70**

There is little doubt that the resources employed upon Market Garden should instead have been devoted to the far less glamorous task of clearing the approaches to Antwerp, which occupied a large part of Montgomery's forces for two months.

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Beevor, A. *Arnhem – The Battle for the Bridges – 1944* (2018), Penguin, London, United Kingdom, p. 364 Source 12.8

In fact the fundamental concept of Operation Market Garden defied military logic because it made no allowance for anything to go wrong, nor for the enemy's likely reactions. The most obvious response would have been for the Germans to blow up the bridges at Nijmegen, and it was only Model's own defiance of military logic which allowed Market Garden its sole hope of success. All the other deficiencies which emerged, such as bad communications and lack of ground–air liaison, simply compounded the central problem. In short, the whole operation ignored the old rule that no plan survives contact with the enemy. Such hubris always seems to provoke Murphy's law.

Jeffson, J. *Operation Market Garden: Ultra Intelligence Ignored* (2002), Pickle Partners Publishing, Sevenoaks, United Kingdom Source 12.9

Operation Market Garden did not fail as the result of a major intelligence error, as stated by numerous authors. Information was available that clearly showed that the German situation in Holland changed dramatically from 4 September to 17 September. While the intelligence community, as a whole, was slow to respond to this change, it nevertheless did. Their warnings though came after the decision to execute the operation had already been made, and the senior commanders were unwilling to cancel the operation.

Headlines

If you were to write a headline which captured the most important aspects to remember, what would these headlines be?

- Compose four headlines for different time frames during this chapter, such as before D-Day, after D-Day, following the breakout and after Operation Market Garden.
- Reflect – how would these headlines demonstrate the changing nature of the war for Germany, including the support and morale of its army and civilians?

12.5 Liberation of Paris

Initially, Allied Commander-in-Chief **Dwight Eisenhower** planned to bypass the French capital despite the French 2nd Armoured Division forming in London in 1943 with the sole purpose of liberating Paris. Eisenhower saw the conflict in Paris as unnecessary, and one which



Video 12.3
Liberation of Paris (00:58)

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distracted from his drive to end the war. If Germany fell to the Allies, so would Paris without a shot being fired. However, Charles de Gaulle convinced Eisenhower that without a strong Allied intervention, the threat of France becoming Communist post-war was very real.

In typical fashion, Hitler ordered that Paris be defended until the last man, or until it was 'a field of ruins'. Explosives were laid throughout the city and under landmarks, but German commander General Dietrich von Choltitz never gave the order for the detonation of the chargers. Despite not destroying Paris, German forces listened to their Führer and fought, even as they were overwhelmed. In the end, 20 000 soldiers surrendered, freeing Paris after five years of occupation. Allied soldiers were enthusiastically met by French civilians who besieged them with flowers, kisses and wine. The Vichy government formally surrendered, and Charles de Gaulle assumed command of Free France.



Figure 12.9 Allied troops liberate Paris, August 1944.

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Figure 12.10 Soldiers of the 4th US Infantry Division drive to see the Eiffel Tower in Paris, after the capital's liberation, 25 August 1944.

Kershaw, I. *The End: The Defiance and Destruction of Hitler's Germany* (2012), Penguin, London, United Kingdom, pp. 59–60 Source 12.10

The Allies had shown hesitation and made costly errors at crucial junctures. But the Germans had made their own major contribution to prolonging the war. For Germany, despite fierce and courageous fighting by the outnumbered forces of the Wehrmacht, the collapse in France had come as a dreadful shock. Within a little over three months, the Allies had liberated France and reached Germany's borders. Soon, it was evident, the war would be fought on German soil. Under Model's able command, however, they had survived the critical, but not fatal, defeat near Falaise. Since then, they had surprised the Allies with the tenacity, even fanaticism, of their fighting. Though outnumbered, they had shown energy and initiative. And they had some technically superior weaponry and tanks – if in insufficient quantities. The main weakness was not on the ground, but in the air, where the Luftwaffe was increasingly paralysed and Allied superiority immense.

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12.6 The Battle of the Bulge: the Ardennes offensive

By late 1944, the Allied forces renewed their advance across a broad front, although at a much slower pace. The retreating German forces had convinced the Allied High Command it was only a matter of time before the Third Reich crumbled completely. They did not anticipate a ferocious counteroffensive by the Wehrmacht, coordinated by a desperate Hitler. It was a gamble he was willing to take, in the hope the Wehrmacht could drive towards Antwerp and cut the Allied supply lines. For Hitler, this would provide him with a stronger position from which to negotiate peace with the United States and Britain.



Figure 12.11 Map of the German successes during the Ardennes offensive

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As with many battles fought on the Eastern Front, the German commanders did not like Hitler's plan. They realised a force penetrating through the Ardennes became exposed to encirclement from the north and south. Unlike the offensive of 1940, the Germans did not have the manpower or Panzers to resist Allied flanking manoeuvres. Secondly, the Allies achieved air superiority in Europe, and had introduced new 'tank-busting' fighter planes in the Hawker Typhoon and Mustang. By the time of the Battle of the Bulge, Axis forces were a shadow of their former glory, cobbled together from remnants of units that had endured horrific losses of soldiers, weaponry, tanks and materials. Despite this, the Germans targeted the weaker forces stationed in the Ardennes region for their assault – weaker because the Allied commanders believed an attack in the Ardennes highly unlikely.

German radio silence convinced the Allies no attack was coming, when in reality, 18 divisions moved into position. When the assault came on 16 December 1944, the Allies were taken by surprise and unable to provide much initial resistance, especially due to poor weather conditions which limited the use of planes. The Germans advanced nearly 100 km in two days before their fuel supplies prevented them going further. Allied forces were trapped behind German lines, such as at Bastogne, where they bravely withstood an 82-day siege before relief came from the forces of US General **George S. Patton**.



Figure 12.12 Allied forces fighting near Bastogne

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Figure 12.13 A tank is dug out of the snow at Amonines, Belgium, on the northern flank of the 'Battle of the Bulge', 1945.

While the fog and cloud initially provided the Wehrmacht with cover from the Allied air force, the weather cleared after a week. This left the Germans exposed, and they were ruthlessly hammered by Allied planes. The gap in the Allied line swiftly closed as the attacked floundered without any airpower. German casualties are difficult to estimate, but range between 60 000 to 100 000 men, while the Allies lost 90 000. Like the Eastern Front, the Allies could replace the manpower and tanks lost in the battle, while the Third Reich could not. The Battle of the Bulge marked the end of the Luftwaffe's abilities to conduct effective missions. Hitler used the last of their forces to support the Ardennes offensive, but heavy losses rendered them useless thereafter.

After the failure of the Battle of the Bulge, the end of the war was within clear sight. On the Eastern Front, the Soviet Union launched a massive attack on the remaining German forces. In the south, Italy surrendered, and other allies like Hungary and Romania followed soon after. Germany now stood alone as the Allies marched towards its soil, without an army or air force capable of resisting.

Source 12.11 Hastings, M. *Armageddon: The Battle for Germany 1944–45* (2015), Pan Macmillan, London, England, p. 226

It was ironic, therefore, that the next phase of the titanic struggle for Germany – Hitler's winter offensive in the Ardennes – inflicted a severe check upon the advance of the Allies on the Western Front and gravely weakened the Wehrmacht's ability to resist the Russians in the east.

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Beevor, A. *Ardennes 1944* (2016), Penguin, London, United Kingdom, p. 369 Source 12.12

The surprise and ruthlessness of Hitler's Ardennes offensive had brought the terrifying brutality of the eastern front to the west. But, as with the Japanese invasion of China in 1937 and the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, the shock of total warfare did not achieve the universal panic and collapse expected. It provoked instead a critical mass of desperate resistance, a bloody-minded determination to fight on even when surrounded. When German formations attacked, screaming and whistling, isolated companies defended key villages against overwhelming odds. Their sacrifice bought the time needed to bring in reinforcements, and this was their vital contribution to the destruction of Hitler's dream. Perhaps the German leadership's greatest mistake in the Ardennes offensive was to have misjudged the soldiers of an army they had affected to despise.

Summary

- The Allied campaign on mainland Europe began with the Normandy landings on D-Day, 6 June 1944.
- While this was the date of the attack, planning commenced months earlier. Part of this was a deception campaign to convince the Nazis the attack was focused on the port of Calais, or into Norway.
- Once the Allies secured the beaches, they struggled to achieve their objectives in the face of strong German resistance.
- Aerial superiority, and the fact the Wehrmacht was now facing Soviet assaults in the east, meant they pushed the Nazi forces back towards the German border.
- Several operations did not go as planned, with great losses, such as Operation Market Garden to capture bridges across Belgium and the Netherlands.
- Hitler ordered a desperate attack to halt the Allied forces in the west, potentially allowing him to sue for peace from a stronger position.
- The Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes Forest – where the war in France started – saw the Third Reich gain great territory before being eventually halted by the heroism of soldiers and control of the air.
- The Allies resumed their march towards Berlin from the west, while the Soviet Union raced to the German capital from the east.

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Key personalities and terms

Personalities

By 1944, **Adolf Hitler** (1889–1945) spent most of his time at the Berghof in Berchtesgaden, southern Germany. The war had turned for the Nazis on both the Western and Eastern fronts, forcing Hitler to focus on desperate gambles to regain the initiative, whether at Kursk or in the Ardennes. However, the end was drawing closer, and within a year, Hitler committed suicide in his bunker in Berlin.



Figure 12.14 Adolf Hitler



Figure 12.15 Franklin Delano Roosevelt

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882–1945) was the 32nd President of the United States from 1933 to 1945. He led America through the Great Depression and the horror of the Pearl Harbor attack, which drew the United States into the war. Roosevelt was elected for a fourth term in 1944 but died while in office, March 1945.

General **Dwight Eisenhower** (1890–1969) was Commander-in-Chief of the Allied forces during the Normandy landings, and to the end of the war. He had not fought in World War I, but had overseen the invasion of North Africa and Sicily, which gave him the experience to command the Allied armies. After the war, Eisenhower became the 34th President of the United States and served as the Commander of NATO.



Figure 12.16 Dwight Eisenhower



Figure 12.17 George S. Patton

George S. Patton (1885–1945) was an American general who commanded forces in the Mediterranean, during the Allied landings at Normandy, and throughout the liberation of Europe from Nazism. Patton was highly successful and much loved by his troops, but created problems publicly due to his hard manner and offensive comments. In 1945, Patton broke his neck in a car accident and died shortly after.

General **Omar Bradley** (1893–1981) was an Allied military commander who fought in the North African campaign and commanded the invasion of Sicily. He played a key role in coordinating the Allied forces liberating Europe, with 1.3 million men in his command. He went on to command the deployment of troops during the Korean War, before retiring in 1953.



Figure 12.18 Omar Bradley

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Terms

Atlantic Wall: a series of German fortifications along the coastal areas of France, Belgium and Holland.

Beachhead: a military term describing the ability of an army to gain an area of control (on the beach in this example), from which they could then deploy further troops.

D-Day: simply stands for 'Designated Day of attack', but has come to represent the day the Allies landed on the beaches of Normandy.

disinformation: false information deliberately provided to the enemy to ensure they make false assumptions about plans or troop movement.

Falaise Pocket/Gap: the name given to a massive encirclement of German forces after the D-Day landings of 1944.

Mulberry: a temporary harbour constructed by the Allies where they could deploy vital resources and supplies.

Omaha Beach: a famous beach in Normandy where the bloodiest fighting occurred.

Operation Bodyguard: the Allied deception operations to convince Germany the Normandy landings would come at a different location, such as Calais in France.

Operation Overlord: the Allied operation to invade the Normandy beaches.

Reconnaissance: observation of an area or forces in order to gain a tactical advantage.

Activities

Thinking historically

1. What elements of misdirection and misinformation did the Allies employ at D-Day?
2. How challenging was it for the Allied forces to break out from the Normandy coastline? What made it so difficult?
3. Describe Operation Market Garden and why it was a failure.
4. Discuss the importance of the Allies achieving superiority in the air.
5. Create a timeline with two columns. In the left column, track the Allied invasion by date, and on the right side, the Soviet invasion in the east (this can be updated after the next chapter).
6. Why would the Battle of the Bulge be described as 'Hitler's last gamble'?

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Circle of viewpoints

- Students divide into groups of four.
- Each student is assigned a 'viewpoint' – Adolf Hitler, French civilian, Allied soldier and a German soldier.
- Each student should consider the D-Day landings from their point of view, using the following prompts:
  - I am thinking of … from the point of view of …
  - I think this person would hold these opinions of D-Day …
  - One question I have about this point of view is …
- Students share their different points of view in the group of four.

Writing historically

1 Essay question: How significant were the Allied strategies to their victory in Europe?

- Create a clear thesis statement which addresses the question.
- On the left-hand side of a table, outline five Allied strategies you could discuss which were significant to their victory in Europe.
- On the right-hand side of the table, provide the evidence from sources to support your argument.

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13 Eastern Front offensives 1944–45

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- The Soviet counterattacks of 1944 and 1945
- Significance of the Soviet Union's conflicts to the outcome of the war in Europe

CHRONOLOGY

23 August 1943	Battle of Kursk is a victory for the Red Army
1 December 1943	The Tehran conference takes place between the Allies
21 June 1944	Operation Bagration launched
23 August 1944	Romania withdraws from the Axis alliance after a coup, following severe German losses to the Soviet Union forces
2 October 1944	Polish uprising crushed in Warsaw, Poland
26 October 1944	Bulgaria withdraws from the Axis
January 1945	The final push for Berlin is launched by the Red Army
4 February 1945	The Yalta conference between the Allies begins
13 February 1945	Remaining Hungarian and German units surrender in Hungary

13.1 Operation Bagration

Overy, R. *Why the Allies Won* (2006), Vintage Publishing, London, England, p. 122 Source 13.1

The drive to succeed in the battles in 1943 stemmed from violent emotions and a directed hatred. The stubbornness of Soviet resistance astonished German commanders; the ferocity of the confrontation led to barbarisms on both sides. The contest came to assume the character of that very struggle of nature which Hitler believed lay at the root of all human life, the survival of the fittest. The Soviet will to win, which emerged painfully from the wreckage of Soviet fortunes before Stalingrad, was not a mere abstraction but a spur to efforts that both sides, Soviet and German, would have thought impossible a year before. The Soviet people were the instrument of their own redemption from the depths of war.



Video 13.1
Hitler is doomed (01:14)

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The Tehran conference in November 1943 led to a commitment from the Allies to launch the D-Day landings in the spring of 1944. In exchange, the Soviet Union pledged to launch a new campaign in the east, which would follow the Allied landings. This attack was called Operation Bagration, or to Soviet General Zhukov, 'the sledgehammer'.

Figure 13.1 Zhukov coordinating Operation Bagration



Figure 13.2 Map of the Soviet invasion in eastern Europe

See, think, wonder

Create a three-columned table with the titles See, Think and Wonder.

1. List what can you **see** in Figure 13.2 in the first column. (I can see …)
2. Using this list, write down what these words make you **think** about. (I think …)
3. In the final column, create a list of ideas which may not directly be in the image, but you now **wonder** about? (I wonder …)

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The Soviet Union primarily wanted Operation Bagration to make decisive inroads into Belorussia (modern-day Belarus) and the Ukraine. This required the Red Army to confront Army Group Centre directly, but unlike earlier engagements, the advantage of resources and manpower had swung to the Soviet Union. The Red Army assembled 2.4 million troops and over 5000 tanks and aircraft. Further complicating Germany's defence, nearly 150 000 **partisans** fought throughout Belorussia, attacking supplies and committing the Wehrmacht forces elsewhere. The bulk of Army Group Centre's forces were situated in the south, believing this would be the key area of the Soviet attack. About 5000 tanks were available but only 600 were deployed in Belorussia to support the 800 000 soldiers. Of these tanks, many were damaged or low on fuel.



Figure 13.3 Soviet propaganda poster stating: 'Soviet land is completely cleared from German invaders!'

Poetically, the Soviet Union launched Operation Bagration on the same day Operation Barbarossa was launched – albeit three years later. By 23 June, the Red Army had driven through Army Group Centre's depleted forces and captured key cities like Minsk, where 100 000 German soldiers were encircled. Of the 25 divisions Army Group Centre had to resist the Red Army, 22 were destroyed with 400 000 causalities. Bagration saw 158 000 troops taken prisoner, many of whom were paraded through the streets of Moscow for propaganda. Brutality was common, as the Red Army sought revenge for the atrocities committed on their soil in 1941. Their greatest vengeance was the destruction of Army Group Centre, but the Soviets did sustain significant losses, with 180 000 killed or missing, and nearly 600 000 injured. Around 3000 tanks were destroyed and 800 planes lost. Despite this heavy toll, Soviet losses could be replaced, while the Wehrmacht's could not.

Historians evaluating the reasons for the Soviet victory during Operation Bagration have focused on different factors. Some historians believe the Reich had no real chance of effective resistance due to a shortage of planes, artillery and tanks. Issues with the way German forces were deployed suggest the Soviet deception campaigns fooled the Axis High Command into thinking the attack originated further south. However, even if these forces had been deployed directly in line with the bulk of the advancing Red Army, it is questionable whether even this was enough to save Army Group Centre.

Momentum was an important concept in the *Blitzkrieg* war, and the Russians were able to gain momentum with their newly constructed tanks (the T-34) and aircraft. Their forces could now communicate, as a result of US radios and telephone cabling, giving the Soviet Union the capacity to operate in a manner it could not during Operation Barbarossa. How much of the Soviet success was simply a correction of what should *not* have

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happened in 1941? The Soviet Union should have been better prepared, trained and equipped to fight the initial Nazi thrust, but it reacted poorly and was overrun. By August 1944, the situation had reversed, and now the Red Army moved towards Poland, and beyond that, Germany.

Source 13.2 **Roberts, G. *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939–1953* (2006), Yale University Press, United States, p. 202**

> The magnitude of the Soviet victory was largely a function of the weakened state of the Wehrmacht by mid-1944 and of the Red Army's decisive superiority in men and materiel, allowing the Soviets to plan and implement offensive action without fear of defeat or even a major counterattack by the Germans. The contribution of the western allies to Soviet successes on the Eastern Front was also a factor of growing importance in 1944. In his May Day statement Stalin paid tribute to 'the United States of America and Great Britain, who hold a front in Italy against the Germans and divert a considerable portion of the German forces from us, supply us with most valuable strategic raw materials and armaments, subject military objectives in Germany to systematic bombardment and thus undermine the latter's military strength'.

Source 13.3 **Shepherd, B.H. *Hitler's Soldiers: The German Army in the Third Reich* (2016), Yale University Press, United States, p. 446**

> The Soviets implemented an elaborate deception plan to convince the Germans that Konev's attack would come from the Stanislav sector north of the Carpathian foothills. Indeed, the Soviets had grown more adept at deception and secrecy in general. Among other things, their ability to attack anywhere along the line meant the Germans had to reckon with the possibility of attack anytime and anywhere. All this was happening as the Germans' intelligence effort, despite the ongoing efforts … to improve their operation, continued to dry up.

Source 13.4 **Harrison, R.W. *Operation Bagration, 23 June – 29 August 1944: The Rout of the German Forces in Belorussia* (2016), Helion & Company, United Kingdom, p. 22**

> The victory in Belorussia had a great influence on events in Western Europe. All the reserves that the German–Fascist command still had at its disposal were transferred to the Soviet–German front, while in the West the Germans had to make do with whatever forces they had at hand. This enabled the Anglo-American forces, which had landed in northern France, to solidly consolidate on its shore and prepare an offensive for the purpose of capturing all French and Belgian territory.

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Figure 13.4 Abandoned German vehicles in Belarus

Source questions

1. Using Source 13.2 as evidence, explain the changes to Soviet combat abilities which brought success during Operation Bagration.
2. Source 13.4 contains bias. What evidence is there of this?
3. Assess the reasons for the Soviet Union's victories, as provided in Figure 13.4 and Sources 13.2–13.4.

13.2 The Warsaw Uprising

Operation Bagration caused the German forces to retreat into Poland to the city of Warsaw. Believing they were soon to be liberated, Polish resistance groups (one pro-British, one pro-Soviet) sought to liberate themselves with the support of the oncoming Red Army. On 1 August 1944, the Polish Home Army (pro-British) engaged the German forces in savage street fighting, and gained control of sectors of the city. While Stalin's forces watched from the far side of the Vistula River, the Allies began high-risk airdrops of weapons and food to support the desperate Poles. Still, the Soviet forces watched and, without support, the Polish resistance was crushed by German forces by 2 October. Warsaw was heavily bombed by the Luftwaffe, with over three-quarters of the city destroyed. Around 16 000 Polish resistance fighters died, many by mass execution.

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Figure 13.5 The Warsaw uprising by the Polish Home Army aimed to liberate Warsaw from Nazi Germany, 1944.

There are differing views on whether Stalin deliberately halted the attack on Warsaw to allow the annihilation of the Polish Home Army.

Source 13.5 **Beevor, A. *The Second World War* (2012), Weidenfeld & Nicolson, Great Britain, p. 611**

> [Stalin] claimed that a German counter-attack had pushed his forces back from the city. This was partly true, but, more to the point after the great advances of Operation Bagration, the Red Army lead formations were exhausted and short of fuel, and their vehicles were in desperate need of repair. In any case, Stalin soon showed that he had little intention of providing real help, nor of aiding the airlift. No Allied aircraft were to be allowed to land on Soviet-occupied territory, although one flight of American bombers was given permission to refuel. Soviet aircraft did drop some weapons to the insurgents, but without parachutes, which rendered them useless. Stalin simply wanted a couple of examples of assistance to ward off any criticism later …

Source 13.6 **Roberts, G. *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939–1953* (2006), Yale University Press, United States, p. 206**

> This picture of consistent, if ill-fated, Soviet efforts to capture Warsaw in summer 1944 runs completely counter to an alternative scenario: that when the Red Army reached the Vistula it deliberately halted its offensive

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operations to allow the Germans time to crush a popular uprising in the city … Among the defects of the alternative scenario is that the Red Army did not at any stage voluntarily slacken its efforts to capture Warsaw. Nor does it take into account the Wehrmacht's recovery after its expulsion from Belorussia or the difficulties the Red Army faced in continuing its prolonged offensive. As to Stalin's motives and calculations, the idea that he stood idly by while the Germans finished off the Polish Home Army is way off the mark.

Stop – look – listen

Consider the following claim: Stalin deliberately allowed the uprising in Warsaw to be butchered, as it made controlling Poland easier for the Soviet Union.

- **Stop:** Be clear about the different sides of this claim. Create a list which defines the facts and uncertainties of the claim.
- **Look:** Find your sources. Where will you look? Consider obvious and non-obvious places.
- **Listen:** Hear what the sources tell you with an open mind. After reading a variety of sources, what conclusions can be drawn on this claim?

13.3 1945

By the end of 1944, the Soviet offensive on the Eastern Front had been extremely successful. An attack on Romania triggered a coup against German military forces, and led to the Romanians joining the Allied war effort. Likewise, an extended siege against the Hungarian capital of Budapest resulted in Hungary's removal from the war. Germany's allies crumbled, and both Soviet and Allied forces marched towards Berlin. The cost had been devastating to the armies and civilians involved, and to the environment which suffered from the scorched earth policy of Hitler. After fighting a continual retreat across the Soviet Union for nearly two years, German forces were weary and undersupplied. It is a misconception to think the Red Army's advance was easy. Despite tired troops and insufficient resources, the Wehrmacht fought a brilliant tactical retreat, inflicting huge losses against Soviet forces. But casualties were not enough to stop the Red Army, as it bravely continued its advance.

After a period of relative calm, the Soviet forces began their final push for Berlin in January 1945, starting with the occupation of the remnants of Warsaw on 17 January. Soviet advances to the eastern border of Germany were relatively easy. They pushed a 400-mile front from Danzig in the north to Vienna in the south – but the main objective was the Oder River, 65 km

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Figure 13.6 Soviet advances in 1944 and 1945

east of Berlin. Here, Hitler desperately tried to draft more men to fight in an improvised army led by Heinrich Himmler, but they stood little chance, if indeed the manpower could be found.

13.4 Yalta

The Soviet occupation of countries across eastern Europe posed a problem for the Allies, which also merged into wider political issues regarding the end of the war. Should countries occupied by Germany but liberated by the

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Soviet Union fall under Soviet control or return to their old governments or monarchs? A meeting was organised to address this question at Yalta in the Crimea, on 4 February 1945. It was attended by Prime Minister Winston Churchill of Britain, President Franklin D. Roosevelt of the United States, and Premier Joseph Stalin of the Soviet Union.

Britain and the United States were in a difficult situation. The Soviet offensives placed them closer to Berlin than the Allied forces moving from the west. This meant the likely final blow to Nazism would be dealt by the Red Army. It raised political challenges of how Germany was to be dealt with post-war, or even divided between the victors. Stalin had the upper hand in any negotiations. The Red Army had already conquered the countries of eastern Europe, and the Allies did not have the ability to remove Stalin, nor would they want another war to do so. Apart from vague assurances of 'democratic processes', Stalin gave nothing away about the fate of countries occupied by the Red Army.

An agreement on the division of Germany into different zones was organised. The Allies also secured a commitment by Stalin to enter the war against Japan in 'two or three months', following the defeat of Nazism. While this was a success, the biggest failure of the Allies was the ability to secure the freedom of Poland. Stalin was adamant that Poland remain under Soviet control, especially as the Germans had twice used it as an avenue to attack the Soviet Union. The United States and Britain conceded Poland. Considering that the **sovereignty** of Poland was the reason Great Britain and France went to war in 1939, many Poles felt betrayed, and public criticism of Roosevelt and Churchill was fierce. At Yalta, the division of Europe between the Communist Soviet Union and the democratic western states was drawn.



Figure 13.7 Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin sit in the courtyard of Livadia Palace during the Yalta conference.

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Summary

- On 21 June 1944, the Soviet Union launched a massive front of counterattacks on the remaining German forces. This was called Operation Bagration.
- The resulting battles saw huge casualties on both sides, but unlike the Soviet Union, the Wehrmacht had endured five years of fighting and could not afford to replace its lost soldiers, tanks, artillery or aircraft.
- The Germans were now fighting a war on three fronts: in the west, south and east.
- Despite these challenges, the Wehrmacht's defence inflicted heavy losses on the Soviet Union, in a war featuring brutality and atrocities.
- The Soviet Union took revenge for the crimes the Germans committed against its people in 1941 and 1942. The Soviets did not limit this to Germans, but were indiscriminate in their treatment of people they liberated, like the Polish.
- For the Allies, this posed a difficult question: after all, would Stalin return governments to these countries or seek to keep them under Soviet control?
- The challenges of the Cold War period following World War II were created in 1944.

Terms

Partisan: a member of a secret group or force, who resist the country which has occupied their own.

Sovereignty: the authority of a country to govern itself.

Activities

Thinking historically

1. Describe the scope of Operation Bagration.
2. Who was the key Soviet general overseeing Operation Bagration, and what role did he play?
3. What was significant about the Warsaw uprising?
4. Outline reasons why the Soviet counterattack featured extreme brutality.
5. Do you believe the Soviet Union was interested in liberating countries so they were free, or so they could be controlled by the Communist government? Justify your response.

Tug of war

- Consider the contributions of the Allied nations in both the east and west to the outcome of World War II.
- Create a table of evidence for and against the argument in the next bullet point – these are the 'tugs'.
- Using the 'tugs', conclude whether the Western Front or the Eastern Front was more important to the outcome of World War II.

Writing historically

- Using information from the tug of war exercise, compose a response to the following question: Which front, east or west, made the greatest contribution to ending the war in Europe?

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14 The end of World War II

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- The final defeat of Nazism in 1944 and 1945
- Hitler's death and the surrender of Germany

CHRONOLOGY

15 January 1945	Hitler retreats to his bunker in Berlin
January 1945	The final push towards Berlin launched by the Red Army
4 February 1945	The Allies meet at Yalta to discuss the end of the war
7 March 1945	The Battle of Remagen takes place
27 March 1945	The Allies delay their advance, allowing the Red Army to begin their final assault of Germany
29 March 1945	The Soviet Union enters Austria
12 April 1945	President Roosevelt dies, to be replaced by President Truman
16 April 1945	Soviets fight the Battle of Seelow Heights, 90 km east of Berlin
19 April 1945	The Red Army reaches the outskirts of Berlin
29 to 30 April 1945	Hitler marries Eva Braun, dictates his will and commits suicide with his new bride
2 May 1945	Soviet troops gain control of the Reichstag building in Berlin
7 May 1945	Germany unconditionally surrenders
8 May 1945	Victory in Europe Day celebrated across the world

After Yalta, the Allies pushed towards Berlin with renewed vigour. The end of the war was in sight, but the retreating German forces still fought with deadly intent. As they retreated, the Germans destroyed key bridges, delaying Allied advances which had to either repair or rebuild the crossings. However, intelligence gathered by reconnaissance flights identified one remaining intact bridge into Germany, which gave the Allies on the Western Front a potential crucial entry point.

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14.1 The bridge at Remagen

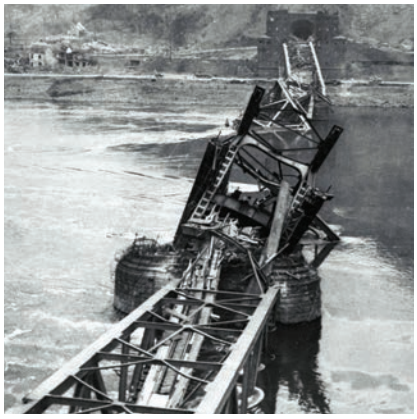


Figure 14.1 The bridge at Remagen after some Allied troops crossed

This potential crossing was the Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen. It provided the Allies with a way to avoid the heavy defences of the Siegfried Line, while also establishing a vital pathway into the Third Reich.

As the Allies arrived, the Germans finalised plans to detonate the bridge with explosive charges set beneath. Whether they were rushed by the Allied attack, or simply did not place the explosives correctly, after the initial explosion the bridge remained standing. Allied engineers rushed out to secure cables, while troops risked a crossing to prevent a German counterattack. Miraculously, the bridge remained standing while Allied forces poured across, and even while the Germans desperately sought to bomb it with their exhausted Luftwaffe. Hitler ordered V2 rocket strikes, which missed and struck in the village, and naval detonators to swim downriver where they were captured or killed. The bridge stood – until collapsing suddenly during repairs 10 days later, killing 24 men. While the bombing had been intense, historical research reveals it was the weight of extra planking, and Allied crossings, which ultimately brought down the bridge.

The Allied forces forged four other crossing points into Germany, including paratrooper drops across the Rhine River. German defences continued to crumble as the United States' 1st and 9th Armies cut off the Ruhr industrial region of Germany, encircling approximately 325 000 troops. As the Allied armies commanded by Generals Montgomery and Patton raced, quite literally, towards Berlin, the Soviet Red Army began its encirclement of the German capital.

Commander-in-Chief of the Allied forces, General Eisenhower, was wary about this development. His advice, from General Bradley, indicated that joining the attack on Berlin would lead to over 100 000 casualties. These were soldiers the Allies did not have to lose if they put aside their pride and let the Soviet forces finish the campaign. Eisenhower was worried that Allied forces had already passed the zones of occupation agreed upon at Yalta with Stalin, so he called the halt order. Generals Montgomery and Patton were furious, but Eisenhower remained adamant his focus was on military objectives rather than political ones.

The way the war ended has led to much historical debate on 'what could have been' if the Allies reached Berlin before the Russians. This is highly speculative, as there is no evidence the Allied forces crossing the Elbe River could have reached Berlin in time. Soviet forces had assaulted Berlin and surrounds since 11 January 1945, for little gain. What reason was there to believe the Allied advance would have made easier progress closing on Berlin? Churchill was adamant that the United States and Britain should control as much of West Germany as possible, due to his distrust of Stalin. Eisenhower

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stubbornly resisted, leaving the Soviet and US forces to eventually meet and share a handshake near Torgau, on the Elbe River, rather than in Berlin.



Figure 14.2 25 April 1945: Soviet and American troops meet at the River Elbe, near Torgau in Germany, marking an important step in the end of World War II in Europe.

14.2 Assault on Berlin

The war on the Eastern Front was a war of extermination. The brutality of Operation Barbarossa was replicated by the Soviet forces as they returned to Berlin. Both sides committed atrocities, whether killing civilians, murdering surrendered soldiers, or not caring for prisoners of war. The treatment of conquered territories was particularly poor, with rape and theft common. As the Red Army swept through Poland and Germany, the barbaric nature of the invading forces caused an exodus of civilians from east to west. Civilians hoped to escape suffering, while Wehrmacht soldiers saw surrendering to the Allied forces in the west a better option than surrendering to the Soviet forces. But for those trapped in Berlin, they were exposed to the full fury of Soviet revenge.

Video 14.2
Charge toward Berlin (01:29)

Beevor, A. *Berlin: The Downfall: 1945* (2010), Penguin, London, United Kingdom, p. 410 Source 14.1

One doctor deduced that out of approximately 100,000 women raped in Berlin, some 10,000 died as a result, mostly from suicide. The death rate was thought to be much higher among the 1.4 million who had suffered in East Prussia, Pomerania and Silesia. Altogether at least 2 million German women are thought to have been raped, and a substantial minority, if not a majority, appear to have suffered multiple rapes.

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Figure 14.3 German refugees flee from Aachen to a camp in Belgium, 19 October 1944.

Circle of viewpoints

- Students divide into groups of four.
- Each student is assigned a 'viewpoint' – a German soldier, a Hitler youth member about to fight, a Soviet soldier, or Adolf Hitler.
- Each student should consider the Battle for Berlin, using the following prompts:
  - I am thinking of … from the point of view of …
  - I think this person would hold these opinions of the Battle for Berlin …
  - One question I have about this point of view is …
- Students share their different points of view in the group of four.

The final Soviet attack leading to the fall of Berlin began on 16 April 1945. The Germans still resisted, conscripting **Hitler Youth** members to fight, but this was futile as the Red Army gained control of the city. In his bunker, Hitler dictated his last will and testament, married **Eva Braun** and committed suicide on 30 April 1945.

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Figure 14.4 A German plane lying behind the ruins of the Reichstag



Figure 14.5 The Red Army armour column passes by the Brandenburg Gate, Berlin, 1945.

14.3 The death of Hitler

Kershaw, I. *Hitler* (2010), Penguin, Great Britain, pp. 821–3 Source 14.2

[Hitler] started to dictate his last will and testament. He began with a brief Private **Testament**. He referred first to his marriage to Eva Braun, and her decision to come to Berlin and die at his side. He disposed of his possessions to the party – or, should it no longer exist, to the state; he still hoped his collection of paintings would go to a gallery in Linz; and he appointed Martin Bormann as executor to see that relatives and his long-serving staff had some reward for their support … In the second part of his Testament, Hitler went through the charade of nominating a successor government for what was left of the Reich … The new head of state and head of the armed forces was Grand Admiral Dönitz … Significantly, however, Dönitz was not to inherit the title of Führer. Instead, the title of Reich President, dropped in 1934 on Hindenburg's death, was reinvented.

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Source 14.3 **Toland, J. *Hitler: The Definitive Biography* (1992), Anchor, New York, United States, p. 888**

> The Hitlers sat together on a couch in their suite. Behind them was the bare space where the portrait of Frederick had hung. Eva was the first to die – by poison. At about 3:30 P.M. Hitler picked up his 7.65-caliber Walther pistol … He put the pistol barrel to his right temple and pulled the trigger.



Figure 14.6 The room of the Führerbunker where Adolf and Eva Hitler committed suicide

Source questions

1. What insights are revealed in these sources about Hitler's final days?
2. Discuss what is significant about Hitler not naming Admiral Dönitz *Führer* (Source 14.2).



Figure 14.7 Red Army soldiers raising the Soviet flag over the Reichstag in Berlin, 30 April 1945

The bodies of Eva and **Adolf Hitler** were wrapped in a blanket and removed from the Führerbunker. In a nearby garden, they were doused in oil and set alight. Despite his appointment as Chancellor of the Reich, Joseph Goebbels and his wife committed suicide shortly after, killing their children too. Recent historical research suggests Martin Bormann died while attempting to flee Berlin, while Speer and Göring were arrested and tried in Nuremberg. Heinrich Himmler was arrested, but suicided by cyanide capsule before he could be questioned by Allied intelligence. The thousand-year Reich was in ruins, but it still took until 2 May before the city of Berlin surrendered, and it was not until 7 May that unconditional surrender was offered by Grand Admiral **Karl Dönitz** in Rheims, France.

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Beevor, A. *Berlin: The Downfall: 1945* (2010), Penguin, London, United Kingdom, p. 431 Source 14.4

Hitler's corpse was not the only one which lacked an identifiable grave. Countless victims of the battle – soldiers on both sides as well as civilians – had been buried by bombs and shells. Each year around 1,000 bodies from 1945 are still being found along the Seelow Heights, in the silent pine forests south of the city and on construction sites in the new capital of a reunited Germany. The senseless slaughter which resulted from Hitler's outrageous vanity utterly belies Speer's regret that history should emphasize 'terminal events'. The incompetence, the frenzied refusal to accept reality and the inhumanity of the Nazi regime were revealed all too clearly in its passing.

Shirer, W. *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (1960), Simon & Schuster, New York, United States, p. 1021 Source 14.5

In a little red schoolhouse at Reims, where Eisenhower had made his headquarters, Germany surrendered unconditionally at 2:41 on the morning of May 7, 1945. The capitulation was signed for the Allies by General Walter Bedell Smith, with General Ivan Susloparov affixing his signature as witness for Russia and General François Sevez for France. Admiral Friedeburg and General Jodl signed for Germany. Jodl asked permission to say a word and it was granted. 'With this signature the German people and the German Armed Forces are, for better or worse, delivered into the hands of the victors … In this hour I can only express the hope that the victor will treat them with generosity.' There was no response from the Allied side.

After five years of fighting on mainland Europe, the end of World War II had arrived. Much of Europe lay in ruins, including some of its greatest cities. But the end of the war in Europe was not the end of the world war. Even as celebrations occurred at Germany's surrender, the Allies were considering their next step in resolving the conflict in the Pacific. This would see the United States use the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by August 1945. VE Day (Victory in Europe Day) had come, but VJ Day (Victory over Japan Day) was still some way, and some lives, off.

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Figure 14.8 Celebration broke out across Europe, the Americas and Commonwealth countries in honour of VE Day – Victory in Europe.



Figure 14.9 Aerial view of the destruction of Berlin

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Summary

- Despite the Third Reich crumbling on three fronts, the Allies still faced stiff resistance, particularly from dedicated Nazi units.
- Germany was in a state of upheaval, with severe bombing and occupying forces leading to mass refugee movement across the country, generally from east to west.
- Whether soldiers or civilians, Germans hoped to find more favourable treatment from the Allied forces than from the ruthless Red Army.
- From his bunker, Hitler watched the destruction, before marrying Eva Braun, and committing suicide on 30 April 1945.
- In his will, Hitler appointed Admiral Dönitz as Germany's leader following his death.
- The Soviet forces allegedly found Hitler's body when they occupied Berlin following Grand Admiral Dönitz's unconditional surrender of the remaining German forces.
- For their part, the Allies did not advance upon Berlin but met the Soviet forces on the River Elbe.
- The war was over at horrific cost. The question now was what to do with a continent annihilated by war and a country which bore the responsibility of numerous atrocities, including the Holocaust.

Key personalities and terms

Personalities

Eva Braun/Hitler (1912–1945) was an assistant to Hitler's photographer, Heinrich Hoffman, before she began an intimate relationship with Adolf Hitler. She led a difficult life as the hidden lover of the Führer, always in the background but never publicly acknowledged. Eva Braun lived with Hitler at Berchtesgaden before following him to the bunker in Berlin where she committed suicide by cyanide following their marriage.



Figure 14.10 Eva Braun/Hitler



Figure 14.11 Adolf Hitler

At the end of the war, **Adolf Hitler** (1889–1945) was a shadow of his former self. He was riddled with health problems such as flatulence, stomach pain, and an unidentified shaking condition evident in the final film footage of him. His mental state is difficult to ascertain. Until the end, he wanted Germany to fight. When he realised the end had come, he wrote his final testament, married Eva Braun and shot himself in the head.

Following Adolf Hitler's death, Admiral **Karl Dönitz** (1891–1980) assumed the role of President of Germany (not Führer). Dönitz had commanded the submarine fleet during World War II and avidly supported Nazism. To end the war, he sent General Alfred Jodl to surrender to the Allies. He was tried, convicted and imprisoned for 10 years following the war.



Figure 14.12 Karl Dönitz

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Terms

Hitler Youth: established in the 1920s, the Hitler Youth was an organisation for children which educated them in Nazi ideology while preparing them for a future war.

Testament: the last 'will' or wishes of a person that usually determines what will be inherited, and by whom.

Activities

Thinking historically

1. Why did the Wehrmacht destroy bridges across the rivers of Germany?
2. How challenging was the final Battle for Berlin for the Red Army? Why?
3. What date did Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun commit suicide?
4. Who was Karl Dönitz and what role did he play in Germany?
5. What did the Nazis' unconditional surrender mean?
6. Many conspiracy theories have arisen regarding Hitler escaping Berlin. Research the conditions of his death, and later treatment, which allowed for such conspiracy theories to develop.
7. How were German citizens treated by the invading Red Army in Berlin?

Connect, extend, challenge

- **Connect:** How are the ideas and information presented connected to what you already knew of the topic?
- **Extend:** What new ideas did you get that extended or pushed your thinking in new directions?
- **Challenge:** What is still challenging or confusing for you to get your mind around? What questions, wonderings or puzzles do you now have?

Writing historically

1. Compose a diary entry for Commander-in-Chief Eisenhower on why he decided not to push directly to Berlin, but to let the Red Army capture it instead.
2. Explain whether you believe capturing and trying Adolf Hitler would have brought a greater sense of conclusion to the war, and the end of Nazism.

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15 Twelve reasons the Allies won

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- Reasons for the Allied victory in World War II

There are a variety of theories as to why the Allies defeated Germany to win World War II. It is important to understand that these theories were often written with a clear bias, or motivation. For example, a Royal Air Force general might focus on the important contribution of the air force to the overall victory. An American soldier might identify with the Allied contribution in the west, while a Soviet soldier would speak of their victories in the east. This has led to a broad range of theories on why the war was won. It is up to each student of history to consider what they believe were the most important factors in the defeat of Germany. Following are 12 reasons in no order of importance.

15.1 Reason 1: Allied air power

After the Germans were unable to successfully remove Great Britain from the war, or defeat the Soviet Union with Operation Barbarossa, the Luftwaffe entered a period of steady decline. Slowing production from 1944, loss of aircraft and pilots, as well as the challenge of training new pilots, ensured the Allies obtained control of the skies. With this superiority, both the Allies in the west and the Soviet Union in the east were able to launch effective campaigns the Nazis could not resist. Germany's final counterattack in the Ardennes was only successful due to heavy fog preventing Allied planes from flying. When the fog cleared, the attack faltered. Likewise, Operation D-Day successfully landed upon the beaches of Normandy because of a lack of German aerial attacks. Air superiority working with infantry and tank divisions provided the means for the Allies to win the war.

The Allied bombing campaigns conducted by both Great Britain and the United States bear a controversial role in ending World War II. From 1944, **tactical bombing** played a key role in further depleting German

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production and therefore Germany's ability to wage war. However, prior to 1944, the impact of **strategic/area bombing** was small. Part of the challenge when considering the overall impact of Allied bombing campaigns to the war effort is the controversial nature of how the bombings targeted civilians. Germany did not surrender until Hitler's suicide, which leads to the conclusion that the bombing did not impact the morale of citizens. The only other reason for bombing was to reduce German production, which did occur from 1944 onwards, but only after the Allies moved from cities to tactical targets, made daylight raids, and focused on knocking out Germany's synthetic fuel plants. What role then did the bombing of cities have in the eventual victory?

The contribution of the air campaign must be considered in different stages – the ineffective nature of the initial Allied bombing in contrast to the effective bombing from 1944 onwards. The latter bombing played a key role in winning the war for the Allies, as did the ability to establish air superiority to launch effective campaigns and win battles.

Source 15.1 **A Luftwaffe pilot describes an engagement with the Allies; cited in Knoke, H. *I Flew for the Führer* (1953), Random House, London, England, p. 153**

It is a truly awe-inspiring spectacle which confronts us. There are approximately 1,000 of the heavy bombers flying eastwards along a wide frontage with a strong fighter escort … Against them we are forty aircraft.

Source 15.2 **Penrose, J. *D-Day, the Companion* (2017) Bloomsbury Publishing, London, England, p. 81**

Overlord's success and the eventual victory of the Western Powers in World War II was inconceivable without the great effort in the air.

Source 15.3 **Overy, R. *Why the Allies Won* (2006), Vintage Publishing, London, England, p. 156**

Did bombing help the Allies to win the war? The arguments began even before the war was over, when American and British technical intelligence teams scoured the bomb sites trying to decide what effect bombing had had on the enemy war effort. The air force commanders wanted the civilian investigators to confirm that if bombing had not quite won the war, it had at least made a major contribution to victory. The civilians, drawn in the main from academic or business backgrounds, were at best sceptical of air power claims, at worst hostile to bombing. Their concluding reports damned with faint praise: bombing had certainly contributed to undermining resistance in Germany in the last months of war, but until then it had done nothing to reverse the sharp upward trajectory of German

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production, and it had clearly not dented morale sufficiently to reduce production or produce revolution. It was estimated that Germany lost only 17 per cent of its production in 1944, which could hardly be regarded as critical. The view has persisted ever since that bombing was a strategic liability, a wasteful diversion of resources that might more fruitfully have been used building tanks or laying down ships.

15.2 Reason 2: Resources

Hitler and his commanders always knew Germany would not be able to sustain the war without capturing resources. World War I taught the Third Reich the value of a strong navy, after Great Britain placed a stranglehold around Germany through a naval blockade which slowly brought starvation of both food and resources. To combat this, Hitler pursued **autarky**, or self-sufficiency, and focused on the production of synthetic fuels – but the reality was that this would never be enough. Germany needed to capture and transport vital resources to sustain the war, such as the oil reserves of the Caucasus in the east.

In contrast to Germany's difficult position, the Allies had access to greater resources and manpower. Both Germany and Japan understood the potential production capacity of the United States prior to World War II, even if, at that stage, it was not directed towards war. When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941, the United States entered the war with the might of its resources focused on aiding its Allies and eventually joining the fight against Germany. This fact, combined with the continued resistance of the British Empire and the rapid technological development of the Soviet Union, ensured Germany fought three countries with access to greater stockpiles of resources.

Goldsmith, R. 'The Power of Victory: Munitions Output in World War II' (2006), *Military Affairs*, p. 69 Source 15.4

The cold figures … probably tell the story of this war in its essentials as well as extended discussion or more elaborate pictures: the initial disadvantage of the Western Allies; the surprising stand of the USSR; the rapid improvement in the United Nations' position in 1943; their decisive superiority over Nazi Germany in 1944 … They back to the full the thesis, dear to the economist's ear, that whatever may have saved the United Nations from defeat in the earlier stages of the conflict, what won the war for them in the end was their ability to produce more, and vastly more, munitions than the Axis.

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Source 15.5 **Speer, A. *Inside the Third Reich* (1997), Simon & Schuster, United States. p. 424**

> The war is over in the area of heavy industry and armaments … from now on the material preponderance of the enemy can no longer be compensated for by the bravery of our soldiers.



Figure 15.1 Assembly hangar in a German tank factory, 1940

Table 15.1 Production of weapons – Germany and the Soviet Union 1941–45

	German aircraft	Soviet aircraft	German tanks	Soviet tanks	German artillery	Soviet artillery
1941	11 776	15 735	5 200	6 590	7 000	42 300
1942	15 409	25 436	9 300	24 446	12 000	127 000
1943	28 807	34 900	19 800	24 089	27 000	130 000
1944	39 807	40 300	27 300	28 807	41 000	122 400
1945	7 540	20 900	–	15 400	–	62 000

Source: Overy, R. *Why the Allies Won* (2006), Vintage Publishing, London, England, p. 407.

15.3 Reason 3: Resource waste

Alongside the reason that the Third Reich lost the war due to a lack of resources is the idea that it self-inflicted harm due to poor resource management. Nazi Germany's leadership has long been viewed by historians as chaotic. As Führer, Hitler decided on policies which were implemented by his followers, often inner-circle Nazis. However, those in Hitler's inner

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circle were regularly in competition with each other to secure the Führer's favour, or expand their own power. Overlap existed between elements of the army, navy and air force, and the widespread duties of figures like Hermann Göring meant he had both too much control, and too little ability to see to all tasks.

During the war, Hitler fixated on superweapons, whether this was the **V1 and V2 rockets**, heavy tanks, or the **battleships *Bismarck*** and ***Tirpitz***. Overall, these technologies had limited impact on winning the war, but were favoured by Hitler. The V1 and V2 rockets, for example, were only ever used on civilians and not military objectives. There is no doubt that British civilians exposed to V1 and V2 attacks suffered horribly; however, their morale was not weakened to the point where England withdrew from the war. The *Tirpitz* and *Bismarck* were sunk, although they did significantly tie up Allied forces for a period of time. Likewise, the Tiger tank was fearsome to the Allied forces and could devastate other tanks on the battlefield, but it was also extremely expensive to make, took longer than other tanks, and used more resources in its construction. Some historians have argued that a greater focus on medium-sized tanks, which were quicker and cheaper to build, would have been more useful to the Germans on the Eastern Front.

The Nazis directed only a small amount of resources into aircraft carriers. The only real attempt was the *Graf Zeppelin*, which was laid down in 1938 but scrapped towards the end of the war. The Reich did not create an air force which could be launched from carriers, as high-ranking Nazi officials failed to recognise the need, or if they did, were incapable of developing a plan to implement their creation. Infighting between the branches of the armed forces, particularly true for Kriegsmarine Commander Admiral Erich Raeder and Luftwaffe Commander Hermann Göring, meant cooperation in planning was extremely limited.

Cornwell, J. *Hitler's Scientists: Science, War, and the Devil's Pact* (2003), Penguin, United States, p. 243 Source 15.6

> As the regime's power barons flexed their muscles and responded to what they believed to be the vision of the Führer, or allies close to the power centres, some aspects of science and technology were encouraged, some were oppressed and some flourished and exerted influence without encouragement. Hence the future of Germany's war technology and production depended on a regime that lacked a centralized executive capable of prioritizing the competing demands of labour and matériel.

15.4 Reason 4: Lend-Lease

American technology and resources transferred to both Great Britain and the Soviet Union played a vital role in allowing both countries to maintain their war effort. While this appears to be an easy assessment to make, the

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value of this contribution is a much more difficult judgement to assess. This is a result of political developments post-war when the USSR and the United States entered the Cold War period. The politics of this period ensured the Soviet Union was not willing to record the importance of American assistance; instead, it downplayed this contribution, and focused on the Soviet achievements leading to the defeat of the Nazis.

The Battle of the Atlantic, where US and British convoys were attacked by U-Boats, made supplying resources to the Soviet Union and Britain challenging. The port of Murmansk in the Soviet Union became a lifeline for the transportation of US resources, weapons and technology, under a program known as Lend-Lease. This program allowed for the delivery of supplies that did not need to be paid for immediately, and could eventually be paid for with either dollars or 'other considerations'.

Lend-Lease formed the backbone of Soviet industry, with recent statistics revealing 15–25% of all Soviet military goods were the result of Lend-Lease, and in some circumstances this figure rose to 50%. Key areas where the United States was able to assist Soviet industry included aviation fuel, clothing supplies, radios, communication devices and cabling, metals such as steel and aluminium, gunpowder and explosives. Apart from this, the United States sent 14 000 aircraft, over 40 000 jeeps, 375 000 trucks, 8000 tractors and more than 12 000 tanks.



Video 15.4
Land-lease
(00:52)



Figure 15.2 A trainload of American trucks arriving for Soviet troops in the USSR

Source 15.7 **Weeks, A. *Russia's Life-saver: Lend-Lease Aid to the U.S.S.R. in World War II* (2004), Lexington Books, United States, p. 135**

> [T]he fact that the Soviet Air Force could operate as efficiently as it did – thanks to the tons of shipped, US manufactured aviation gasoline – was unquestionably due to this vital Lend-Lease aid. Another cardinal example was the Lend-Lease shipments of steel and … nearly 350,000 tons of aluminium ... It composed the bulk of the aluminium that was used in the manufacture of Soviet aircraft at a time when aluminium production in the USSR had fallen critically short of demand.

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Marshal Zhukov in 1963; cited in Weeks, A. *Assured Victory: How 'Stalin the Great' Won the War, but Lost the Peace* (2011), ABC-CLIO, Westport, United States, p. 123 Source 15.8

When we entered the war we were still a backward country in the industrial sense … But, listen, one cannot deny that the Americans shipped over to us material without which we would not have equipped our armies held in reserve or have been able to continue the war … We did not have enough munitions, [and] how would we have been able to turn out all those tanks without the rolled steel sent by the Americans?



Figure 15.3 American planes at a supply depot in Iran, from where they were transported to the USSR

15.5 Reason 5: Logistics

Logistics in World War II allowed armies to move forward while remaining well supplied. They were vital to any army's ability to wage war, as evident at Stalingrad when the Luftwaffe could not maintain supply to its encircled troops. The key reason for the success of the D-Day landing was the Allied planning and preparation, with the mass coordination of men, boats and resources leading to a secure foundation to assault the Wehrmacht. After D-Day, the importance of logistics can be seen through the Allied construction of Mulberrys and maintenance of supply lines as the front extended towards Germany. No supplies meant the potential to lose battles – effective logistics management could therefore win the war.

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Source 15.9 **Hastings, M. *Overlord: D-Day and the Battle for Normandy 1944* (2015), Pan Macmillan, London, United Kingdom, pp. 21–2**

> [T]his was completed in a mere 17 weeks before the newly-revised date for D-Day ... Its accomplishment remains the greatest organizational achievement of the Second World War, a feat of staff-work that has dazzled history, a monument to the imagination and brilliance of thousands of British and American planners and logisticians which may never be surpassed in war.

15.6 Reason 6: The Führer's failures

Hitler's assumption of the position Commander-in-Chief of the German forces has led many historians to lay the defeat of Germany at his feet. However, this is a simplistic view which ignores the role of Hitler's generals in the decision-making process. Hitler was prone to rash judgements and trusting his 'gut' in the decision-making process – but it was these very same traits which delivered victory in the west during the first part of the war. When people look to explain why Germany lost the war in the east, Hitler's decisions are swiftly jumped upon.

The halt order outside of Moscow during Operation Barbarossa, the refusal to allow General Paulus to break out of the Stalingrad encirclement, even the decision to delay the battle of Kursk so that more tanks could be brought to the battle – these decisions demonstrate a failure of judgement on Hitler's part. But they also demonstrate the failures of the Wehrmacht commanders, who played a role in shaping these decisions, such as advising to halt outside Moscow while Ukraine could be consolidated. At Stalingrad, Hitler acted on advice from Göring and von Manstein that the Stalingrad pocket could be broken. At Kursk, Hitler was not to know the Soviet Union was aware of the plan for the salient, and after having been defeated in previous battles, it was prudent to resupply. World War II was not decided by a single halt order – however, it did turn on events like the choice to invade the Soviet Union in 1941. While not completely his fault, Hitler must take some credit for the poor choices of his 'gut' decisions, while he certainly bears the responsibility for the decision to invade the Soviet Union, especially while Britain was not yet defeated.

Source 15.10 **Overy, R. *Why the Allies Won* (2006), Vintage Publishing, London, England, p. 387**

> No one doubts that the war was ultimately Hitler's responsibility, or that Hitler made mistakes on a grand scale. In most postwar explanations of the outcome Hitler's failings stand at the head of the list. The story is a familiar one. German victories early in the war were the result of short, opportunistic campaigns against enemies who were weaker

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and isolated. In 1941 Hitler made the mistake of invading the Soviet Union in the belief that the tactics of 'lightning war' would bring victory in four months. In December 1941 Germany found herself at war with a combination of the three largest industrial economies outside Continental Europe, a war that Germany, allied to economically weak states, could never hope to win. Hitler's belief that a German superpower could tear up the political structure of Europe and western Asia and replace it with a Party-led authoritarian empire was always irrational and deluded.

15.7 Reason 7: Resistance on multiple fronts

Throughout the war, the Germans fought on several large fronts, especially after the launching of Operation Barbarossa. This was theoretically the lesson they should have learned from World War I, which they did initially aim to avoid through the Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. After 1941, the Wehrmacht faced a formidable alliance in the USSR, the United States and Britain, who united against the Nazis despite political differences. The Nazis controlled a vast territorial empire, but one with only limited security. The invasion of the Soviet Union was not complete in the east, Britain had survived aerial assault to remain in the war, and progress across Africa had been halted. Apart from land battles, Germany was fighting a war in the air to defend its cities from British bombing, and a sea war to limit Allied convoys and prevent a blockade like World War I. The reality was the Germans were stretched beyond their capabilities.

Historians speculate on the outcome of the war if Germany had not opened the Eastern Front against the Soviet Union. Would the Allies have breached the Atlantic Wall if the best of Germany's units still protected it? Would they have even landed if German fighters and bombers were able to hit targets moving across the English Channel? While all of this is speculative, it is evident the war would be completely different without the opening of the extra front in the Soviet Union. Combined with the impact of the Russian winter, the Soviet front was devastating to the Wehrmacht's drive for victory and led to its eventual defeat. Alone, Soviet forces destroyed or disabled an estimated 607 German divisions between 1941 and 1945.

Grechko, A. *Soviet Studies on the Second World War* (1976), USSR Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia, p. 12 Source 15.11

After this [Stalingrad] nobody could any longer doubt the ability to crush Nazi Germany singlehandedly.

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Source 15.12 **Kershaw, I. *The End: The Defiance and Destruction of Hitler's Germany* (2012), Penguin, London, United Kingdom, p. 17**

It was the beginning of the end for the Third Reich. By late July 1944, the D-Day landings of the western Allies that had taken place in Normandy on 6 June 1944 had been consolidated. Troops and arms were being shipped over to the Continent in ever greater numbers. Direct ground attack on the Reich itself was now in prospect. On the eastern front, the Red Army, in its massive offensive 'Operation Bagration', launched just over a fortnight after D-Day, had smashed through the defences of the Wehrmacht's Army Group Centre (an immense formation of 48 divisions, in four armies, and pivotally placed over a 700-kilometre stretch of the enormous front), inflicting huge losses, and had advanced more than 300 kilometres. To the south, Rome had fallen to the Allies and German troops were engaged in fierce rearguard fighting near Florence. Meanwhile, ever more German towns and cities were exposed to relentless devastation from the air. With resources and manpower stretched to the limit and hugely inferior to the combined might of the enemy, now forcing back the Wehrmacht from the east, west and south, the writing was on the wall for the Hitler regime.

Source 15.13 **Mawdsley, E. *World War II: A New History* (2009), Cambridge University Press, Great Britain, p. 394**

Westerners often ignore the 'other fronts' in the invasion campaigns of the summer and autumn of 1944. On the other hand, they exaggerate the importance of the Red Army and the Battle of Berlin in the climactic last four months of the war, and underestimate fighting elsewhere and the role of the British and American armies. Hitler's Reich proper was now enclosed in a tight ring on fronts, and the Allies mounted attacks from five directions.

15.8 Reason 8: A lack of quality allies

Germany's allies did not offer the support necessary to sustain a long battle. In the North African campaign, Italian troops became known (perhaps unjustly) for their lack of fighting capability, their poor morale and their willingness to surrender. They were not able to secure the southern front for Germany or offer meaningful assistance elsewhere, and Mussolini's removal forced Germany to defend Italy from Allied attacks. The primary focus of Japan's war was in the Pacific, but drawing the United States into the conflict left it exposed to continual attacks from the middle of 1942. Japan had not been willing to attack the Soviet Union, instead choosing to pursue its interests in the Asia–Pacific. This was a fateful decision, as it is unlikely the Soviet Union could have fought a war in both the east and the west – and of course, the United States might not have entered the war without the assault on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese.

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Neville, P. *Mussolini* (2004), Routledge, London, England, p. 162 Source 15.14

At no stage, however, in the four years to be examined in this chapter, was Fascist Italy able to replicate the victories of its Nazi German ally between 1939 and 1942. On land, on sea and in the air, the story was the same as Italian forces were successfully routed in Greece, North and East Africa, Russia and ultimately Italy itself. And much of this military catastrophe was attributed to the Duce himself, who fragmented Italian effort and dissipated Italian manpower over as many as five different fronts. As a military leader, Mussolini was a failure, not least because his expectations were totally unrealistic. Frequently, Italian troops fought bravely, but they were badly led, badly equipped and ultimately suffered poor morale when it became abundantly clear that Fascist rhetoric was no substitute for modern tanks, guns and aircraft. What equipment the Italians did possess was often more appropriate to the First World War than the Second.

15.9 Reason 9: Cohesion between Allied forces

The returning Allies demonstrated cohesion between the different elements of their forces – whether this was the countries involved, or the divisions between air, infantry, navy and bomber command. The initial German assault demonstrated the effectiveness of combined attacks, even if the objectives of the Panzers, or infantry, were not always united. For the Allies, it was important they replicate this unity of forces to counter the Axis threat.

Another aspect of cohesion was the ability of the Allies to unite leaders from different countries, many of whom had larger-than-life egos. The British were adamant that their efforts resisting the Nazis deserved figures in leadership roles, which resulted in Trafford Leigh-Mallory (air), Bertram Ramsay (sea) and Bernard Montgomery (land) given commands, under the overall leadership of Dwight Eisenhower. But there were still US generals, such as George Patton and Omar Bradley, who needed to be brought into the command structure. Patton was notorious for his on-the-spot decision-making, and willingness to counter orders from superiors, while Bradley was conservative and deeply respected by his men. These generals led the push to reach the German border and cross the Rhine River, supported by aircraft, and the logistic lines which spread across France.

Penrose, J. *D-Day, the Companion* (2017), Bloomsbury Publishing, London, England, p. 16 Source 15.15

The Allies had the best overall foundation for vanquishing Nazi Germany – a strong alliance and a goal from which the Alliance never wavered. In fact, the most significant lesson of the World War II campaign in Europe is likely to be the power that can be and was generated by a strong alliance which holds firmly to a mutually accepted goal.

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15.10 Reason 10: Disinformation/spying/breaking the Enigma code

Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union all conducted effective disinformation campaigns, although the impact of these is difficult to judge. This was most evident during D-Day – the Nazis believed there *was* an attack in Normandy, but as a result of disinformation, thought it was a diversionary assault for the main thrust at the port of Calais. Similarly, having correct information was vital to conducting effective warfare – the Russian counteroffensive at Kursk came about due to the Soviet Union's newfound ability to gather information on the Germans (through a captured engineer). As a result of knowledge and appropriate planning, the Soviet forces successfully resisted the German encirclement at Kursk and inflicted heavy losses. This can also be seen during Operation Market Garden when a lack of Allied information led to the underestimation of German forces, leading to heavy Allied losses. Information became the key to ensuring success in battle, while disinformation was essential to deceive the enemy.

Source 15.16 **Barbier, M. *D-day Deception: Operation Fortitude and the Normandy Invasion* (2009), Stackpole Military History Series, New York, United States of America, p. 195**

> Although one cannot deny the contribution of the Fortitude deception plan – both Fortitude North [an attack on Norway] and Fortitude South [attack on Calais] – to the Allied success in Normandy, one must not overemphasize its importance. The successful invasion resulted from a combination of factors, not from any one … By pinning down the 15th Army in the Pas de Calais, the deception plan made the Normandy battle easier for the Allied forces. Fortitude provided a useful contribution, but it was not, despite the opinion of the Allied leaders at the time, the determining factor in the Allied victory. In the final analysis [Fortitude's] impact was minimal. A re-examination of archival sources and recent scholarship suggests that, although the Allies successfully implemented the deception, it was not in fact as 'vital' to the Allied victory in Normandy as is often assumed. Moreover, the persistent tendency to exaggerate the operational effect of Fortitude on the German military performance at Normandy continues to draw attention away from other, technical-military reasons for German failures there.

The 'Enigma code' has been immortalised in myth and movies as a significant factor in shortening the war. During World War II, dedicated code-breakers, mathematicians and support staff worked to decipher the German Enigma code at **Bletchley Park** in England. There, **Alan Turing** built a device to decipher the code, which significantly contributed to the Allied ability to predict German attacks. Using a purpose-built computer, the codebreakers were able to predict where and when German U-Boats would strike. Some historians have estimated that their contribution to the war reduced its length

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by two to four years. While this may be an exaggeration, the Allied awareness of German U-Boat attacks on convoys significantly contributed to their ability to launch the D-Day invasion and progress towards Berlin.

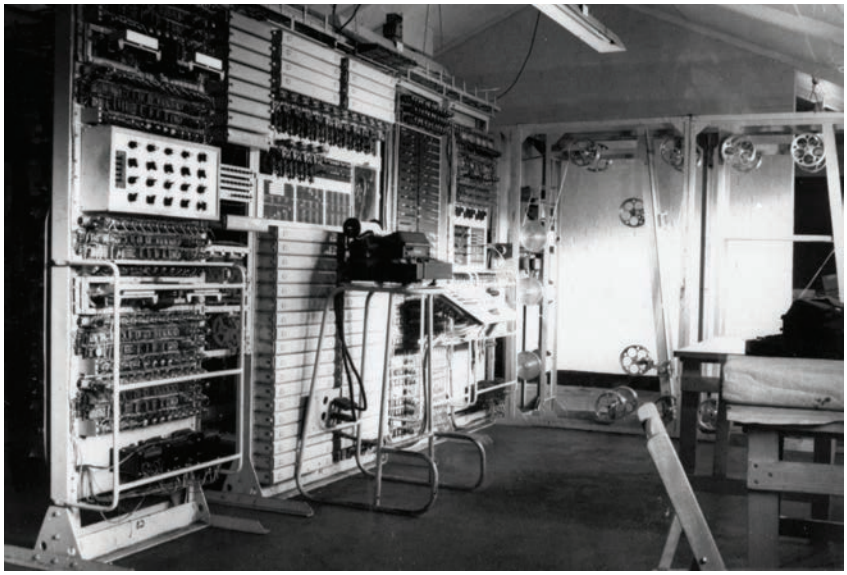


Figure 15.4 A photograph of Colossus, the first programmable computer at Bletchley Park in Buckinghamshire. It was used to crack the German Enigma code.

15.11 Reason 11: Nazi racial policy and treatment of civilians

There is no doubt that the brutal nature of the Nazi race policies, or the manner they treated civilians in occupied territories, would ever bring anything but resistance. This occurred through a combination of guerrilla resistance, attacks on supply depots, murder of soldiers or officers, or spying on the Allies. In contrast to this, Denmark had relatively low levels of resistance (until 1943) due to less extreme Nazi policies. Resistance groups led to a greater commitment of military resources within each conquered territory, rather than being deployed at the front lines. They also disrupted supply lines, preventing vital resources from reaching their target, or provided plans of troop movements and build-up to the Allies. If the Nazis had been kinder to occupied territories, many countries would have accepted their role as a liberator from the harshness of Soviet Communism.

Bevin, A. *How Hitler Could Have Won World War II* (2001), Random House, New York, United States, p. 81 Source 15.17

His most disastrous error was to go into the Soviet Union as a conqueror instead of a liberator. The Soviet people had suffered enormously at the hands of the Communist autocracy for two decades. Millions died when the Reds forced people off their land to create collective farms … The secret police punished any resistance with death or transportation to

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horrible prison Gulags in Siberia … Life for the ordinary Russian was drab, full of exhausting work, and dangerous. At the same time, the Soviet Union was an empire ruling over a collection of subjugated people who were violently opposed to the rule of [Stalin]. Vast numbers of these people would have risen in rebellion if Hitler's legions had entered with the promise of freedom and elimination of Soviet oppression …

Source 15.18 **Murray, W. & Millet, A.R. *A War to be Won: Fighting the Second World War* (2001), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., United States, p. 141**

The Wehrmacht's victories over the summer and autumn of 1941 obscured how high the odds were against Operation Barbarossa. By defining the war as Vernichtungskrieg (war of destruction), Hitler and the Wehrmacht ensured that the Soviet peoples would rally to Stalin's tyranny instead of enlisting in an effort to overthrow the Soviet regime. It was not that Russia was unconquerable; surely the conquest of 1917 indicates the opposite. But the campaign rested on the mistaken beliefs that the Wehrmacht could defeat the Red Army within five months and that once the Germans challenged Stalin, the apparently rotten political edifice of the Soviet Union would collapse. The conditions of the racial war … the extermination of the Jews, and the looting of the local population inevitably led to a strengthening of Soviet resistance to the invader.

15.12 Reason 12: Overcoming the steep learning curve

When the Germans launched their attacks on Poland, France and the Low Countries, they had already developed tactical superiority over their enemies. The Spanish Civil War allowed the Germans to test their tactics, in contrast to the British, French and American forces who used outdated tactics, weapons, armour and methods of engagement. France's fixation on Germany using the Schlieffen Plan is evidence of this.

Allied generals were extremely worried about the accountability of their units on D-Day. They believed their forces could only take on German units when they had a significant numerical advantage. Each engagement demonstrated to the Allied generals that numerical superiority was not always a decisive factor, and that tactics, morale and the individual units fighting each battle played a significant role in whether the objective was achieved. Some Allied units developed a reputation for courage in achieving their outcomes, while others worried their commanders to the extent they needed to be disbanded. But by early 1945, the Allied forces gained vital combat and tactical experience, and with their commanders able to understand the complex style of fighting involved in World War II, significant progress was made.

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Key personalities and terms

Personalities

Alan Turing (1912–1954) was a mathematician and computer scientist who worked from Bletchley Park to crack the Enigma code. Turing's contribution was not widely recognised due to his homosexuality.



Figure 15.5 Alan Turing

Terms

Autarky: a policy of a government or country where they can survive without external assistance or trade.

Battleship *Bismarck*: one of two gigantic battleships produced by Nazi Germany, which was sunk after an engagement with the HMS *Hood*, and a chase from the Allied navy.

Battleship *Tirpitz*: the second of the great German battleships conducted operations in the Atlantic before mines and constant British aerial bombing saw it sunk in a fjord of Norway.

Bletchley Park: the location of the massive effort to crack the Enigma code.

Strategic/Area bombing: using bombers to deploy bombs widely and indiscriminately. This form of bombing was used to demoralise populations through destruction and civilian deaths.

Tactical bombing: using bombers to target specific infrastructure, like a munitions factory or an airfield.

V1/V2 rockets: known as Hitler's miracle weapons, the V1 and V2 (vengeance weapons) were rockets tipped with explosives which were used on British cities.

Activities

Thinking historically

1 What was disinformation, and why was it important?
2 Discuss how important Hitler's personal failures were to losing the war.
3 Sequence the reasons, 1 to 12, with 1 being the key reason you believe the Allies won the war, and 12 being the weakest reason.
4 Explain why you sequenced the reasons in your selected order.

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I used to think … now I think …

- Before reading this topic, what did you believe were the core reasons for the Allies winning the war in Europe? Start your sentence with: I used to think …
- Describe how this view has changed. Start your sentence with: Now I think …

Writing historically

1 Essay question: Evaluate the reasons that Germany lost the war in Europe

- Create an essay scaffold for this question using the following table:

Overall thesis statement				
	Paragraph idea	**Topic sentence**	**Key facts**	**Historians' views**
Paragraph I				
Paragraph II				
Paragraph III				
Paragraph IV				
Paragraph V				

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16 The death throes of Nazism

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- The Nuremberg war trials

Germany lost World War II. After its initial success in France, Europe and parts of Africa, the Wehrmacht was crushed beneath the combined weight of Commonwealth, American and Soviet forces. Hitler's dreams of a thousand-year Reich lay in ruins, as did much of Germany. Its leaders were dead or attempting to flee, its bridges, historical buildings, industry and agriculture were devastated by bombing and warfare, and its people were scattered, starved, or dead. While some celebrated the end of the war, for others it was a continuation of their suffering – with starvation and persecution still rife. Homes were destroyed and millions of lives were lost. The mental and emotional cost was incalculable, and impacted the lives of soldiers and civilians on all sides for many years to come. The war had ended, but the memories remained.

16.1 The aftermath of the war

Many people took it upon themselves to issue justice – beating, shaming, shaving, or hanging signs around suspected Nazis' necks for public humiliation – similar to what the Nazis did to those in a relationship with a Jew. Others took vengeance on those who had informed against them, which perhaps led to the loss of loved ones. This social turmoil was immense, as the country of Germany struggled to come to terms with its actions during the war and rebuild its society. But these considerations were not the primary targets of the occupying forces. A gigantic challenge faced the Allies in the post-war period, apart from the widespread **denazification** of Germany. How do you deal with the leaders of a regime who committed such horrors and atrocities? More challenging still was the question, how do you deal with civilians who actively supported that regime?

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Source 16.1 **Beevor, A. *Berlin: The Downfall: 1945* (2010), Penguin, London, United Kingdom, p. 430**

> There was a general evasion of responsibility for what had happened. Members of the Nazi Party claimed that they had been forced to join. Only the leadership was guilty for anything that might have happened. Ordinary Germans were not. They had been 'belogen und betrogen' – 'deceived and betrayed'. Even German generals implied that they too had been victims of Nazism, for if Hitler had not interfered so disastrously in the way that they ran the war, then they would never have been defeated.

16.2 The Nuremberg trials

Video 16.3
Hermann Göring (01:05)



Figure 16.1 The defendants at the Nuremberg Nazi trials. Front row (*left to right*): Hermann Göring, Rudolf Hess, Joachim von Ribbentrop, General Wilhelm Keitel and SS General Ernst Kaltenbrunner. Back row: Admirals Karl Dönitz and Erich Raeder, Hitler Youth commander Baldur von Schirach, and Fritz Sauckel who controlled forced labour.

See, think, wonder

Create a three-columned table with the titles See, Think and Wonder.

1. List what you can **see** in Figure 16.1 in the first column. (I can see …)
2. Using this list, write down what these words make you **think** about. (I think …)
3. In the final column, create a list of ideas which may not directly be in the image, but you now **wonder** about? (I wonder …)

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Before the war's end, it was decided to bring the leading Nazis to trial for war crimes. Hitler, Goebbels and Himmler committed suicide before they could be placed in front of a judge, but 21 other high-ranking Nazis were tried at Nuremberg – a venue selected as it had been the home of National Socialist rallies. The trials lasted from November 1945 to October 1946, with the defendants facing four key charges for their role in the war.

Charter of the International Military Tribunal, 8 August 1945

Source 16.2

The **International Military Tribunal (IMT)** is composed of judges from the United States, Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union. Leading Nazi officials will be indicted and placed on trial in Nuremberg, Germany, under Article 6 of the IMT's Charter for the following crimes: (1) Conspiracy to commit charges 2, 3, and 4, which are listed here; (2) crimes against peace – defined as participation in the planning and waging of a war of aggression in violation of numerous international treaties; (3) war crimes – defined as violations of the internationally agreed upon rules for waging war; and (4) crimes against humanity – namely, murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, and other inhumane acts committed against any civilian population, before or during the war; or persecution on political, racial, or religious grounds in execution of or in connection with any crime within the jurisdiction of the Tribunal, whether or not in violation of domestic law of the country where perpetrated.

The legality of the Nuremberg trials – even to this day – is questionable. There was no **precedent** in history for putting those who waged aggressive war on trial. Likewise, there were serious questions about the definition of 'crimes against humanity', and whether all soldiers fighting in the war had committed these offences. Numerous atrocities are linked to the Soviet forces conquering German-occupied territories, and Germany itself. Nor could the western Allies escape allegations of alleged prisoner killings, rapes and death of civilians throughout the war – should they also be tried, or was this just a trial of the losers, by the victors?



Figure 16.2 Defendants at Nuremberg were kept in the local prison.

The Allies focused on officially and publicly ending Nazism, and appointed Justice **Robert Jackson** to lead the trials. From the start, the defendants were shown a film of the liberated concentration camps, which

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appeared to genuinely shock many. Hermann Göring was an exception, who stood by everything he had done and tried to force other prisoners to do the same. Only Baldur von Schirach and Albert Speer admitted to any remorse, although Speer's 'performance' as many historians describe it, has been challenged to this day, as a weight of evidence grows revealing Speer was aware of the treatment of Jews in concentration camps.

Many Germans relied upon a defence of 'following orders'. They argued that if they did not follow the orders they were given, they would have been killed. The Allied judges did not accept this argument and sentenced 12 prisoners to death by hanging, including Hermann Göring and Joachim von Ribbentrop. Rudolf Hess, Erich Raeder and Walther Funk were sentenced to life imprisonment. Karl Dönitz, Baldur von Schirach, Albert Speer and Konstantin von Neurath received prison sentences between 10 and 20 years. Three Germans were acquitted of their crimes: Hjalmar Schacht (the Nazi minister for Economics), Franz von Papen (German polititian) and Hans Fritzsche (head of press and radio). The hangings were conducted on 16 October 1946. Hermann Göring escaped the noose by committing suicide with cyanide while in prison.

While the trials brought an end to the leadership of Nazism, the United States was not interested in pursuing them further. Too many questions existed over where to draw the line on who was a criminal, or not – how many Nazis needed to be killed for their crimes, arrested, or cleared? Should Allied soldiers be tried for their crimes? Questions were raised over the fate of German scientists, who had actively contributed to the death of so many British civilians. Secretly, America had transported these scientists to the United States, such as **Wernher von Braun**, who had overseen the rocketry needed to propel the V1 and V2s. He went on to design the rockets to take men to the moon – whatever guilt he bore for his involvement with Nazism was never tested in a court of law.

Pursuing every criminal at Nuremberg was a political complication as well. Germany needed to set aside the old wounds and rebuild. The major reason for this was the simple fact the United States and Soviet Russia now entered the **Cold War**. The western zones of Germany needed to become a buffer against the spread of Communism into western Europe – continuing to put its citizens on trial would complicate this process.

Source 16.3 **Walker, A. *Nazi War Trials* (2005), Oldcastle Books, London, England, p. 152**

> In its attempts to re-establish the rule of law, the Nuremberg Trial, if not unflawed, proved a necessary and admirable conclusion to six years of brutal and terrible warfare.

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Futamura, M. *War Crimes Tribunals and Transitional Justice: The Tokyo Trial and the Nuremburg Legacy* (2007), Routledge, London, England, p. 1

Source 16.4

In 1945, the Allies … established the International Military Tribunal for the Trial of Major German War Criminals (the Nuremberg Tribunal) … Almost half a century later, the **United Nations**, with the United States again playing a leading role, created the ad hoc international criminal tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda (ICTs). The ICTs, both in their creation and operation, [were] strongly based on and influenced by the experience of the Nuremberg Tribunal and post-war Germany and 'lessons' learned from it.

Summary

- The International Military Tribunal was established to bring Nazis to justice.
- The trials initially took place in Nuremberg, although others did occur later.
- High-ranking Nazis were put on trial, including Hermann Göring, Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, Generals Keitel and Jodl, and various governors of occupied territories.
- The trial had no legal precedents and referred to laws created after the war occurred, which is against basic legal principles.
- Justice Robert Jackson led proceedings at Nuremberg.
- Göring's trial dominated news headlines, but after initial success in the witness stand, Göring was convicted by the weight of physical evidence against him.
- Twelve of those tried were sentenced to hang, while another seven were given significant periods in prison, including Admirals Raeder and Dönitz, Albert Speer and Rudolf Hess.
- There were three Germans who were acquitted of their crimes, including Hjalmar Schacht, the Nazi Minister for Economics, and Franz von Papen.
- Göring committed suicide before his hanging could be completed, while the other 11 met their end at the gallows.
- The Nuremberg trials set a precedent for international cases to follow, including the Tokyo Trials following the surrender of Japan.

Key personalities and terms

Personalities

Justice **Robert Jackson** (1892–1954) was a United States Supreme Court Judge who was appointed to the position of Chief Judge at the Nuremberg trials. After initially failing to challenge the intellect of Hermann Göring, he meticulously worked through documented evidence to prove the guilt of various Nazi Party members and military leaders.



Figure 16.3 Robert Jackson

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Figure 16.4 Wernher von Braun

Wernher von Braun (1912–1977) was the leading scientist working on the Nazi rocketry program, and responsible for creating the V1 and V2 rockets. After World War II, von Braun was secretly transferred to the United States to work on its missile program, and took a leading role in the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) quest to land men on the moon.

Terms

Cold War: a time of political hostility between the United States and the Communist Soviet Union, lasting from 1945 to 1990.

Denazification: the removal of all ideas associated with Nazism from German society.

International Military Tribunal (IMT): a body created to legally resolve the crimes committed by people during World War II.

Precedent: a legal term where a case can be decided based on the same situation occurring in a prior case.

United Nations: the post-war body established to replace the League of Nations, with the intention of promoting peace and prosperity.

Activities

Thinking historically

1. What was the purpose of the Nuremberg trials?
2. Identify the key charges created by the International Military Tribunal.
3. Research Justice Robert Jackson, and the role he played at the Nuremberg trials.
4. Research the top Nazis tried at Nuremberg and their role in Nazi Germany.
5. What reason did people have to be sceptical or concerned about the Nuremberg trials?

Claim, support, question

- Make a **claim** about whether the Nuremberg trials were an appropriate way to conclude the war, and bring Nazis to justice.
- Identify **support** for your claim – things you see and know that support your claim.
- Ask a **question** related to your claim that you would need to research.

Writing historically

1. Do you believe Allied war crimes should also have been tried at Nuremberg?
   - Write an editorial where you justify your response to this question.

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Glossary

Afrika Korps the name of the German forces sent to North Africa under Erwin Rommel.

Anschluss the uniting of Austria and Germany.

appeasement the name given to the policies of Britain and France where they gave in to Hitler's desires in the hope this would stop him from further aggression.

Ardennes Forest a densely forested area of rough terrain situated on the border between Belgium, France and Germany.

Aryan a 'pure' German race, usually featuring blonde hair and blue eyes.

Atlantic Wall a series of German fortifications along the coastal areas of France, Belgium and Holland.

Auschwitz–Birkenau Auschwitz was a concentration camp created in Poland in 1940, before additions in 1941 turned Auschwitz–Birkenau into a notorious death camp.

Autarky a policy of a government or country where they can survive without external assistance or trade.

auxiliary duties any duties which support the carrying out of a broader role, such as nurses supporting doctors, or secretaries supporting lawyers.

Battle of the Bloody Triangle a large tank battle in Ukraine, 1941.

battleship *Bismarck* one of two gigantic battleships produced by Nazi Germany, which was sunk after an engagement with the HMS *Hood*, and a chase from the Allied navy.

battleship *Tirpitz* the second of the great German battleships conducted operations in the Atlantic before mines and constant British aerial bombing saw it sunk in a fjord of Norway.

beachhead a military term describing the ability of an army to gain an area of control (on the beach in this example), from which they could then deploy further troops.

black market an 'underground' trading market for goods which are rationed or in short supply.

Bletchley Park the location of the massive effort to crack the Enigma code.

Blitzkrieg falsely attributed to Hitler, *Blitzkrieg* translates as 'lightning war'. It involved a rapid, concentrated attack with combined forces (infantry, air, tanks, artillery).

Bolshevism the Bolshevik Party overthrew the Russian government, later changing its name to the Communist Party.

British Expeditionary Force (BEF) the name of the British forces in western Europe on the outbreak of World War II.

Bund Deutscher Madel a branch of the Hitler Youth movement which targeted young women for indoctrination into Nazi ideology.

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Cold War a time of political hostility between the United States and the Communist Soviet Union, lasting from 1945 to 1990.

collaborative government a type of government which works with its occupier.

collective security countries cooperating in an alliance to bring security to each other.

Communism a type of government with no class structure where the 'state' owns everything and redistributes it to its people.

Condor Legion the Wehrmacht units who served in Spain during the Spanish Civil War.

conscientious objectors people that refused to participate in the war effort, or be conscripted, often due to personal or religious beliefs.

conscription a government policy which forces citizens (mostly men), usually aged between about 18 to 45, to join the armed forces of their country.

D-Day simply stands for 'Designated Day of attack', but has come to represent the day the Allies landed on the beaches of Normandy.

death camp a prison camp designed with the specific intention of killing its occupants.

decadence a term used loosely by politicians, intellectuals and writers to criticise those aspects of France they did not like. There was no common definition of decadence in France.

deep war a Soviet military tactic which favoured multiple attacks on a front line with mechanised units, rather than one 'war-ending' battle.

demilitarised zone an area which cannot have military forces within it.

denazification the removal of all ideas associated with Nazism from German society.

disinformation false information deliberately provided to the enemy to ensure they make false assumptions about plans or troop movement.

Dyle Plan the French plan to defend against a German attack by swiftly moving north and east to fight to protect Belgium and the Netherlands.

Einsatzgruppen Nazi death squads responsible for mass killings of enemy forces, civilians, or Jewish people, behind the main lines of the Wehrmacht forces.

Emergency Powers Act an act passed through the British parliament to allow the government to make laws during the war.

encircled a feature of the rapidly moving *Blitzkrieg*. Attacking units passed around both sides of the enemy before rejoining deep behind their lines. This created isolated 'pockets' of resistance which could be bombed or starved into surrender.

Enigma code an encrypted message which the Germans used to code communications.

Falaise Pocket/Gap the name given to a massive encirclement of German forces after the D-Day landings of 1944.

***Fall Blau* (Operation Blue)** the name for the German offensive in southern Russia which targeted the oilfields of the Caucasus.

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***Fall Gelb* (Plan Yellow)** the operational name given to Erich von Manstein's plan, which involved diversionary attacks on Belgium and the Maginot Line, while the main German force assaulted through the Ardennes region.

Fascism a political system based on a very powerful leader, state control and being extremely proud of country and race.

Fighter Command a command of the RAF formed in 1936 to provide greater coordination and control of fighter aircraft.

Final Solution the name used by Heinrich Himmler to describe the deliberate murder of Jewish people.

fog of war a term used to describe the chaos and confusion that occurs during war, or individual battles.

German High Command (OKH) the *Oberkommando des Heeres*, or German High Command of the Army, was responsible for the planning of Operation Barbarossa.

Gestapo *(Geheime Staatspolizei)* the Nazi secret police who enforced terror and repression on German society.

ghetto a closed-off area of a city where a minority group is forced.

ghost units the name given to General Erwin Rommel's units, as they advanced so fast they could appear and vanish, like ghosts.

Hitler Youth established in the 1920s, the Hitler Youth was an organisation for children which educated them in Nazi ideology while preparing them for a future war.

Holocaust the deliberate slaughter of Jewish people during World War II.

International Military Tribunal (IMT) a body created to legally resolve the crimes committed by people during World War II.

Kristallnacht the 'Night of Broken Glass' on 9 and 10 November 1936, when Nazis attacked the synagogues, homes, businesses and schools of Jewish people.

Kursk a salient in the Soviet line near the city of Kursk, which resulted in the largest tank battle of World War II.

labour camp a type of prison which forced occupants to work in harsh conditions, often leading to their death.

Lebensraum an ideology of Hitler which translates as 'living space' for the German people, particularly in eastern Europe.

Lend-Lease the Allied program for ensuring the Soviet Union remained in the war, by supplying it with resources and technology to resist the Germans.

logistics the organisation of troop movements, supplies, equipment and accommodation which must occur to support soldiers fighting on the front lines.

Luftwaffe the German Air Force under Hermann Göring.

Maginot Line over 1500 km of concrete fortifications, obstacles, tunnels and weapons installations running in a line along the French border.

Mein Kampf translating as 'My Struggle', *Mein Kampf* outlined Hitler's ideas on a variety of topics, from *Lebensraum* and the Jews to the future of Europe.

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Military Training Act an act which made it compulsory for men to undertake six months of training between the ages of 20 and 21.

Ministry of Information (MOI) the government department created on the outbreak of World War II, which dealt with publicity and propaganda.

Mulberry a temporary harbour constructed by the Allies where they could deploy vital resources and supplies.

Munich Agreement a 1938 agreement surrendering the Sudeten area of Czechoslovakia to Germany, while Hitler committed to peace thereafter.

National Service (Armed Forces) Act 1939 an act which allowed for conscription of men aged 18–41.

nationalism the promotion of the interests of one's own nation above all others.

Night of the Long Knives a purge conducted by the Nazis in 1934, to remove political threats and secure the support of the Reichswehr.

Non-Aggression Pact an agreement between two countries not to engage in any military action against each other.

Nuremberg Laws a series of anti-Semitic and racist German laws which passed in 1935.

Nuremberg trials the trials conducted post-war to bring high-ranking Nazis to justice.

Omaha Beach a famous beach in Normandy where the bloodiest fighting occurred.

Operation Bodyguard the Allied deception operations to convince Germany the Normandy landings would come at a different location, such as Calais in France.

Operation Dynamo the codename given to the evacuation at Dunkirk by British ships.

Operation Lightfoot the opening operation of Montgomery's plan to secure Egypt and drive the Axis forces back across North Africa.

Operation Overlord the Allied operation to invade the Normandy beaches.

Operation Sealion the name of the proposed German invasion of Britain.

Operation Uranus the name of the 1942 Soviet counterattack which encircled the German 6th Army in Stalingrad.

partisan a member of a secret group or force, who resist the country which has occupied their own.

Phoney War the six months following the fall of Poland during which none of the British, French or Germans fought.

plebiscite a vote by all citizens of a country to decide an important issue, such as a constitutional change.

Polish Guarantee the statement made by the British that if Germany attacked Poland, the English would declare war.

precedent a legal term where a case can be decided based on the same situation occurring in a prior case.

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Rasputitsa a period of heavy rain which made Russian roads impossible to travel.

reconnaissance observation of an area or forces in order to gain a tactical advantage.

Red Army the name for the military forces of the Soviet Union.

Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda the German ministry created in 1933 which ensured all elements of the media delivered a pro-Nazi message.

Reichswehr the name of the German army from the end of the war in 1919 to 1935, when it became the Wehrmacht.

Royal Air Force (RAF) the RAF was formed during World War I, and would be the primary defender against the Luftwaffe during the Battle of Britain and the Blitz.

Schlieffen Plan the plan Germany used during World War I. It involved a rapid attack on France through Belgium and the Netherlands, before moving south to Paris.

***Schutzstaffel* (SS)** initially founded in 1925 as Hitler's bodyguard, the SS became the elite of Nazi followers, and undertook duties such as fighting in the armed forces, surveillance, enforcing racial policies, or controlling the concentration camps.

scorched earth a policy of destroying everything as an enemy advances, in order to deprive them of resources or infrastructure.

Sickle Cut the name given to the German tactics which isolated French forces as they moved to defend Belgium and the Netherlands.

Siegfried Line over 630 km of German defensive fortifications built opposite the Maginot Line in the 1930s.

Social Darwinism theories applying Charles Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest to human society and politics.

sovereignty the authority of a country to govern itself.

strategic/area bombing using bombers to deploy bombs widely and indiscriminately. This form of bombing was used to demoralise populations through destruction and civilian deaths.

Stresa Front Italy, Britain and France met at the small town of Stresa in 1935 to declare they were united in their opposition to German rearmament. Their unity was soon abandoned.

Sudetenland Czech territory on the German/Czechoslovakian border where German-speaking people lived.

Suez Canal a man-made waterway constructed in 1869 through Egypt, between the Mediterranean and Red Seas.

T-34 a plain but effective Soviet tank, which combined speed, defence and firepower.

tactical bombing using bombers to target specific infrastructure, like a munitions factory or an airfield.

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testament the last 'will' or wishes of a person that usually determines what will be inherited, and by whom.

Third Reich the official name in Germany for the period during which the Nazi Party ruled.

Treachery Act this introduced the death penalty for spying, or imprisonment for lesser crimes.

Treaty of Berlin a treaty which committed Russia and Germany to remain neutral if either were to be attacked by another country.

Treaty of Rapallo a treaty negotiated between Russia and Germany, where both countries dropped their claims to territory in the east of Europe, and committed to positive relations.

unconditional surrender a form of surrender where one side admits complete defeat to the other. This differs from 'conditional surrender' where one side negotiates their surrender, and generally gains more favourable conditions.

United Nations the post-war body established to replace the League of Nations, with the intention of promoting peace and prosperity.

V1/V2 rockets known as Hitler's miracle weapons, the V1 and V2 (vengeance weapons) were rockets tipped with explosives which were used on British cities.

Vichy France the government which controlled France under German occupation.

Waffen SS the military branch of the *Schutzstaffel* (SS).

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