

# WORLD WAR TWO

## Literature:

Child, John, Tim Hodge and David Taylor. Understanding History 3. Oxford: Heinemann Publishers, 1993.  
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Walsh, Ben. Modern World History. London: John Murray, 1996.

## The Blitzkrieg 1939 – 1941

### • German invasion of Poland

- **1 September, 1939** – early in the morning German troops invaded Poland, following the plan **Fall Weiss**. The excuse for the attack was artificially created by the Germans. A group of German soldiers disguised in Polish uniforms attacked a radio station in Gliwicz.
- **3 September, 1939** – Britain and France declared war on Germany, USA remained neutral.
- Germany planned to use the tactics of **blitzkrieg** and the invasion of Poland was quick so Britain and France did not have time to react.

**TASK 1: What is the main idea of the blitzkrieg tactics?**

- in Poland the Germans carried out their policy of racism (persecution of the Jews)
- at the same time the **Red Army attacked Poland from the east**

**TASK 2: What have you heard about the Katyn massacre in 1940?**

### • Soviet expansion

- **June 1940** – annexation of **Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania** was completed
- The next step was **Finland** but it refused to surrender so the Soviet army attacked Finland. The conflict developed into the **Winter War** (November **1939** – March **1940**). Finland managed to resist and the USSR gained only the **Karelia**.

### • The Phoney War (The Sitting War, Sitzkrieg)

- these were all nicknames given to the early phase of the war because at the beginning the Allies did not react quickly
- however, in 1940 Britain and France agreed not to sign separate peace with Germany

### • German invasion of Scandinavia and western Europe

- In April **1940 Germany invaded Denmark and Norway**. Denmark fell in one day and Norway managed to last for two months. Sweden claimed to remain neutral.
- In May 1940 **Germany invaded the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg**
- German armies went **around the Maginot Line and invaded France**
- In June 1940 German armies **entered Paris**. Harsh peace conditions were accepted by Marshal Pétain. Later France was divided into the northern zone (including Paris) under German administration and the area around the spa town **Vichy** under a collaborationist regime led by Pétain.

**TASK 3: What is collaborationism?**

Also, a minor part of the French army led by **Charles de Gaulle** left for exile and in London they decided to fight against Germany – **Free French Forces**.



Winston Churchill

- **Battle of Britain July – October 1940**
  - Britain now stood alone. In May **Winston Churchill** became the prime minister. He was strongly against any negotiation with Hitler.
  - **Operation Sea Lion** – a German plan of an invasion to Britain, with a preceding air assault performed by the **Luftwaffe**
  - **RAF (Royal Air Force)** - British air force which stood up against Luftwaffe, the RAF was also assisted by Canadian, Belgian, Polish and Czechoslovak pilots (Czechoslovak squadrons no. 310, 311 and 312)
  - air raids, bombardment
  - civilians were involved because of the targets which were in towns or close to them, e.g. London docks or Coventry
  - Britain managed to defend itself - they fought for survival, good discipline and organization, children were often sent to the countryside to escape the danger of air raids, new invention – radar
- **North African campaign**
  - In 1940 **Italian armies invaded Egypt** but were soon pushed to Libya so **Germany had to help** and General Erwin **Rommel** (“*The Desert Fox*”) took command of the German troops in Africa.
- **The Balkans**
  - In 1941 **Germany invaded Yugoslavia and Greece** (Italy tried first but failed)
  - Yugoslav **Partisans** – led by Josip Broz **Tito** – started a successful guerilla campaign
  - Due to its failures in the Balkans and Greece Italy had to follow Hitler’s orders.
- In 1941 the USA decided to help the Allies by the **Lend-Lease Act** which meant lending money and military technology to the Allies. The ship convoys travelling to Britain were then often attacked by Germany which led to the start of **submarine war in the North Atlantic**.
- And in 1941 W. Churchill and F. D. Roosevelt signed **the Atlantic Charter**, expressing their common aim to defeat the Nazis and end their tyranny in Europe
- **The attack on the USSR – Operation Barbarossa**
  - In June 1941 **Germany invaded the USSR** in three directions – on Leningrad, Ukraine and the Caucasus)
  - at first they used the tactics of blitzkrieg and Stalin did not expect any attack  
**TASK 4: What made Stalin think Hitler would not attack the USSR?**
  - the German armies were advancing very quickly at first, however, Hitler underestimated the military advantages of the USSR  
**TASK 5: What is it about the Russian lands that makes any invasion from the west difficult? (Think of Napoleon’s Russian campaign to help you)**
  - in December the German armies stood before **Moscow** – and they were defeated by the Red Army led by General Zhukov
  - in the south the German armies reached the Caucasus to get hold of the oil reserves

- **the USA enter the war**

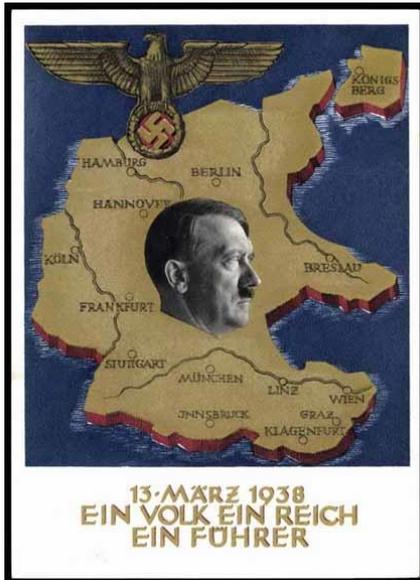
- In September 1940 **Japan** signed the **Tripartite Pact** with Germany and Italy (thus creating the Berlin – Rome – Tokyo Axis)
- Japan wanted to gain control of the southeast Asia and the Pacific
- at first, Japan occupied Indochina
- the USA were afraid of the Japanese actions and cut them off from the oil reserves
- on **7 December, 1941 the Japanese fleet attacked US naval base Pearl Harbor on the Hawaiian Islands** and caused great damage and more than two thousand casualties
- the very next day **USA declared war on Japan** and joined the war in Europe, and in return the Allies joined the USA on the Pacific front
- in six months the Japanese invaded the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Burma
- and just like the Germans in Poland, the Japanese exploited the nations of the occupied countries and persecuted them racially

## The Turning Points 1942 – 1943

- At the end of 1941 **Germany and Japan were in their prime.**
- In Europe only Britain was able to resist.
- North Atlantic – submarine warfare which was turned in favour of the Allies after the capture of the German military code machine **Enigma**.
- **The Russian front**
  - **battle of Stalingrad** – August **1942** – February **1943**  
at first German armies conquered most of the city but then they were surrounded by Soviet auxiliary forces and suffered from hunger and frost, total casualties were more than 1.5 million, in February 1943 **German army surrendered** – it was the **turning point of the war**
  - **German retreat** - Hitler tried to restore his success in the east in the **battle of Kursk** in July **1943** which was **the largest tank battle of the war** – Germany lost, German armies had to retreat to the west and Kiev and Leningrad were freed by the Red Army
- **North African Campaign**
  - **another turning point - Rommel was defeated in the battle of El Alamein (1942)** by British General Montgomery and the Allies started advancing
  - finally, in May **1943 the Axis armies surrendered** in Tunisia
- **The Pacific**
  - **the tides turn** here too – in 1942 the USA started gaining in the Pacific, e.g. in the battle of the Coral Sea
  - **the battle of Midway** (June **1942**) – the Japanese fleet was defeated
  - **the battle of Guadalcanal** (August **1942** – February **1943**) – in a very long, tough battle US army recaptured the island of Guadalcanal – **the turning point in the Pacific**
- **Negotiations of the Allies**
  - in **1942** – 26 nations signed a declaration to be the **United Nations** (the foundation of the future UNO)
  - **1943 – the Big Three (Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin)** met at the **conference in Teheran** to discuss their future offensive in Europe

**TASK 6:** During the war propaganda was used heavily by all the countries. Study the posters and for each of them say what their message is and which country they probably come from.

SOURCE A



SOURCE B



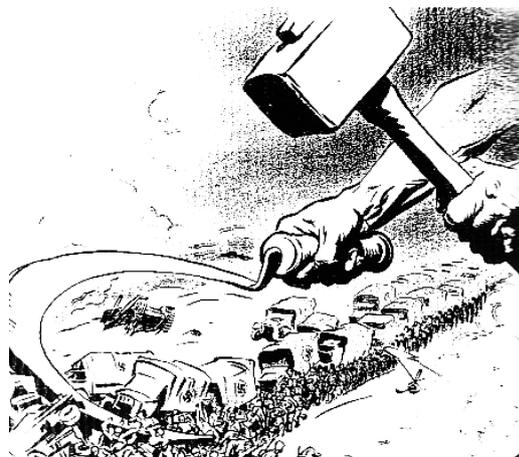
SOURCE C



SOURCE D

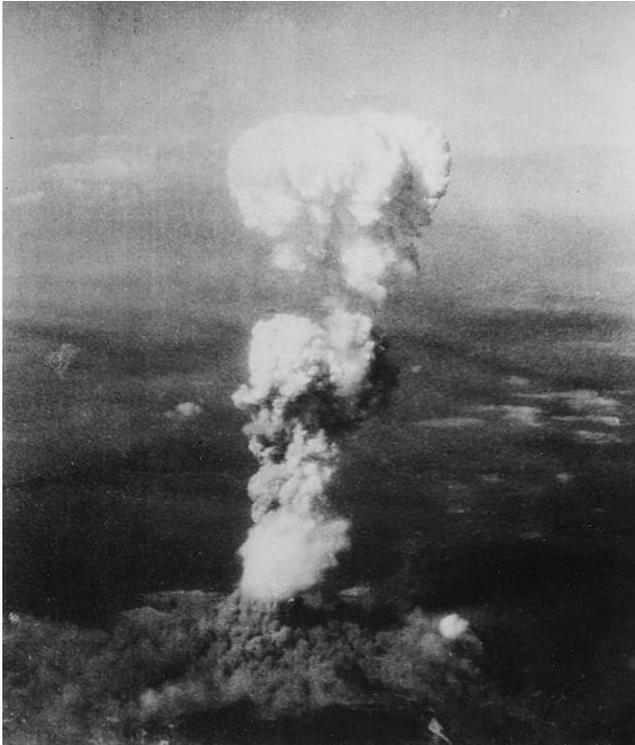


SOURCE E



## The final stage of the war 1944 – 1945

- **Operation Overlord**
  - the Allies were preparing for an invasion of northwest Europe – through **Normandy**
  - **D-Day (6 June 1944)** – the invasion was led by **Dwight D. Eisenhower**, it was one of the greatest amphibious assaults in history
  - in August 1944 the **Allies were in Paris** (they were helped by the local resistance movement)
  - in September 1944 the **Allies freed Belgium and the Netherlands and reached the German borders**
- **German defeats in the west**
  - Germany and its allies were in deep crisis, Hitler was hoping for a radical changes, especially through new military inventions, e.g. the atomic bomb, missiles V1 and V2
  - an opposition formed against Hitler – an unsuccessful **assassination attempt** in July 1944
  - German armies tried to resist the Allied invasion and defeated the Allies in **Arnhem** in September 1944
  - however, the last major attempt to avert the defeat was the **German offensive in Ardennes** in December **1944 – but it failed**
  - in spring **1945 – Germany was surrounded and Italy was lost** (Mussolini was dead)
  - in March 1945 the **Allies crossed the Rhine** and in April they joined the Soviet troops on the Rhine
- **German defeats in the east**
  - there was a **wave of national uprisings** (Warsaw, Slovakia, Rumania, Bulgaria)
  - the Red Army advanced in the Balkans (supported by local guerilla fighters)
  - in the north they advanced through the Baltic, Belorussia and Ukraine to Poland
  - in August **1944** there was an **uprising in Warsaw** but the Soviets did not support it against the Germans because they wanted the democratic forces in Poland to be destroyed in the uprising – the uprising **failed**
- **The fall of Berlin**
  - the Allies continued advancing on Berlin
  - 30 April, **1945 – Hitler committed suicide in his bunker** (with Eva Braun)
  - 7 May, 1945 – the **unconditional surrender of the German armies was signed**
  - and on **8 May, 1945 the peace was in effect in all of Europe**
- **Japanese defeat**
  - after the German surrender the USA could concentrate on the war in the Pacific
  - US troops gained **the Philippines, Okinawa and Iwo Jima, and freed Burma**
  - the **Japanese fleet** resisted fiercely (e.g. **the kamikaze**) and even though they were soon almost completely **destroyed – they refused to surrender**
  - July 1945 – successful **tests of the atomic bomb in New Mexico** (the Manhattan Project by J. R. Oppenheimer)
  - **6 August, 1945** – Japanese town **Hiroshima was bombed with an atomic bomb** (80,000 dead immediately, another 50,000 dead from radiation poisoning!) and three days later **Nagasaki was bombed too** (40,000 dead immediately, another 40,000 dead from radiation poisoning)
  - on 8 August the USSR declared war on Japan (even though the war was in fact over)
  - 2 September, 1945 – **Japan signed surrender** on board of USS Missouri



*The atomic cloud over Hiroshima*



*The effects of the atomic bomb on Nagasaki (before and after)*

- **The conferences of the Allies 1944-1945**

- the aim was to **establish effective coordination** of the Allied forces and to **discuss the post-war arrangements**
- in September **1944** in Dumbarton Oaks **USA, GB, USSR and China** agreed on the **basis of the UN Charter**
- in October 1944 Churchill and Stalin met in Moscow to discuss the future spheres of influence (this was a topic they had problems agreeing on)
- **in February 1945 Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin** met at the **Yalta Conference**
  - to discuss the military actions together
  - Roosevelt wanted the USSR to join the war in the Pacific
  - to discuss the post-war arrangements in Europe
- in April **1945 the United Nations Organization was founded** in San Francisco
- in **July and August 1945 Harry Truman** (the new US President), **Clement Attlee** (the new British Prime Minister) and **J.V. Stalin met at Potsdam**
  - to discuss the post-war arrangement in Germany (see notes on the Cold War)
  - to discuss the post-war arrangement in Eastern Europe (Poland)

## The Holocaust

### TASK 7: What were Hitler's ideas about the Jews?

- To get rid of the Jews, **Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich** designed the **Final Solution** in **1942**. It was a systematic genocide of the Jews, overseen by Heydrich.
- The Jews were gathered into **ghettoes** or sent to **concentration camps**. From there they were sent to **extermination camps (death camps)**.

#### TASK 8:

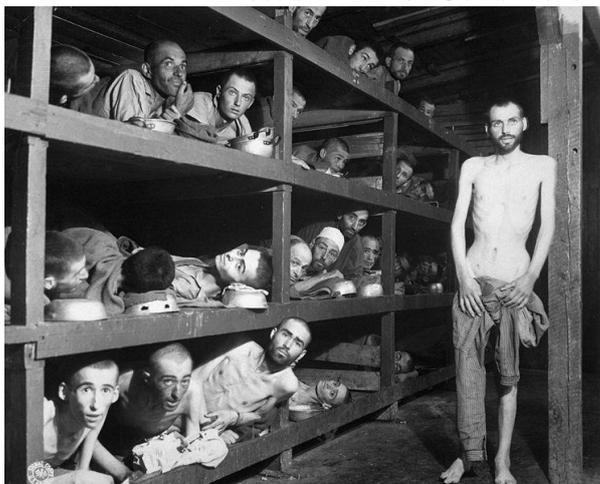
- a. What was the difference between a ghetto, a concentration camp and an extermination camp?
- b. Discuss the conditions there.
- c. Do you know any examples of these?

a ghetto –

a concentration camp –

an extermination camp –

- **Almost six million Jews were murdered.**



*Prisoners in Buchenwald.*

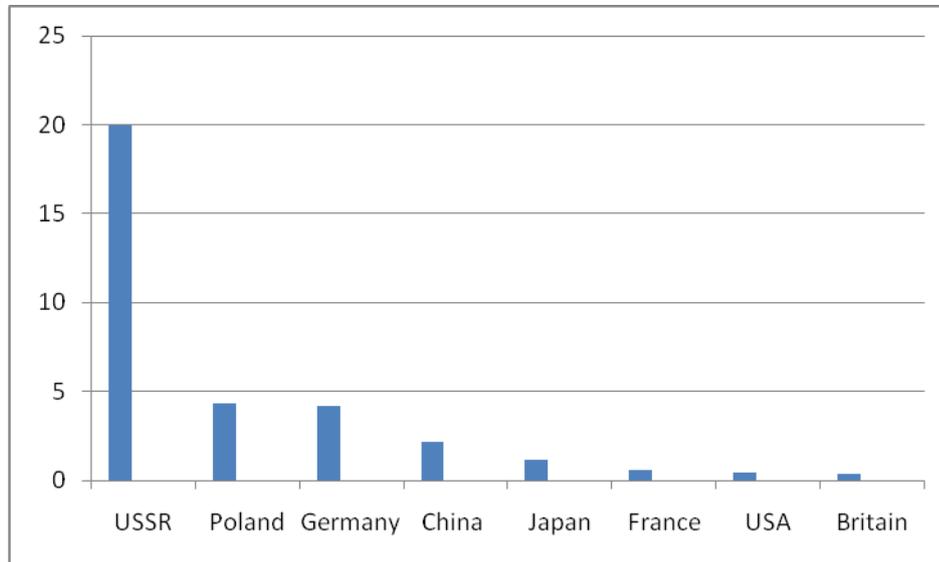


*Rows of corpses awaiting burial at Belsen death camp, 1945.*

- Other minority groups were persecuted and eliminated too, e.g. communists, homosexuals, gypsies, pacifists, etc.

## The effects of the war

- **The casualties** were the highest in history – over 37 million.



*Casualties in million*

- **Civilian population suffered** like never before.
- **The atomic bomb** showed a new direction of warfare. The **radar** showed its full potential too.
- The **negotiations and post-war arrangements of the Allies led to the Cold War** (or at least were unable to prevent it).

**TASK 9: How was this world war different from the first one? Comment on the differences in warfare, impact on the civilian population, tactics, philosophy etc.**



INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

**REVISION:**

**TASK 10:**

**How would you describe the first phase of the war?**

**TASK 11:**

**What were Germany's advantages in the war?**

**TASK 12:**

**Comment on the relationship between the USSR and Germany before and during the war.**

**TASK 13:**

**What was the turning point of the war?**

**TASK 14:**

**What were the consequences of the war? Write down as many as you can.**