

# EUROPE DURING THE WAR

## Context

The German Reich invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, thus initiating one of the greatest and bloodiest conflicts in human history. War-torn Europe was divided among countries that were either occupied, occupiers, collaborators of Nazi Germany or otherwise neutral. Millions of civilians perished due to armed struggle, the policy of destruction and worsening living conditions. Many more fell victim to war crimes committed, in particular, by the German Nazi regime.

The first ally of the Third Reich was the Soviet Union, although relations between these two countries were poor after Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933. Ideological differences between them appeared to be insurmountable. Negotiations on a political and economic pact between the USSR and the Third Reich were conducted in secret from April 1939. In August 1939, Adolf Hitler signalled his readiness to make great territorial concessions to the USSR. As a consequence, a boundary between the German and Soviet spheres of influence was drawn. It was formalised on 23 August 1939 through the signature by Joachim von Ribbentrop and Vyacheslav Molotov, foreign affairs ministers of the Third Reich and USSR, of what is known as the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. It included a secret protocol on the division of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland and Romania. The pact paved the way for the German attack on Poland and provided for Soviet participation in its territorial partition. Additionally, it constituted a basis for the expansion of Soviet territories to include East European

countries such as the Baltic states. This alliance lasted until 22 June 1941, when the Germans attacked the USSR.

Three days after the German attack on Poland, Great Britain and France declared war on the Third Reich in fulfilment of their alliance declarations. However, they did not support Poland militarily. On 17 September, as a result of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact's provisions, the Soviet Union invaded Poland from the east. After more than one month of fighting known as the 1939 war of defence or the September campaign, the last large army unit lay down its weapons on 6 October 1939. The two occupiers divided Poland following Germany's attack on the USSR in September 1939. Western territories were annexed to the Reich, eastern to the USSR and the central zone of the German-established General Government became subject to occupation.

After the outbreak of the Second World War, Lithuania found itself in the Soviet sphere of influence. In June 1940, the USSR sought to locate its military bases in Lithuanian territory. When the demand was rejected, the Soviets occupied the country. During the occupation, the civilian population, including approximately 210,000 Jews, was subjected to repression with many deported deep into the USSR. The Soviets also took control of private enterprises. The same befell Latvia and Estonia. In turn, Lithuania found itself in the German sphere of influence after the start of the German-Soviet war in the summer of 1941 and

was incorporated into the Reich Department East (*Reichskommissariat Ostland*) as General-Department Lithuania with its capital in Kaunas. The other Baltic states, Latvia and Estonia, found themselves in the German sphere of influence.

After the Soviet attack on Poland in 1939, some of its eastern territories of Galicia were incorporated into the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic. After the German attack on the USSR in June 1941, the territory of occupied Ukraine remained under German administration and Eastern Galicia was brought into the General Government. The Germans introduced a harsh occupation law and repressed the local populace, as in the General Government. They steadily imposed anti-Jewish legislation throughout the occupied countries of East-Central Europe, created ghettos and after June 1941 commenced the mass shooting of Jews and operation of death camps.

The Third Reich did not halt its territorial conquests with the east of Europe. In the spring of 1940, it launched an attack on West European countries. On 9 April 1940, Germany invaded Denmark and Norway. Whereas German forces took Denmark in one day, Norway resisted. Although the Germans quickly occupied its most important cities, a small but determined Norwegian Army organised a resistance in the central and northern parts of the country. It was supported by a British-French-Polish expeditionary corps. In early June, in the face of the overwhelming advantage of German forces and dire situation on the front in France, King Haakon VII was able to emigrate to Great Britain together with his government and ceased to resist. Both countries, Denmark and Norway, remained under occupation until the end of the Second World War. The Norwegian campaign proved to be a great success for the Wehrmacht. The Germans gained access to valuable raw resources, including iron ore. Norwegian ports and airfields also became a convenient location for raids on Great Britain and the North Atlantic. A newly-formed government headed by Vidkun Quisling collaborated with the Nazis. The Germans considered Danes and Norwegians to belong to the Nordic 'master race' and for this reason the occupation was not marked by widespread terror. The Danish government was given autonomy in internal affairs, including control over the police and the judicial system. A 'cooperation policy' prevailed until 1943. King Christian X remained

in power. However, censorship was introduced, members of the Communist Party were arrested and the Danish fleet served German military purposes. In the summer of 1943, in response to the occupation force's policy, the Danish resistance movement launched a general strike. The Reich representative in Denmark, Werner Best, demanded the punishment of 'saboteurs' but the Danish government refused. The Germans therefore dissolved the government and assumed full control over the state. Soon thereafter, they also planned to begin deportation of Jews.

On 10 May 1940, the Germans attacked the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg under the codename Fall Gelb. The German attack on the Netherlands ended with the bombing of Rotterdam and surrender on 14 May 1940. The Reich Commissar (*Reichskommissar*) was Arthur Seyss-Inquart, who assumed control over the Dutch civil service. Occupation authorities swiftly introduced racist regulations depriving Jews of certain rights. On 28 May 1940, the Belgian Army also capitulated. Benelux countries found themselves under German occupation. Soon thereafter, the Germans introduced anti-Jewish legislation and starting from 1942 began deporting local Jews to death camps in occupied Polish territories.

Also on 10 May 1940, the Third Reich attacked France, which surrendered on 22 June after surprisingly brief resistance. The country was divided into two parts: northern France together with Paris remained under German occupation, whereas the southern part became the collaborating French State (known as Vichy France) headed by Marshall Philippe Pétain. This state functioned until 1944 (although the Germans actually occupied it already in November 1942 in connection with events in North Africa).

Seeking to subdue extensive East European territories awarded to it under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Soviet Union attacked Finland on 30 November 1939. Nevertheless, this country mounted such strong resistance against the Soviets, despite enormous losses, that they could not achieve their goal. Both countries concluded a peace agreement on 12 March 1940 under which Finland suffered immense territorial losses, but saved its independence. Even more dramatic was the fate of the Baltic states, i.e. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Already from the autumn of 1939,

they were subjected to enormous pressures from the Soviets and in the spring of 1940 were forced to let the Soviet army into their territories as well as pro-Soviet politicians into their governments. Soon, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were declared Soviet republics and on 6 August formally joined the Soviet Union.

In addition to the Soviet Union, other countries also found themselves on the side of the Third Reich. In the 1930s, cooperation intensified between Germany and Italy, where the National Fascist Party led by Benito Mussolini came to power in 1922. In October, he became Prime Minister and soon a dictator. In the following years, Italy moved closer to Germany and its policy toward Jews gradually changed. In November 1936, Benito Mussolini first used the expression 'Berlin-Rome Axis' in reference to a friendship treaty signed between Italy and Germany one month previously. This was the start of a military alliance between the Third Reich and Italy to which Japan acceded with time. On 27 September 1940, a pact of three was signed in Berlin creating a new alliance called the 'Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis'.

Italy joined the war in June 1940 as an ally of the Third Reich. The Italians occupied a tiny part of France and subsequently attacked Egypt and its defending British Army in September 1940, as well as Greece in October. They soon suffered setbacks on both fronts and were forced to seek help from German forces. In June 1943, the Allies landed in Sicily after invading North Africa. This caused a political crisis in Italy, which put an end to Mussolini's rule. King Victor Emmanuel III ousted him from power and ordered his internment. On 8 September 1943, the Kingdom of Italy signed a cease-fire with the Allies. The king fled to the south, which was being gradually liberated. Northern and central regions fell under control of Nazi Germany, which re-installed Mussolini as the head of a new puppet fascist regime called the Italian Social Republic.

Hungary was also on the side of the Third Reich. From 1919, the head of the Kingdom of Hungary was Regent Admiral Miklós Horthy and his rule authoritarian. Even before the Second World War, the country had formed an alliance with the German Reich. In 1941, it became involved in military actions on the side of the Axis countries. At that time, Jews in Hungary were relatively safe

and for a long period the country served as a safe haven for Jewish refugees from many German-occupied countries. The situation in Hungary changed in March 1944, when the country found itself under German occupation. Horthy was removed from power in the autumn of 1944. The Germanophile Döme Sztójay became Prime Minister and legalised a fascist anti-Semitic party known as the Arrow Cross (*Nyilaskeresztesek*).

Another country cooperating with the Third Reich was Slovakia. A direct consequence of the Munich agreement of September 1938 was the First Vienna Award signed one month later, in which German and Italian ministers of foreign affairs set a new border for Slovakia and Hungary. Southern Slovakia was transferred to Hungary. An autonomous territory was created in the remaining part of the country within the framework of the Czechoslovak Republic, which was liquidated shortly thereafter. On 15 March 1939, the German army entered Czechoslovakia. It was divided into the Reich Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (in the west) and the puppet Slovak Republic (in the east) with a regime headed by Jozef Tiso, a Catholic priest supporting the Nazis.

Romania was also part of the Axis although it had declared neutrality after the outbreak of the Second World War. Due to revisionist demands for Romanian territory expressed by the Soviet Union, Hungary and Bulgaria, Romania lost a third of its land by autumn 1940. Soon after the Second Vienna Award (treaty between Germany and Italy), King Carol II was forced to abdicate. His son Michael was crowned and a coalition government under General Ion Antonescu and the Iron Guard, a fascist party, was formed. The new regime, known as the National Legionary State, was an ally of Nazi Germany. Romania participated in the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 and soon re-annexed the previously lost territories and Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, and took over Transnistria.

The Third Reich also found allies in the Balkans. On 6 April 1941, Nazi Germany and its allies attacked the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. A part of the country was divided between the Third Reich, Hungary, Italy and Bulgaria. Two puppet Axis states were established in the remaining part: Serbia and the Independent Croatian State (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, NDH) headed by Ante Pavelić, where

power was assumed by the Ustashe, a Croatian fascist movement collaborating with Germany. The Germans and Italians divided the NDH into two spheres of influence: southwest controlled by the Italians and northeast by the Germans. After the defeat of Italy in September 1943, the NDH annexed all territories lost under the Rome Treaty. The aim of the Ustashe was to create an ethnically 'pure' Croatia. It perceived Serbs living in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina as the greatest obstacle to that goal. The NDH government worked together with the Third Reich in the killing of Jews. Additionally, it engaged in genocide of Serbs living within the country's borders. The Ustashe adopted laws modelled on those of the Third Reich that were directed against those deemed enemies of the Croatian nation: Jews, Roma and Serbs. These groups were interned in concentration camps of which Jasenovac was the largest and were subsequently murdered or, as in the case of Jews, sent to German death camps.

The opponents of the Axis states were called the Allies. The anti-Nazi coalition had already begun to take shape in the first weeks of the Second World War. After the German attack on Poland, Great Britain and France declared war on the Third Reich on 3 September 1939, although at this stage neither France nor Great Britain actively engaged in armed action. The British dominions Australia and New Zealand issued a similar declaration. They were soon joined by Canada, and a world war became a fact. In 1940, further countries attacked by the Third Reich gradually joined the accord. As a consequence of the German attack on the USSR in June 1941, this great power also joined the anti-Nazi coalition. In August 1941, the US and Great Britain signed the Atlantic Charter, a declaration specifying the objectives of the British and US policy during the Second World War and its aftermath. Notably, the United States, one of the greatest alliance powers, joined the coalition only after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. Barely one month later, on 1 January 1942,

the United Nations Declaration signed by 26 countries was issued. It obliged its signatories to fight fascist states and not to conclude a separate cease-fire or peace with them. A turning point in the Second World War was the defeat of the German army in the battle for Stalingrad fought between August 1942 and February 1943. The myth of the invincible Third Reich was shattered. The Red Army assumed the initiative on the Eastern front and from then on the Wehrmacht was in retreat, which strengthened the position of the USSR in the anti-Nazi coalition. There were also changes on other fronts. In May 1943, the Allies defeated Axis armies in North Africa. Since an effective landing in France would not yet be possible, a decision was made to land in Sicily, a strategic base for the Axis air force and fleet in the Mediterranean, which Allied forces successfully invaded in July and August 1943. As already noted, this led to the fall of the fascist regime in Italy.

The Americans fighting in the Far East were victorious against Japan of the Axis. After the Allies landing in Normandy in June 1944, the Germans found themselves in a trap (from the east, west and south). The Axis alliance fell apart as more and more countries fighting the Allies being defeated. On 9 May 1945, the Germans signed an unconditional surrender and Japan followed four months later (9 September). The Second World War was thus over. The victorious powers (mainly Great Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union), whose leaders met several times during the war (Teheran – 1943 and Yalta – 1945), charted the post-war world order. A decisive meeting took place in Potsdam in July–August 1945 where previous agreements were sealed and a new global system established.

Finally, it is worth noting that not all countries of Europe were drawn into the war or at least officially did not take sides yet only Switzerland, Sweden, Spain, Portugal and Turkey (until February 1945), as well as the Holy See (Vatican) remained neutral.



# EUROPE AND THE WORLD DURING THE WAR



## Chart 1. THE OUTBREAK OF THE WAR AND ITS ORIGINS

### Unit 1

The ceremony marking the signing of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact in Moscow, 23 August 1939. Left-right: head of the Legal Department at the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs Friedrich Gauss, German Minister of Foreign Affairs Joachim von Ribbentrop, Joseph Stalin and Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Molotov. Public domain



### Text of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Non-Aggression Pact, 1939.

The Government of the German Reich and Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, desirous of strengthening the cause of peace between Germany and the U.S.S.R., and proceeding from the fundamental provisions of the Neutrality Agreement concluded in April 1926 between Germany and the U.S.S.R., have reached the following Agreement:

**Article I.** Both High Contracting Parties obligate themselves to desist from any act of violence, any aggressive action, or any attack on each other, either individually or jointly with other Powers.

**Article II.** Should one of the High Contracting Parties become the object of belligerent action by a third Power, the other High Contracting Party shall in no manner lend its support to this third Power.

**Article III.** The Governments of the two High Contracting Parties shall in the future maintain continual contact with one another for

the purpose of consultation in order to exchange information on problems affecting their common interests.

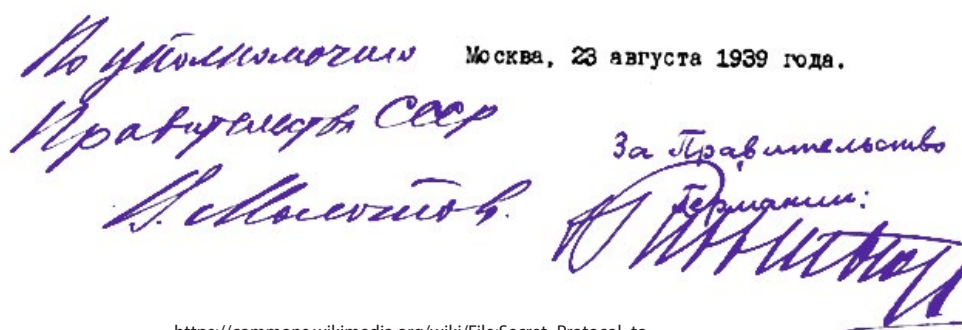
**Article IV.** Should disputes or conflicts arise between the High Contracting Parties, neither shall participate in any grouping of Powers whatsoever that is directly or indirectly aimed at the other party.

**Article V.** Should disputes or conflicts arise between the High Contracting Parties over problems of one kind or another, both parties shall settle these disputes or conflicts exclusively through friendly exchange of opinion or, if necessary, through the establishment of arbitration commissions.

**Article VI.** The present Treaty is concluded for a period of ten years, with the proviso that, in so far as one of the High Contracting Parties does not terminate it one year prior to the expiration of this period, the validity of this Treaty shall automatically be extended for another five years.

**Article VII.** The present treaty shall be ratified within the shortest possible time. The ratifications shall be exchanged in Berlin. The Agreement shall enter into force as soon as it is signed.

[https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/125339/1393\\_Molotov-Ribbentrop\\_Pact.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/125339/1393_Molotov-Ribbentrop_Pact.pdf)



Москва, 23 августа 1939 года.

За Правительство  
Германии:

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Secret\\_Protocol\\_to\\_Molotov%E2%80%93Ribbentrop\\_Pact\\_Page\\_2.jpg#/media/File:Secret\\_Protocol\\_to\\_Molotov%E2%80%93Ribbentrop\\_Pact\\_Page\\_2.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Secret_Protocol_to_Molotov%E2%80%93Ribbentrop_Pact_Page_2.jpg#/media/File:Secret_Protocol_to_Molotov%E2%80%93Ribbentrop_Pact_Page_2.jpg)

### A secret supplement protocol to the Molotov– Ribbentrop Non-Aggression

In signing the non-aggression pact between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the undersigned plenipotentiaries of the two sides discussed in strict confidentiality the issue of delimiting spheres of mutual interest in Eastern Europe. This discussion led to the following result:

1. In the event of territorial-political reorganization of the districts making up the Baltic States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), the northern border of Lithuania is simultaneously the border of the spheres of interest of Germany and the USSR. The interests of Lithuania with respect to the Vilnius district are recognized by both sides.
2. In the event of territorial-political reorganization of the districts making up the Polish Republic, the border of the spheres of interest of Germany and the USSR will run approximately along the Pisa, Narew, Vistula, and San rivers. The question of whether it is in the (signatories') mutual interest to preserve the independent Polish

State and what the borders of that state will be can be ascertained conclusively only in the course of future political development. In any event, both governments will resolve this matter through friendly mutual agreement.

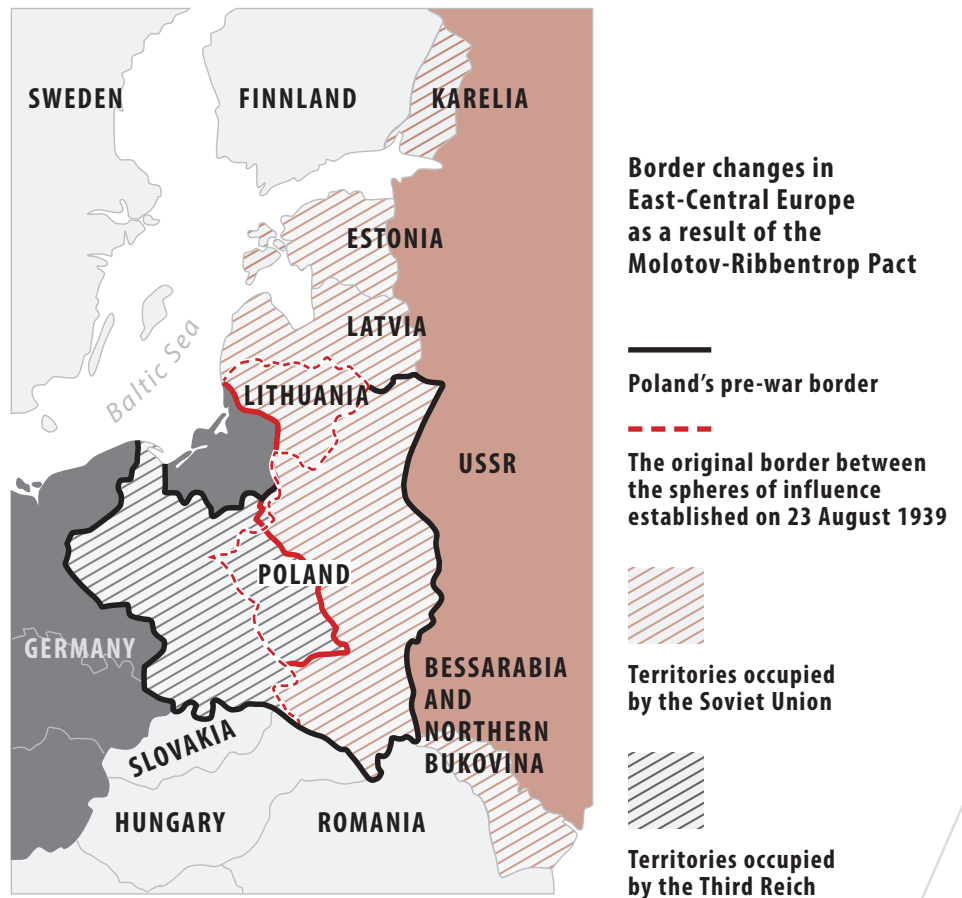
3. Concerning south-eastern Europe, the Soviet side emphasizes the interest of the USSR in Bessarabia. The German side declares its complete political disinterest in these areas.

4. This protocol will be held in strict secrecy by both sides.

Moscow, 23 August 1939

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110994.pdf?v=61e7656de6c925c23144a7f96330517d>

**Spheres of interest of the Third Reich and the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics in East-Central Europe, in accordance with the provisions of the secret additional protocol to the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of 23 August 1939.**



## EXERCISE:

**Look at the photograph and map, read the text and answer the following questions:**

- Where and when was the German-Soviet non-aggression pact signed? Who were its signatories?
- What was its purpose and provisions? What were the commitments of the Third Reich and the USSR made in the document?
- What was the purpose of the secret protocol attached to the pact? What were its provisions?
- How should the expression and the protocol 'in the event of territorial-political reorganization' be understood?
- What was the course of the border between the German and Soviet spheres of influence established in the secret protocol? How did it change after the German attack on Poland?



## Search for additional information and think:

- What significance did the German Soviet non-aggression pact of 23 August 1939 have for the outbreak of the Second World War?
- Why did Germany and the USSR want to maintain confidentiality of the secret protocol attached to the pact?
- Today, can these documents be a basis for charging the Third Reich and the USSR with starting the Second World War?

### Unit 2

German soldiers re-enact the prising a Polish border barrier in Kolibki open for propaganda purposes, September 1939. AIPN



The German warship Schleswig-Holstein firing on the Polish coast. An attack on a Polish military depot on the Westerplatte peninsula began at 4:45 on 1 September 1939.

Public domain/ Apoloniusz Zawilski (1972) Bitwy Polskiego Września (Battles of Polish September), Warsaw: Nasza Księgarnia



The centre of Wieluń after bombing, 1 September 1939. The attack on the city is considered by some historians as the first armed onslaught of Nazi Germany on Poland as well as the first German war crime. Most likely, the purpose of the operation was to terrorise the local civilian population as Polish forces did not station there.

Public domain/photograph from the collection of the Wieluń Area Museum in Wieluń



**An excerpt from a report of  
a Luftwaffe fighter pilot on  
the bombing of Wieluń:**

Before me diagonally was a group of houses, some manor buildings or a small village. Smoke rose from there and with a dark streak covered yellow fields and a shimmering river. Wieluń – our target! In the city several homes stood in a great blaze. However, high above this dark point against the background of the blue sky flash by here and there, flying like dragonflies over the mirrored surface of water, German fighters that await and are to guard our attack. [...]. My first attack on a live target! For a split second a flash of awareness: below is a living city full of people [...]. The streets below look like a picture from a postcard and the dark points moving along them are the target. Nothing but a target. At a height of 2,500 metres life on earth loses its meaning [...]. Height of 1,200 metres [...] the first bomb falls! [...] now looking down the bomb fell right, directly on the street and the dark mass moving along the street stops. A dark plume arose on the spot that I hit. And into this plume fell a series of bombs from other airplanes [...]. We direct the flight according to orders toward a northern exit from the city. Again bombs! Right behind the city was some enclosure crammed with troops and harnesses. We are at a height of barely 1,200 metres, descend to 800. The bombs fall and the enclosure below disappears in fire and smoke together with everything within it. Return! The last load, the heaviest, falls on the main square. A fountain of flames, smoke and shards higher than the steeple of a small church [...]. A last look: nothing remained of the Polish cavalry brigade.

<http://www.historiawielunia.uni.lodz.pl/1wrzesnia2.html>

**An excerpt from  
Dr Patyrna's recollections  
of the German air attack on  
the hospital in Wieluń:**

A bomb fell on the hospital yard near the building where I occupied an apartment on the first floor. The house shook. I ran down barefoot to the ground floor with clothes in hand. I noticed several people from the hospital staff there and ordered them to escape to the yard. As we lay in the yard under trees, German airplanes again appeared over the hospital buildings and dropped a second bomb right behind a residential building. It collapsed this time (...) a third bomb fell very near the main building. We were covered in sand. I got up quickly and ran to the patients. However, I was only able to reach a walnut tree growing by a wall of the main building when a fourth bomb that was dropped on the hospital area shattered nearly one-half of this structure. (...) I ran into the building whose south-eastern part lay in ruins. A nurse with a torn off part of her hand ran to me from the building for patients with contagious illnesses. I ran to the maternity building, which also collapsed. Returning to the main building I encountered the bodies of two dead people (...) Rooms, operating and dressing, were reduced to rubble. I ordered the sisters to tear clothes and tend to the wounded. (...) We lay mothers and new-borns on a cart and sent them to Sieradz. A midwife delivered two babies in a hospital park.

<http://www.historiawielunia.uni.lodz.pl/1wrzesnia2.html>



Twelve-year-old Kazimiera Mika by the body of her older sister Andzia killed during a German air attack. Warsaw, September 1939 (Photo: Julien Bryan).

Julien Bryan/Public domain

**From Situation Report, no. 3 of Stefan Starzyński, Civilian Commissar at the Warsaw Defence Leadership, 19 September 1939.**

The [Warsaw civilian] population fears hunger and stands at night in queues for increasingly rare bread. As queues are demoralising and are at times a breeding ground for the stupidest panic gossip, they expose people to an unnecessary waste of time. Thus, the supply of Warsaw with bread was soon fundamentally reformed. [...] On the 19 of this month at 5 to 7 a.m., 166 human corpses were removed from streets [killed from bombing] as were 305 dead horses. The number of corpses removed by local authorities does not include all those killed, whose bodies were taken away by families, friends, etc. In the light of difficulties in transport to cemeteries, 35 points were established at city squares and parks where burials could take place.

Cited in: Waclaw Lipiński, Dziennik, Warsaw 1989.



The defenders of Westerplatte taken captive by the Germans. Defence of the Military Transit Depot by a garrison of the Polish Army on the Westerplatte peninsula was the first battle of the Second World War that took place on 1–7 September 1939. Public domain



A Polish village ablaze on the Osa River near Grudziądz, September 1939. AIPN



In September 1939, the Germans murdered thousands of Polish army soldiers taken prisoner.

Public domain



18 September 1939. A meeting of German and Soviet allies in Brest on the Bug. Bundesarchiv, Bild

1011-121-0008-25

**Recollections of Tadeusz Nowak, a soldier of the 20th Infantry Regiment who managed to survive the crime in Majdan Wielki near Tomaszów Lubelski. On 20 September 1939, 42 Polish soldiers previously taken captive were murdered there:**

One of the [German] soldiers said in broken Polish: 'We are taking you prisoner and letting you go home while you murder German soldiers,' as he pointed to a lying German soldier nearby. During the beating of the prisoners by German soldiers we heard a loud voice nearby. When I looked in that direction, I saw a German officer with a revolver in his hand.

I thought that he prohibited the German soldiers from beating us, but it turned out that the German soldiers beating us moved to the side after his shouting, aimed their rifles at us and opened fire into our group. The prisoners fell to the ground after the shooting began; I also fell, as did two wounded Polish soldiers on top of me.

Kazimierz Hajdukiewicz, who lay on my right, told me to pray; he himself began praying. I heard his voice: 'Queen of the Polish crown, pray for us.' After a while I heard a German soldier say: 'This one is still alive,' after which I heard a shot that finally killed Hajdukiewicz. Several more single shots were fired as the prisoners lay in the ground. The moaning stopped after these shots and complete silence ensued. I was conscious the entire time when laying on the ground, as I was only slightly wounded in the shoulder.

When it became quiet around me and I assumed that the German soldiers were no longer nearby, I raised my head and saw that we were not guarded. I got up and ran to the nearest barn where I hid.

<https://twojahistoria.pl/2018/09/13/polskich-zolnierzy-traktowali-tak-jak-by-ci-byli-zwierzetami-zbrodnie-niemieckie-na-polskich-jencach-we-wrzesniu-1939-roku/>

## EXERCISES:

**Look at the photographs, read the text and answer the following questions:**

- Where and when did the Second World War start? What did the German invasion of Poland look like?
- What did the bombing of Wieluń look like? What civilian buildings were destroyed? Were German pilots aware that they were bombing civilian targets?
- How does Dr Patyrna describe the bombing of the Wieluń hospital?



- *How did the Germans treat Polish soldiers taken captive?*
- *What was the situation of the Warsaw civilian population during the onslaught on the city and German bombing raids?*
- *What war crime did the Germans commit in Majdan Wielki near Tomaszów Lubelski?*
- *How was Tadeusz Nowak able to survive it?*
- *What did the meeting of German and Soviet soldiers on 18 September in Brest on the Bug look like?*

### Search for additional information and think:

- *What was the course of the German invasion of Poland in September 1939?*
- *What nature did German military actions have? Against whom were they directed?*
- *How did Poland's allies, Great Britain and France, behave after the German attack? Did they fulfil their allied obligations toward Poland?*
- *When and under what pretext did Soviet forces enter Poland? How did they behave in occupied territories?*
- *How did the Soviet invasion contribute to Poland's defeat during the 1939 defensive war?*
- *What was the fate of the civilian population during the German and Soviet invasion of Poland?*
- *How were Polish prisoners of war treated by the Germans and Soviets?*
- *What war crimes did the Germans and Soviets commit during the invasion of Poland?*

## Chart 2. THE OUTBREAK OF THE WAR IN THE WEST

### Unit 1

German soldiers with seized military equipment, 29 May 1940 (one day after Belgium's capitulation). On 10 May 1940, the Germans moved westward. On this day, they simultaneously attacked Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. The French campaign began at the same time. From its first day, the campaign proved to be a series of German victories and quickly led to the surrender of the Benelux countries. Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-1970-048-11 / Hausen, v. / CC-BY-SA 3.0



Rotterdam city centre after its May 1940 bombing. The heavily damaged (now restored) St Lawrence Church stands out as the only remaining building reminiscent of Rotterdam's medieval architecture. The photo was taken after the removal of all debris. Public Domain





### A testimony of Irma Wauters.

I'm from Antwerp. We were a large family of seven children. My mum and dad lived through the First World War; they were well aware of the atrocities that took place during that time. So they decided to leave. They knew Antwerp was going to be targeted. There were a lot of us but, because my dad had a transportation business, we had a truck as well as a car.

I can't remember when we left for the sea. It must have been two or three days after the May 10 offensive. At the end of the first day, we managed to stay for one night in a flat in Middelkerke, on the coast. I remember that during the night I woke up in the cellar. We'd been taken down there because the Germans were already bombing Ostend, which was nearby. The next day we left and spent the night in De Panne, near the French border. Then we went down to Tréport, in Normandy. Belgians were very welcome there. People even put tables out with food.

We went further along the French coast to the south-eastern part of Brittany. We were able to rent a small house. As I was a child, it was a pleasure for me to live there – I loved the countryside and have wonderful memories. There were chickens everywhere. It was more of an adventure, like we were on holiday.

<https://webdoc.france24.com/exodus-france-german-invasion-war-1940/>



A parade of German troops in Paris. A view of the troops with the Arc de Triomphe in the background, June 1940. The second phase of the campaign (Operation Fall Rot) began on 5 June. Despite the overwhelming advantage of the Germans and the accession of Italy to their side, bloody battles were fought on the Maginot line. Nevertheless, the campaign ended with the defeat of France on 14 June 1940. Paris was occupied as an open city without fighting.

Bundesarchiv

### A testimony of Emile Vittecoq.

My mum was terribly afraid of the Germans. She knew all about the abuses they'd committed when they occupied the north-east of France in the First World War. She had heard they raped women. It was she who decided to leave. My dad stayed on our farm in Montreuil-en-Caux in Normandy, not far from the English Channel.

Around May 10, a truck from a friend of my parents arrived. My dad loaded some luggage and two mattresses into it. We got in. There was my mum, my big sister Marie, my little sister Marguerite and my brother René. We went to the Sarthe region in the west of the country – to the house of one of my dad's friends from the First World War.

But on June 10, we found out that the Germans had crossed the Seine. So my mum decided that we'd go to the South the next morning. She didn't have a specific destination in mind. After we got past Le Mans, the main city in the Sarthe, all you could see was endless lines of refugees – with wheelbarrows, pushchairs, bikes heaving with luggage, all that. The road was too crammed for you to drive along on it in a car, so we

went on foot, using small roads instead of the main ones. We found a barn to spend the night in. It was infested with rats, but we were so exhausted that nothing could stop us from sleeping.

<https://webdoc.france24.com/exodus-france-german-invasion-war-1940/>



German bombers over London during the Battle of Britain, 1940.

Public domain/photograph MH6547 from the collections of the Imperial War Museums

**A testimony of William Walker, a participant of the Battle of Britain.**

Suddenly the radio went absolutely mad: '616 Squadron scramble, 616 Squadron scramble.' So we jumped up, dashed out of the Mess and grabbed whatever transport we could, got down to dispersal, jumped into our plane, all took off individually and more or less formed up when we were airborne. We were vectored onto what proved to be a raid of some 80 aircraft, mostly Junkers 88s. I had never seen so many aircraft in the air before at one time. I was just amazed. They were unescorted because they came from Norway. Their fighter escort had to turn back as soon as they reached the coast because they didn't have enough fuel to get back to Norway, so they couldn't escort them overland. I managed to shoot at three before my ammunition ran out. The squadron knocked out I believe about ten or twelve altogether. I think anybody who flew a Spitfire knew they were flying something rather special. The cockpit was small, but you fitted into it and were very much part of the plane you were flying. [...] We were scrambled to patrol Dover – Dungeness and we were patrolling when we met a whole squadron of Messerschmitts that appeared. All three of us were shot down. Teddy Snorbin was shot down, very badly burned but survived, although he was killed later. Sergeant Ridley, my great friend, was killed and I got a bullet in my leg and my plane was shot to pieces. I realised that I would have to bail out, so I opened the hood, pulled back the cover and tried to jump. However, I still had my helmet on that was plugged into the radio which pulled me back, so I took my helmet off and fell out, still at 20,000 feet.

I wasn't going to take any chances, so I pulled the ripcord straightaway. The extraordinary thing was that as I came down, whilst the air was filled with aircraft, I never saw another aircraft on the whole of my

journey down in my parachute. But, I could see below a dense cloud so I had no idea where I was. It wasn't until I got through the clouds that I realised I was over the sea, so I blew up my Mae West and eventually landed in the sea. I could see some distance away a shipwreck sticking out of the water. I didn't realise then, because I didn't know that part of the world at all, but it was wrecked on the Goodwin Sands.

Eventually, I managed to swim, reached it and sat on it. But, it was at a rather acute angle and I kept slipping off. Eventually, after about half an hour or so a fishing boat arrived and took me off and gave me a large cup of half hot tea and whisky, which I drank. They wrapped me in a blanket. My leg was hurting a bit, a bit painful. Then, when we got to a mile off the shore an RAF launch came out and I was transferred to it. When I was on the RAF launch they had a loo and the hot tea and whisky had worked on my cold tummy to some extent. I retired to the loo and I couldn't leave it. The airman kept knocking on the door and saying, 'Are you alright?' and I was just in agony.

Anyway, I was eventually able to leave and was lifted up the steps of Ramsgate Harbour. A crowd had collected and they all cheered. A dear old lady came forward with a packet of cigarettes which she handed to me as I was lifted into the ambulance and was taken to Ramsgate Hospital. They had been terribly bombed and had no kitchens. All they could provide me whilst I was there, because I had to spend a night there, was a cup of tea and some bread and butter. I was put to bed under a whole lot of electric light bulbs and it was some 12 hours before I was able to feel anything at all. I was suffering from hypothermia. Anyway, I spent the night and admired the people there. They were running the hospital and people in Ramsgate were in. They had been so badly bombed and were still carrying on with their normal duties.

[http://ww2history.com/testimony/Western/Battle\\_of\\_Britain\\_pilot](http://ww2history.com/testimony/Western/Battle_of_Britain_pilot)

London after a German bombing, 1940.

Public domain/ National Archives and Records Administration





Polish pilots from No. 303 Squadron RAF who fought alongside British airmen, among others in the Battle of Britain. 1940. Public domain



## EXERCISES:

**Look at the photographs, read the text and answer the following questions:**

- When did Germany attack the Benelux countries and France?  
Which Axis country supported Germany in its invasion of France?
- What city was completely bombed by the Germans during their invasion of the Netherlands?
- Which Western European country defend itself the longest? When did it finally surrender?
- What symbol did the German army parade in Paris become?
- How do Irma Wauters and Emile Vittecoq recall their escape from the encroaching German army?
- How did the Germans want to force the British to surrender? What significance did the bombing of London have for this purpose?
- How does William Walker recall his involvement in the Battle of Britain?
- What was the name of the air division in which Polish pilots serve during the Battle of Britain?

**Search for additional information and think:**

- What were the directions of the German invasion of Western European countries?
- In what order were specific countries defeated by the Third Reich?
- In what way did the attacked countries resist the German army?
- How did the Germans force the Dutch to surrender?
- What systems of occupied government did the Germans introduce in the defeated countries?  
How did they differ and what did they depend on?
- What happened to the French and British armies after the defeat of France?
- What course that the Battle of Britain take? Which countries did pilots supporting British ones in their fight with the Germans come from?
- What was the significance of the Battle of Britain for the further course of the war?



## Chart 3. THE AXIS COUNTRIES: GERMANY'S ALLIES

### Unit 1

The national flags of Germany, Japan, and Italy draping the facade of the Embassy of Japan on the Tiergartenstraße in Berlin (September 1940). Bundesarchiv, Bild

183-L09218 / CC-BY-SA 3.0



Japanese propaganda postcard, 1938. Wikipedia Commons

The signing of the Tripartite Pact (accords of the governments of Germany, Italy and Japan) in Berlin on 27 September 1940. This was a defensive alliance aimed at formalising cooperation of three countries known as the Axis. NAC



### Text of the Tripartite Pact.

The Governments of Japan, Germany, and Italy consider it as the condition precedent of any lasting peace that all nations in the world be given each their own proper place, have decided to stand by and co-operate with one another in their efforts in Greater East Asia and the regions of Europe respectively wherein it is their prime purpose to establish and maintain a new order of things, calculated to promote the mutual prosperity and welfare of the peoples concerned. It is, furthermore, the desire of the three Governments to extend cooperation to nations in other spheres of the world that are inclined to direct their efforts along lines similar to their own for the purpose of realizing their ultimate object, world peace. Accordingly, the Governments of Japan, Germany and Italy have agreed as follows:

**ARTICLE 1.** Japan recognizes and respects the leadership of Germany and Italy in the establishment of a new order in Europe.

**ARTICLE 2.** Germany and Italy recognize and respect the leadership of Japan in the establishment of a new order in Greater East Asia.

**ARTICLE 3.** Japan, Germany, and Italy agree to cooperate in their efforts on aforesaid lines. They further undertake to assist one another with all political, economic and military means if one of the Contracting Powers is attacked by a Power at present not involved in the European War or in the Japanese-Chinese conflict.

**ARTICLE 4.** With a view to implementing the present pact, joint technical commissions, to be appointed by the respective Governments of Japan, Germany and Italy, will meet without delay.

**ARTICLE 5.** Japan, Germany and Italy affirm that the above agreement in no way affects the political status existing at present between each of the three Contracting Powers and Soviet Russia.

**ARTICLE 6.** The present pact shall become valid immediately upon signature and shall remain in force ten years from the date on which it becomes effective. In due time, before the expiration of said term, the High Contracting Parties shall, at the request of any one of them, enter into negotiations for its renewal.

In faith whereof, the undersigned duly authorized by their respective governments have signed this pact and have affixed hereto their signatures.

Done in triplicate at Berlin, the 27th day of September, 1940, in the 19th year of the fascist era, corresponding to the 27th day of the ninth month of the 15th year of Showa (the reign of Emperor Hirohito).

<https://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/triparti.asp>

The bodies of victims along the Qinhuai River out of Nanjing's west gate during the Nanjing Massacre. In December 1937 and January 1938, the Chinese population of Nanjing (then the capital of the Republic of China governed by the Kuomintang) was murdered by Japanese army soldiers. This massacre was one of the greatest war crimes committed by the Japanese army. It is estimated that approximately 50,000–400,000 people died. Public domain







Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini riding in an open automobile through the streets of Munich during the Italian dictator's visit to Germany, ca. 1941. Public domain



Italian artillery operated by Somali Ascaris troops during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, 1936. The conflict was the outcome of Italian efforts to create a consolidated colony encompassing Abyssinia and the already Italian-ruled Eritrea and Italian Somalia and a seizure of the source of the Blue Nile securing access to vast natural resources. That war contributed to a rapprochement between Italy and the Third Reich. In November 1936, Benito Mussolini used the term 'Berlin-Rome Axis' referring to the signature on 25 October 1936 of a friendship treaty between Italy and Germany. The treaty was concluded when the League of Nations expressed opposition to the Italian-Abyssinian war. Subsequently, on 22 May 1939, the union of the two countries transformed into an alliance called by Mussolini the 'steel pact' expanded with an accord in October 1936. Public Domain/Unknown author



Miklós Horthy and Adolf Hitler in 1938. From 1919, the Kingdom of Hungary was led by Regent Admiral Miklós Horthy who governed the country in an authoritarian manner. The country had established an alliance with the German Reich before the outbreak of the Second World War. Public domain/  
Ladislav Luppa's own work



Hungarian armoured troops on the Eastern front during the invasion of the USSR, 1941. NAC



Adolf Hitler meeting Father Jozef Tiso (Berlin, 1941). Father Tiso was a Catholic theologian and the leader of the nationalist Slovak People's Party. He decided to collaborate with Adolf Hitler and from 1939 to 1945, with his support, was president of a puppet state called the Slovak Republic. He introduced totalitarian rule, lifting the freedom of conscience, speech and the press, also banning all opposition parties. Tiso established an armed formation called the Hlinka Guards modelled on the Nazi SA. He was an accomplice in deporting Slovak Jews to death camps. After the Second World War, he was convicted and hanged for wartime crimes. NAC



Adolf Hitler meets Ante Pavelić, the leader of the Independent State of Croatia, upon his arrival at the Berghof in Bavaria, Germany, for a state visit. 1941. The Ustashe regime of Pavelić was one of the most murderous in occupied Europe. On 6 June 1941, Pavelić met Adolf Hitler with whom he discussed the possibility of expelling most Serbs from Croatia and their substitution with Croatians and Slovenes living in territories occupied by the Third Reich. Until the end of the war, Pavelić implemented his agenda of expelling (national and religious) minorities from the NDH and engaged in their genocide. He was responsible for war crimes, mainly mass murder of Orthodox Serbs, Jews and Roma. Public Domain/ USHMM

## EXERCISES:

### Look at the photographs, read the text and answer the following questions:

- When, by whom and for how many years was the Tripartite Pact concluded?
- What were its main objectives and provisions?
- What did the new order announced by the pact signatories entail?
- In what territories was it to be introduced?
- How was the demarcation of the spheres of influence among the Axis countries envisioned?
- Was the pact open to other countries? What was the condition for their accession?
- What wars did Italy and Japan wage in the 1930s?
- What European countries joined the pact? Who ruled these countries at the time?
- Who were the leaders of Hungary, Slovakia and Croatia who led to the alliance of their countries with the Axis?
- How did these countries support Germany and Italy during the Second World War?

### Search for additional information and think:

- What was the origin of the Berlin–Rome Axis? Who formulated this term?
- How did this alliance evolve during the war? What countries joined it, when and why?
- What political systems prevailed in the countries joining the Tripartite Pact?
- What was their status within the alliance? Which countries retained greater independence and which ones were completely subservient?
- What were the relations between these countries? What kept them in the alliance?
- What did the countries joining the Tripartite Pact attain?
- What benefits did their accession give the Third Reich and fascist Italy?



## Chart 4. THE OUTBREAK OF THE WAR IN THE EAST

### Unit 1



German troops at a Soviet state border post, 22 June 1941.

Operation Barbarossa was the codename for an invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany and some of its Axis allies, which began on Sunday 22 June 1941. The German Generalplan Ost aimed to exploit some conquered people as slave labour for the Axis war effort while snatching oil reserves of the Caucasus and agricultural resources of various Soviet territories. Public Domain/Johannes

Hähle - Waralbum.ru

### **An account of the Siege of Leningrad by Major Lozak, a staff officer in the Soviet Army:**



Units of the German Third Panzer Army on the road near Pruzhany, June 1941. Public Domain



A collection of bodies of Leningrad residents during the city's siege by the German army. The siege of Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg) lasted 2.5 years from 8 September 1941 until 27 January 1944. Historians estimate the number of fatalities among Soviet forces and city residents at approximately 1.5 million. Public domain/RIA Novosti archive

In those days there was something in a man's face which told you that he would die within the next 24 hours...I have lived in Leningrad all my life and I also have my parents here.

They are old people and during those famine months I had to give them half my officer's ration, or they would certainly have died. As a staff officer I was naturally and quite rightly getting considerably less than the people at the front: 250 grams a day instead of 350.

I will always remember how I walked every day from my house near the Tauris Garden to my work in the centre of the city, a matter of two or three kilometres. I'd walk for a while, then sit down for a rest. Many times, I saw a man suddenly collapse on the snow. There was nothing

I could do. One just walked on. On the way back, I would see a vague human form covered with snow on the spot where, in the morning, I had seen a man fall down.

One didn't worry; what was the point? People didn't wash for weeks; there were no bath houses and no fuel. But, at least people were urged to shave. During that winter I don't think I ever saw anyone smile. It was frightful. Yet, there was a kind of inner discipline that made people carry on. The hungry people established a new code of manners. They carefully avoided mentioning food. I remember spending a very hungry evening with an old boy from the Radio Committee. He nearly drove me crazy talking all evening about Kant and Hegel. Yet, we never lost heart. The Battle of Moscow gave us complete confidence that it would be all right in the end. But, what a change all the same in February when the Ice Road began to function properly!

<http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/leningrad.htm>

**An account of the siege of Leningrad by an employee of the Architects' Institute:**

We went on with this blueprint work right through the winter of 1941–2. It was a blessing for us architects, the best medicine that could have been given us during the famine. The moral effect is that a hungry man knows he has useful work to do. But, there's no doubt about it: a worker better bears hardships than an intellectual.

Many of our people stopped shaving, the first sign that a man is going to pieces. Most of these people pulled themselves together when they were given work. But, on the whole men collapsed more easily than women and at first the death-rate was highest among men. However, those who survived the worst period of the famine finally survived. The women felt the after-effects more seriously than the men. Many died in the spring, when the worst was already over. The famine had peculiar physical effects on people. Women were so run down that they stopped menstruating.

So many people died that we had to bury them without coffins. People had their feelings blunted and never seemed to weep at the burials. It was all done in complete silence, without any display of emotion. When things began to improve the first signs were that women began to put rouge and lipstick on pale, skinny faces. Yes, we lived through hell enough; but you should have been here the day the blockade was broken. People in the street wept with joy and strangers hugged each other. Now, life is almost normal. There is this shelling, of course, and people get killed, but life has become valuable again.

<http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/leningrad.htm>

**Vladimir Ogryzko was 23 years old and an officer in an NKVD regiment when the Germans neared Moscow in October 1941.**

Then when, on 14 October the enemy had already reached the nearest approach and a section of tanks had reached the border of the Khimki reservoir, when you could see the enemy through binoculars, then Moscow began to feel a bit shaken. People were afraid, because we already knew and heard what would happen to Moscow if fascism prevailed. You know, they already had a racist programme: Moscow was to be completely obliterated, drowned, and razed to the ground. It would cease to exist. So, this shook some people up.

Food rationing was, of course, very tough and people were already panicking. Panic was spread by diversionary groups and spies who had broken through Moscow's defences. They spread panic. There were robberies, everything you can imagine occurred, because as usual people, the ill-educated, lost their heads. That was the reason for the 14th of October Decree, which declared a state of siege and severe measures. The scum of the earth did show its face. It seeped through. But, it wasn't the true face, it couldn't discredit the real Muscovites and true patriots. It was a very small section, but they were nonetheless able to cause much harm and evil. This is why severe measures laid out in the Decree were immediately enforced against them: summary execution.

At that time I was a company commander sent on the main route into Moscow. Tank sub-units, ammunition carriers, men and beasts, all marched along it. There was panic on the roads. The people who fled Moscow, thinking that they would be saved and would survive, were so primitive. These people blocked the roads. So, as company commanders, we cleared the way so as to let the reserves through. It's very simple. If someone was in the way, that was it. Russian men are strong. You shoved him in the ditch, and that was it. If he shoved back – to put it crudely – he was then only thinking of himself, wasn't someone ready to defend his motherland. He stood in the way, so to us carrying out our mission, he was not a man, but a traitor and enemy. So, we'd throw him in the ditch. Then, the next lot would get the picture. Absolute power. I still admire the fact that my company refused to let anyone pass who showed himself to be an enemy, a marauder.

We didn't touch those who were confused, and there were a few of them. We simply brought them back in line. Those who resisted were executed. These severe measures, these beautiful measures, are the essence and content of war. You cannot say that they go against human rights, as they are neither cruel nor mad. It was right to execute people who didn't understand their position at a time that had become even crueller for their country. The men in our division were well prepared. It isn't peacetime. You're not going say, 'Stop or I'll shoot!' a thousand times before you shoot, nor will you shoot in the air. Of course not. You shoot them on the spot. It was a tough command. Anyone who resisted or didn't obey orders on demand, especially if they also moved away or opened their mouths, was eliminated on the spot without further ado. That was considered to be a truly heroic act – you were killing the enemy. It was the way to dampen the panic [...]. Rear-guard detachments were formed to fulfil a mission, when there were already huge numbers of German fascist troops just beyond Moscow. The order went out: 'Moscow is behind us, there's no falling back!' That was the situation. That's how they came into being. These rear-guard detachments played, I would say, a psychological, morale-supporting role. They induced a sense of responsibility in our soldiers and officers etc. to maintain the front-line. They fulfilled the mission they were given. It was a period of 'No falling back, no steps back!' when we were advancing and the troops were retreating. The rear-guard battalions had a mission. Reinforcements would march past with guns and shout: 'Stop, you're one of us!' And then what happened? Without having realised what was happening, the soldier would go to work and carry



out the mission. Generally speaking, when you look at a soldier or man in that situation, whether or not he's an officer, when he's struck by panic, he loses control of himself. So you have to stop him in time. As we said, you have to give him a shake or even punch him. You then see him becomes a soldier again. If he resists or something or runs away, we eliminate him. We shot them, that's all. They weren't fighters. It was hard, difficult to understand, but what can you do?

[http://ww2history.com/testimony/Eastern/NKVD\\_officer](http://ww2history.com/testimony/Eastern/NKVD_officer)



Himmler inspecting a Soviet camp for prisoners of war, 1941.  
Public domain/Unknown author

## EXERCISES:

### Look at the photographs, read the text and answer the following questions:

- When did the Third Reich attack the USSR? What was the codename of this operation? What was its purpose?
- How was the German army armed, how the Soviet?
- How did the Germans treat Soviet prisoners of war?
- How long did the Germans siege of Leningrad last? How many victims were there?
- How does Major Lozak describe the German siege of Leningrad? What was the greatest problem facing the city residents? How did they seek to survive? What gave them hope of survival?
- What was the situation in Moscow, when German forces neared in October 1941? How did the city residents and defending soldiers behave?
- What powers did the NKVD decree on the siege of Moscow provide?
- What did the order 'Moscow behind us, there is no retreat!' signify for Soviet soldiers?
- How does Vladimir Ogryzko explain the need to eliminate those not carrying out this order? Do you agree with his argumentation?

### Search for additional information and think:

- Why did the Third Reich attack the USSR? What led to the Third Reich resolving to breach the non-aggression treaty signed with the Soviet Union in 1939?
- Were the Soviets prepared for this attack?
- What was the nature of warfare during the Nazi German invasion of the Soviet Union?
- How did the Soviets attempt to defend themselves? Why did the German army advance swiftly?
- How did German soldiers behave toward the civilian population?
- How did they treat Soviet soldiers taken prisoner?

# Chart 5. THE ANTI-HITLER COALITION AND THE END OF THE WAR

## Unit 1

Attack on Pearl Harbor. The burning battleship West Virginia. President Franklin D. Roosevelt described the attack as follows: 'Yesterday, 7 December 1941, a date which will live in infamy, the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.'

IWM © EN 21474



**An excerpt from  
a testimony of Sergeant  
Robert E. Baird, Army  
Air Force, Headquarters  
Squadron, Hickam Air Field:**

On Sunday December 7, 1941 my buddy Daniel Bednar and I arose earlier than many of the other men as we had planned a picture-taking bicycle ride for this fateful Sunday. We were off the post fairly early as planned, had gotten only about two miles from the gate of Hickam Field and were at the end of Pearl Harbor when planes came out of the sun in dive bomber chain formation. They came out of their dive low over the water at right angles with different warships. Each plane or chain of planes had its own particular objective. At first we did not recognize the planes as those of the Rising Sun. We thought it may be our own Navy on maneuvers blowing up some obsolete ships.... However, we soon changed our minds as many of the ships were split in the center and men were scrambling off the decks and into the water. We were still watching with ever excited interest when a screaming whistle was heard near us and at almost the same moment dust flew all around us. This was a near miss of shrapnel. We thought that this was a good time to get back to Hickam Field to see if there was something we could do. We pedalled bikes like bikes had never been pedalled and were back on the post at Hickam in nothing flat. From the gate we could see our Flying Fortresses lined up and down the mats burning furiously to the ground.

[...] Stray bullets were screaming past us and once my buddy asked if I heard that one whistle past us. I replied, 'I am not deaf!'[...] When we arrived at the barracks my buddy Dan was put on a ground machine-gun nest and I was told to draw a pistol from the armament section of the hangar. I had already fastened my gas mask upon my shoulders. After obtaining a 45 caliber pistol I went back to the barracks. I left my wing of the barracks and was near the consolidated mess hall when

CRASH! Boom! I was heaved into the air and came down on my back in a dazed condition. When I got up I felt myself over and saw that I was none the worse for my fall. I then smelled what to me appeared to be gas. I quickly donned my gas mask, tightened up the head straps and found that I could breathe without the terrible smell. I found out later that the odor was from the powder within the bombs....

<https://www.historycolorado.org/story/collections-library/2017/12/07/witnesses-pearl-harbor>

The 'Big Three' in Teheran (left-right): Joseph Stalin, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill on the portico of the Russian Embassy during the Tehran Conference to discuss the European theatre of war in 1943. Churchill is shown wearing a Royal Air Force air commodore's uniform.

Public domain



### **Military Conclusions of the Tehran Conference:**

1. Agreed that the Partisans in Yugoslavia should be supported by supplies and equipment to the greatest possible extent, and also by commando operations;
2. Agreed that, from a military point of view, it was most desirable that Turkey should come into the war on the side of the Allies before the end of the year;
3. Took note of Marshal Stalin's statement that if Turkey found herself at war with Germany and, as a result, Bulgaria declared war on Turkey or attacked her, the Soviet would immediately be at war with Bulgaria.<sup>1</sup> The Conference further took note that this fact could be explicitly stated in forthcoming negotiations to bring Turkey into the war;
4. Took note that Operation Overlord would be launched during May 1944 in conjunction with an operation against Southern France. The latter operation would be undertaken in as great a strength as availability of landing-craft permitted. The Conference further took note of Marshal Stalin's statement that Soviet forces would launch an offensive at about the same time with the object of preventing German forces from transferring from the Eastern to the Western Front:<sup>2</sup>



5. Agreed that military staffs of the three Powers should henceforward keep in close touch with each other in regard to impending operations in Europe. In particular, it was agreed that a cover plan to mystify and mislead the enemy as regards these operations should be concerted between the staffs concerned.

F. D. R.

W. C. C.

W. S. C.

Teheran, 1 December 1943.

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1943CairoTehran/d424>

## EXERCISES:

### Look at the photographs, read the text and answer the following questions:

- When did the Empire of Japan attack the United States? Was the attack on Pearl Harbor a surprise for the Americans? What significance did this attack have on the US entering into the war against the Axis countries?
- How does Sgt Robert E. Baird recall the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor?
- When and where did the ‘Great Three’ meeting take place? Who took part?
- What were the provisions of the conference in Teheran? How was cooperation between the three Allied powers to take place?
- When was Operation Overlord to take place? How was it to be supported by the Soviets?

### Search for additional information and think:

- What is the significance of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in American history?
- What change did the US entry into the war have on the military alignment of power?
- How did the anti-Hitler coalition come about? Which countries joined? What role did they play in its structure?
- Why did Great Britain and the US agree to the alliance with the USSR blamed for the outbreak of the Second World War?
- What significance did the ‘Great Three’ conference in Teheran have for the outcome of the war?

## Unit 2

Barmalei Fountain in the centre of Stalingrad shortly after the battle, summer 1942. The Battle of Stalingrad was among the most important ones of the Second World War. Fighting took place on the Eastern front between Germany and its allies and the Soviet Union for control over the city (presently known as Volgograd) in southern Russia. The total number of victims of fighting between 23 August 1942 and 2 February 1943 approaches two million.

Public Domain/Sergey Strunnikov - Waralbum.ru



Smoke over the centre of Stalingrad after aerial bombardment of the central station by the German Luftwaffe.

Stalin instructed his forces in the city not to retreat, famously decreeing in Order No. 227: 'Not a step back!' Those who surrendered would be subject to a trial by a military tribunal and face possible execution.

Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-B22081 / CC-BY-SA 3.0



Soviet soldiers counterattacking in Stalingrad, February 1943. The ruined Railwaymen's Building is in the background.

RIA Novosti archive, image #44732 / Zelma / CC-BY-SA 3.0

**An excerpt from Robert M. Citino's opening chapter 'The Allies turn the Tide' describing the Battle for Stalingrad from the end of August 1942:**

For the next two months, the two adversaries fought a brutal street battle for control of the city. Paulus's army tried to clear the city block by block and building by building, while the reconstituted Soviet Sixty-Second Army led by General Vasily I. Chuikov held on grimly. [...]

In the Stalingrad inferno, even something as simple as crossing the street required careful advance planning and suppression of all known and suspected enemy positions. Indeed, the city itself played a huge role in the fight.

German skill in operational manoeuvre mattered here not at all and the Soviets were quick to recognise the rubble of bombed-out buildings as a natural ally of the defenders. They also noted that even successful German assaults often left the attackers so disorganised and fragmented that they were easy prey to hastily organised counterattacks. Finally, they learned how to nullify their enemy's firepower by 'hugging' them, deploying as close to them as possible so that the Luftwaffe would either have to risk heavy friendly fire casualties or cease bombing altogether.

In the end, infantry on both sides bore the brunt of the damage: fighting, living, and dying in the ruins of a destroyed city. One anonymous German soldier called it a Rattenkrieg — a 'war of rats' — the name seems completely appropriate, especially considering that both sides used the sewer system as a means of infiltrating enemy positions.



'I have lost my ring': yet another Soviet propaganda drawing illustrating the German defeat at Stalingrad. <https://ww2today.com/new/2016-2/west-point-history-world-war-ii-volume-2>

In operational terms, the Germans did make steady progress during those two months. But meagre reinforcements brought to the city by the Volga River ferries kept Chuikov in business and he managed to hold on to an ever-narrower strip along the steep Volga bank. By late October, the Wehrmacht had taken 90 percent of the city, but its infantry losses had been catastrophic and German commanders were crossing one division after another off the 'capable of attacking' list.

They took one last shot on November 11 with Operation Hubertus, an offensive into the northern factory district spearheaded by virtually every combat engineer battalion in Army Group South. It was a desperate expedient that left the entire army group short of these precious specialist troops for months and the gamble ultimately did not pay off. Hubertus petered out within 400 yards of the Volga River Bank, the final Soviet defensive position in Stalingrad. In the city, 400 yards might as well have been 400 miles, and once again the Germans had failed.

Days later, on November 19, the Red Army launched Operation Uranus, a great counteroffensive to the north and south of Stalingrad, with the aim of encircling German forces in the city. It opened with a massive assault by Fifth Tank and Twenty-First Armies against the extended front of the Romanian Third Army along the Don. The Romanians were underequipped, undertrained, and undersupplied and the Soviet offensive simply vaporized them.

<https://ww2today.com/new/2016-2/west-point-history-world-war-ii-volume-2>

**From a letter from Private First Class Walter Oppermann, no. 44111, to his brother, 18 November 1942.**

Stalingrad is hell on earth — Verdun, beautiful Verdun, with new weapons. We attack on a daily basis. If we manage to advance 20 metres in the morning, the Russians throw us backward in the evening. . . .

**From a letter from soldier Heinrich Malchus, no. 17189, to Private First Class Karl Weitzel, 13 November 1942.**

. . . When we got to Stalingrad, there were 140 of us, but by September 1, after two weeks of battle, only 16 remained. All the rest were wounded and killed. We don't have a single officer and a non-commissioned officer had to take over command of the division. Up to a thousand wounded soldiers a day are taken back to the rear from Stalingrad. . .

**From a letter from Senior Lance Corporal Joseph Tzimach, no. 27800, to his parents, 20 November 1942.**

. . . It is pure hell here. There are barely 30 men in the company. We have never been through anything like this. Unfortunately, I can't write everything to you. If fate allows it, someday I will tell you about it. Stalingrad is a grave for the German soldiers. The number of soldiers' cemeteries is growing....



**From the diary of Field Gendarmerie Sergeant Helmut Megenburg.**

... November 19. If we lose this war, they'll take revenge on us for everything we did. We killed thousands of Russians and Jews with wives and children around Kiev and Kharkov. This is simply unbelievable. But it is for precisely this reason that we need to exert all our strength in order to win the war.

December 6. The weather is getting worse and worse. Clothing freezes on our bodies. We haven't eaten or slept in three days. Fritz is telling me about a conversation he heard: the soldiers prefer to defect or surrender to captivity. ...

**From a letter from soldier Otto Zchtig, 1st Company of the 1st Battalion of the 227th Infantry Regiment of the 100th Light Infantry Division, no. 10521 V, to Hetti Kaminskaya, 29 December 1942.**

... Yesterday we got vodka. At that time we actually cut up a dog, and the vodka really came in handy. Hetti, I have already cut up four dogs, yet my comrades can't eat their fill. One day I shot a magpie and cooked it. ...

**From a testimony of Lieutenant General Alexander von Daniel, commander of the German 376th Infantry Division.**

... The operation to surround and liquidate the German 6th Army is a strategic masterpiece. The defeat of the German troops in the vicinity of Stalingrad will have a major influence on how the war proceeds. Making up for colossal losses in people, equipment and ammunition sustained by the German armed forces as a result of perish of the 6th Army will require huge effort and a lot of time. ...

[https://www.rbth.com/society/2014/02/02/letters\\_from\\_the\\_battle\\_of\\_stalingrad\\_33751.html](https://www.rbth.com/society/2014/02/02/letters_from_the_battle_of_stalingrad_33751.html)

## EXERCISES:

**Look at the photographs, read the text and answer the following questions:**

- What armies fought at Stalingrad? Who led them?
- How long did the Battle of Stalingrad last? How did it end? How many victims did the Battle of Stalingrad consume?
- What was the nature of the Battle of Stalingrad? Which side managed the street-fighting? Which countries did soldiers who supported the Germans in the Battle of Stalingrad come from?
- What did Stalin's Order No. 227: 'Not a step back!' concern? Why was it issued and what significance did it have for Soviet soldiers?
- Explain why German soldiers used the term *Rattenkrieg* – a 'war of rats' to describe the nature of fighting in Stalingrad?
- How do you understand the Soviet propaganda poster presenting Hitler with the slogan 'I have lost my ring'?
- How do German soldiers describe the situation in Stalingrad in their letters to families? In what conditions did they live and fight? What was their greatest problem?

- What does Helmut Megenburg write on the situation in Stalingrad in his memoirs? What did he fear after the lost war?
- How does Lieutenant general Alexander von Daniel assess the effect of the German defeat at Stalingrad?

### Search for additional information and think:

- What was the course of the Battle of Stalingrad?
- Why was the capture of Stalingrad so important for the Germans?
- What significance did the Battle of Stalingrad have for the outcome of the war?
- Why was the Red Army able to win the battle?

## Unit 3

Allied leaders in the Sicilian campaign, including General Dwight D. Eisenhower, meeting in North Africa. Operation Husky was the codename for an invasion of Sicily by Allied armies during the Second World War (10 July–17 August 1943). It was headed by Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, whereas Gen. Harold Alexander led land forces. The strategic aim of this invasion was to deprive the Axis countries of Sicily as an air and naval base. That meant an opening of the entire Mediterranean Sea for the Allies. The second aim was to draw Italian forces into fighting in the hope of a potential elimination of this country from the war.

Public Domain



The landing of the British 51st Highland Infantry Division in Sicily, 10 July 1943. Operation Husky was the greatest amphibian operation in the Second World War in terms of number of soldiers and length of the front. Public domain



Third County of London Yeomanry tank men are accorded a great reception by civilians in Belpasso near Catania, Sicily, August 1943. Here, they are seen with Sicilian children riding on their tanks as they rumble down the main street. Public domain/Imperial War Museum

**Walter Bernstein's account  
originally published  
in *The New Yorker* on  
2 October 1943:**

We all stopped and looked at the closed door of the house. It was a two-story affair, with a large wooden door and no windows. Riley dropped to one knee, aiming his rifle at the door. Sheehan aimed his tommy gun. No one spoke. I moved quietly up to the door and stood at one side of it with my back against the house. Taylor moved over to take my place and covered the door. As soon as all the men were in position, I reached over and slowly tried the knob. The door was locked. I pressed against it very slowly, but it wouldn't give. I looked back at Riley, who nodded, and then I banged the door very hard with my gun. Almost immediately a woman began to cry inside. I banged again and she cried louder, then began to yell and shriek. I couldn't understand a word she said. She was yelling at the top of her lungs and all I could tell was that she was speaking Italian. 'Tedeschi?' I asked, giving the Italian name for the Germans. 'No!' the woman screamed. 'No! No!' I looked over at Riley and he shrugged. He stood up and called for Caruso, who came running up. He motioned Caruso to the house, who came over and stood at the other side of the door. The woman was still screaming and Caruso had to shout to make himself heard. Finally, he yelled something in Italian that sounded very fierce and the woman shut up. For a moment there was no sound. Then, the knob turned and the door slowly opened. A thin, middle-aged woman with stringy black hair stuck her head out. She first looked at me, then at Caruso. 'Americano?' she asked. We nodded and Caruso said something in Italian. The woman looked at us again and then at the other soldiers in the street. She began to cry. She held her hands to her face and cried, then she went over to Caruso and threw her arms around him and kissed him on both cheeks. She came over and kissed me and went down the road and kissed the other men, every one of them, even Lieutenant Riley.

<http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/sicily.htm>



Allied landing craft nearing the beaches of Normandy. That was a part of Operation Overlord aiming to open the Western front of the Second World War. It began on 6 June 1944 with a successful invasion of German-occupied France and lasted until the end of August. The three-month military campaign in north-western France ended in late August 1944. Public domain



Operation D-Day. American units land on Omaha Beach on 6 June 1944. One of the most iconic photographs depicting the Second World War.

Public domain/ National Archives and Records Administration



**An excerpt from  
a testimony of Lieutenant  
Wesley Ross from the  
146th Engineer Combat  
Battalion – B Company,  
Omaha Beach.**

As we approached the beach, I began seeing splashes in the water from mortar, artillery and small arms fire, so I quickly lost interest in being an observer and ducked down behind the steel ramp and sidewalls. This was really fingernail-biting time, as detonation of our explosives by mortar or artillery fire would have been devastating. This unfortunate scenario was visited upon two Gap Assault Teams on the 299ECB's eastern sector, when their explosives detonated prematurely. Both NCDU officers and most NCDU members were killed. The two army teams to which they were attached must also have suffered similarly, as 299ECB pro-rated fatalities were almost double that of the 146ECB. As we came close in, our navy gunner began 'hosing down' the beach ahead with his twin .50 caliber machine guns mounted near the stern of our LCM. This certainly was a morale booster, because as we approached the beach we saw several dead GIs face-down, bobbing and rolling in the surf. This was unsettling – this was just a few minutes after our infantry covering force had been programmed to be the first foot-soldiers ashore. These men may have been tankers in the DD-Tanks that sank in the heavy surf. Had they been in our initial infantry cover force, their under-the-chin assault gas masks should have kept them face-up in the water, even if drowned.

There were no visible tankdozers or infantrymen near our landing area when we scurried from our LCM, five minutes late from our planned landing time of 0633 (per Ensign Blean). This five minute delay had an adverse effect on our mission, as will be seen. Our tankdozer was late and I had thought that our infantry covering force was also late (we had landed on Easy Green, approximately 200 yards west of our assigned spot, and the infantry may have landed properly). The fortified house near the mouth of les Moulins Draw was a short distance east.

[http://americandday.org/Veterans/Ross\\_Wesley.html](http://americandday.org/Veterans/Ross_Wesley.html)

**An excerpt from  
a testimony of Raymonde  
Hue, Vierville sur Mer  
Omaha Beach.**

On Tuesday, June 6, at about 03:00 (French time), my father made us get up and go in the shelter that he had built in the courtyard. There were my parents, both my sisters and myself. The next morning, we left very early and took the road. There were three German tanks stopped in front of the gate. Then, a group of about 20 soldiers walked by. We thought that they were Tommies, because we did not talk about the Americans. These soldiers were surrounded by German ones, who held them up with their guns. That group was going toward Louviere. My mother then told us that if we followed that group, the planes might not fire at us. So, we went behind that little group. When they got to the junction, some American soldiers liberated their comrades, but we found out later as we were not with them anymore. That happened on June 7 between 09h00 and 10h00 (French time). As we followed a group of prisoners, a German soldier passed by us on my bike. He must have had taken it while walking in front of my house. Five hundred meters further that soldier left my bike in a ditch, where all the German officers were hiding. He must have been bringing information with the bike. I got my bike back and dragged it through the meadows for two days. I was 12...

[http://americandday.org/Veterans/Hue\\_Raymonde.html](http://americandday.org/Veterans/Hue_Raymonde.html)

## EXERCISES:

### Look at the photographs, read the text and answer the following questions:

- What was Operation Husky? When and where did it take place?
- What forces took part in it? Who commanded it?
- How were Allied soldiers greeted in Italy?
- What was Operation Overlord? What did the landing of Allied soldiers on the beaches of Normandy look like?
- How does Lieut Wesley Ross describe the Allied landing on Omaha Beach?
- How does 12-year-old Raymonde Hue recall the actions of American and German forces in Vierville sur Mer, Omaha Beach?

### Search for additional information and think:

- What were the aims of Operation Husky and were they achieved? What impact did they have on fighting on the Eastern front?
- What was the course of the Allied landing in Normandy?
- Forces of which countries took part in this invasion?
- What was the greatest challenge for Allied soldiers? What losses did they suffer?
- What significance did Operation Overlord have for the outcome of the Second World War?

## Unit 4

Allied landing craft nearing the beaches of Normandy. That was a part of Operation Overlord aiming to open the Western front of the Second World War. It began on 6 June 1944 with a successful invasion of German-occupied France and lasted until the end of August. The three-month military campaign in north-western France ended in late August 1944. Public domain



Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel signing the act of the Wehrmacht's surrender, 8/9 May 1945. Public domain



Red Army soldiers celebrating the capture of Berlin, May 1945. Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-E0406-0022-018 / CC-BY-SA 3.0

**The Fall of Berlin testimony  
by Gerda Drews.**

When the Battle for Berlin began in April 1945, I was staying with some relatives on a farm south of the city. It was filled with German soldiers who were in full retreat. There was little hope that we could hold out against the Russians. However, I wanted to be with my family when the worst happened, so I left the farm on April 28 to return to Berlin. As I walked along the road, I was passed by military vehicles filled with more German soldiers. They were trying to break through to the north of Berlin. There was a rumour that there was an opening there, where they could escape from the Russians and surrender to the Americans instead. We had heard some terrible stories about what was happening to the German people as the Russians advanced. I made it to the train station, but it had been bombed to pieces so there was no train. Instead, I caught a ride into Berlin with a truck full of soldiers. Artillery shells were landing on both sides of us. Russian multiple rocket launchers called Stalin's Organs fired one rocket after another. I could see the contrails of rockets flying over my head. They were firing into the centre of Berlin. When I left the soldiers to turn toward my neighbourhood, I saw one of my relatives pushing a baby carriage toward me with her two little girls. She was trying to make it to her parents to stay with them. She yelled at me as she passed: 'Watch out! Watch out! They are shooting at us!' There were shells landing all around us. I made it to our cottage in Wittenau, a suburb on the northwest edge of the city. The door was locked and no one was home. I let myself in with my key, went into the cellar we used as an air raid shelter and locked myself in. Suddenly, the trap door opened and it was my father! My family – my parents and little sister — had moved into the nearby bunker or bomb shelter. They were convinced that I had been killed. My father came to see if the house was still standing. At first we couldn't make it back to the bunker because the shelling was too heavy. Finally, there was a break and we ran all the way to the bunker. There, we stayed for days while the fighting raged outside. We didn't know what would happen to us. We were also worried about my older brother Heinz, who was fighting with the German Army on the eastern front.

<https://www.elinorflorence.com/blog/berlin-battle/>

**Svetlana Alexeyevich's  
research on 'Rape during  
the Occupation of Germany',  
2018.**

**A testimony of an unknown  
Soviet soldier.**

When we occupied every town, we had the first three days for looting and ... [rape]. That was unofficial of course. But, after three days one could be court-martialled for doing this. ... I remember one raped German woman laying naked with a hand grenade between her legs. Now I feel shame, but I did not feel shame back then. Do you think it was easy to forgive [the Germans]? We hated to see their clean undamaged white houses with roses. I wanted them to suffer. I wanted to see their tears. Decades had to pass until I started feeling pity for them.

<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=04641ffe5c77497eabef0b8bf59a11d7>



An atomic cloud over Hiroshima. On 6 August 1945, a single American bomber appeared in the sky over the city of Hiroshima. It did not even sustain anti-aircraft fire. The plane dropped a four-tonne uranium atomic bomb called Little Boy. It was the first-ever attack with the application of a nuclear weapon. The second one took place in Nagasaki three days later.



Hiroshima after the bombing. Hiroshima Peace Memorial



A mushroom cloud over Nagasaki caused by the explosion of an atomic bomb, 9 August 1945. Wikipedia



Japanese Foreign Minister Mamoru Shigemitsu signing the Instrument of Surrender on behalf of the Japanese Government on board the USS Missouri (BB-63), 2 September 1945. Lieutenant General Richard K. Sutherland, U.S. Army, is watching from the opposite side of the table. Public Domain/Army Signal Corps photographer LT. Stephen E. Korpany - Naval Historical Center Photo # SC 213700

## EXERCISES:

**Look at the photographs, read the text and answer the following questions:**

- Until when was the battle for Berlin fought and what was its nature?
- What destruction did the city suffer?
- When did Hitler commit suicide?
- How does Gerda Drews describe the situation of the civilian population during the Battle of Berlin? What did she fear most?
- Why did Soviet soldiers plunder and rape the German civilian population?
- When and where did the first-ever nuclear attack take place?
- When did the war end in Europe and when in the Far East?
- Who signed acts of surrender on behalf of Germany and Japan?

**Search for additional information and think:**

- What events led to the surrender of the Third Reich and the Empire of Japan?
- What Allied actions forced Germany and Japan to surrender?
- What was the final outcome of the Second World War for the Allied and Axis countries?
- How many countries took part in the armed conflict? Which of them fought on the side of the Allies and which on the side of the Axis?
- On what continents did the fighting take place?
- What significance did the Second World War have in the history of humanity?



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MINISTRY  
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