

Fascism

A system of government dominated by far-right-wing forces and generally commanded by a single dictator. Several Fascist governments were established in Europe in the early twentieth century, most notably those led by dictators Adolf Hitler of Germany, Benito Mussolini of Italy, and Francisco Franco of Spain.

“Final Solution”

The Nazi's euphemistic term for their plan to exterminate the Jews of Germany and other German-controlled territories during World War II. The term was used at the Wannsee Conference of January 1942, in which Nazi leaders planned the Holocaust but made no specific mention of the extermination camps that ultimately killed millions.

Gestapo

The brutal Nazi secret police force, headed by the infamous Hermann Göring. The Gestapo was responsible for the relocation of many European Jews to Nazi concentration camps during the war.

Lebensraum

Literally “living space,” Adolf Hitler's justification for Germany's aggressive territorial conquests in the late 1930s. Based on the work of a previous German ethnographer, Hitler used the idea of lebensraum to claim that the German people's “natural” territory extended beyond the current borders of Germany and that Germany therefore needed to acquire additional territory in Europe.

Luftwaffe

The German air force, which was used heavily in campaigns such as the Battle of Britain in 1940.

Manhattan Project

The code name for the U.S. government's secret program to develop an atomic bomb. Begun in 1942, the Manhattan Project utilized the expertise of world-famous physicists, including Albert Einstein and Enrico Fermi, to develop the weapon. It finally succeeded in conducting the first successful atomic bomb test in July 1945 at Alamogordo, New Mexico. After a difficult decision by President Harry S. Truman, U.S. forces dropped two atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, prompting Japan's surrender.

Munich Agreement

A September 30, 1938, agreement among Germany, Britain, Italy, and France that allowed Germany to annex the region of western Czechoslovakia called the Sudetenland. The Munich Agreement was the most famous example of British prime minister Neville Chamberlain's policy of appeasement prior to World War II.

Operation Barbarossa

The code name for the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, which Hitler predicted would take only six months but ended up miring the German armies for more than two years.

Operation Overlord

The code name for the Allied invasion of France in 1944, which commenced on the beaches of Normandy and ultimately was successful in liberating France and pushing German forces back east to their own territory.

Britain and join in the fight against Germany, hand their ships over to the British, allow the British to move the ships somewhere safe in the West Indies, or scuttle their fleet. The French crews refused all four options, leaving the British little choice but to fire upon their allies, destroying the ships and killing over 1,200 French sailors. French ships at several other locations, however, were seized without incident.

The Channel Battle

The German code name for its plan to conquer the United Kingdom was Operation Sea Lion. The operation began tentatively, as a series of probing bomber attacks against British ships in the English Channel and ports in southern England in early July 1940. In fact, Hitler was still debating whether to invade Britain or Russia first.

The first German bomber attack over the Channel came on July 10, 1940. Yet even as late as July 19, Hitler made a last-minute speech advocating peace with Britain, presumably trying to buy time. Britain ignored the appeal. Skirmishes over the Channel and coastal southern England continued into August, but the Royal Air Force only rarely came out to defend the ships in the channel, preferring to hold off until the German planes got closer to the mainland, nearer to the limit of their range. As a result, British shipping in the Channel suffered heavy damage, but the RAF was able to conserve pilots and planes for the coming battle.

Eagle Day

In early August 1940, Hitler decided to begin massive bombing raids on air bases and military command posts in southern England, hoping to break Britain's will. Germany would withhold any attempt at a ground invasion, however, until it was clear that air superiority could be gained over England. On August 13, which the German high command labeled "Eagle Day," Germany sent more than 1,400 bombers and fighters across the English Channel. The Germans brought down only thirteen British fighters that day but lost more than three times as many of their own aircraft.

Over the next several days, the Germans continued to suffer comparatively heavy losses. While this gave British pilots a certain sense of optimism, the sheer numbers of planes the Germans sent meant that many bombs were still reaching their targets. Nevertheless, even after three weeks of incessant attacks, the RAF was still very much intact.

The London Blitz

In early September 1940, Hitler directed the Luftwaffe to shift its focus to the major British cities, including London. The attacks began on September 7 and continued into May of the following year. At times, they continued day and night for weeks at a time without letup. Tens of thousands of Londoners lost their lives during this time, along with thousands of residents of other British cities. In the meantime, however, British bombers were also conducting nightly air raids on central Berlin.

Although this London Blitz continued, Hitler decided on September 17, 1940, to put his plan for an invasion of Britain on hold indefinitely. It was clear that air superiority over England would be difficult to attain. Instead, Hitler turned his attention to Russia.

The First Turning Point

The Battle of Britain marked the first turning point in the war, as it was the first time that German forces failed to achieve a major goal. The Royal Air Force's strong and effective resistance caused Hitler to abandon the idea of invading Britain and to turn his attention to Russia. Although the Blitz continued to terrorize London and other cities for months to come, Britain no longer faced the threat of a ground invasion. It demonstrated to the world that with enough stubborn resistance, Hitler could be forced back.

well aware that the Japanese were planning something against them—they just did not know precisely what. One man in particular, Admiral Richmond K. Turner, strongly urged that U.S. forces be placed on a higher state of alert, as he was particularly concerned about the U.S. Navy base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. During previous U.S. war games and exercises, Pearl Harbor had proven highly vulnerable to surprise attacks. Although Turner's advice was considered, only some of his recommendations were implemented.

Indochina

Indochina was a French-administered colony in Southeast Asia comprising the present-day nations Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. On July 20, 1941, Japanese troops entered the region and quickly occupied the entire area. Japan justified the occupation as necessary in order to deny resources to the Chinese resistance. However, Indochina also provided Japan with a convenient base for launching attacks against other countries and territories in the region, including Singapore and the Dutch East Indies. Both the United States and Britain saw this move as a threat and a clear indication of Japan's intention to continue its expansion throughout the Pacific Rim. The two countries expressed their disapproval by freezing Japanese bank accounts.

The Japanese Attack Plan

As early as January 1941, Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku developed a plan for attacking the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbor and carried out training exercises to prepare specifically for such an attack. In October, the Japanese emperor, Hirohito, gave his general approval for action against the United States and, on November 8, approved the specific Pearl Harbor attack plan.

On November 25–26, the Japanese fleet set sail from Japan, unseen by U.S. spies. Even then, however, some Japanese officials disapproved of the plan, and it continued to be debated heatedly. By December 1, all discussion had ended, and Hirohito ordered the plan to proceed. Japan's goal was to make a permanent end to Western interference in its affairs by obliterating the U.S. and British military capabilities in the Pacific.

Pearl Harbor

On the morning of December 7, 1941, a fleet of six aircraft carriers, twenty-five submarines, and nearly three dozen additional support ships was sitting 200 miles north of the Hawaiian island of Oahu—in the open sea, far beyond the line of sight of any U.S. forces. The first wave of Japanese planes numbered more than 180. Although U.S. radar operators saw the massive formation nearly a full hour before the attack began, they raised no alarm, because they mistook the planes for a group of U.S. bombers expected to arrive from California around the same time. This mistake happened in spite of the fact that the planes seen on the radar were coming from the wrong direction and were much more numerous than the expected bomber fleet.

The first wave arrived at the U.S. Navy base at Pearl Harbor at 7:55 A.M. and achieved complete surprise; only nine Japanese planes were lost. The primary targets were major U.S. warships, most of which were docked close together in neat lines. These included eight of the nine battleships in the U.S. Pacific Fleet, along with several dozen other warships. The Japanese also targeted six nearby military airfields. A second attack wave of more than 160 planes followed just over an hour later. By this time, the Americans were well alerted and managed to bring down twenty Japanese planes.

In all, the attack on Pearl Harbor killed 2,402 Americans, destroyed five battleships completely, put three more out of commission, sank or seriously damaged at least eleven other warships, and destroyed nearly more than 180 aircraft on the ground. The only good luck the U.S. Navy had was that none of its aircraft carriers were in port at the time and that the Japanese bombers failed to hit the large fuel reserves in the area.

Operation Bagration

Although the Red Army kept pushing, it was not until the summer of 1944 that a major Soviet offensive took place. Operation Bagration began three years to the day after Germany's initial invasion of Russia, on June 22, 1941. The objective was to drive out completely the German forces centered in Belorussia and central Russia. The Soviets advanced with nearly 2 million troops and thousands of tanks and within days had broken the German front line in two. On July 3, Soviet forces took the Belorussian capital of Minsk, and less than two weeks later, the Red Army reached the Polish border.

The Discovery of Concentration Camps

As the Red Army advanced west into Europe via Poland, Slovakia, and Romania, they uncovered a growing body of evidence concerning German atrocities. On July 24, 1944, Soviet soldiers moving through Lublin, Poland, captured the Majdanek extermination camp before its German operators could destroy the evidence of what had taken place there. Upon arrival, they found hundreds of dead bodies, along with gas chambers, crematoria, and thousands of living prisoners in varying states of starvation. Although the West had received reports of such atrocities for some time, this Soviet discovery was the first absolute proof.

The Polish Insurgency

At the same time, an active Polish insurgency continued to fight against the Germans in Warsaw and throughout western Poland. The Allies had limited success in their efforts to airdrop supplies and other means of support to these insurgents. The Soviet government refused to assist in these airdrops and even actively discouraged them, claiming that they would have negligible effect on the war and were a waste of time. However, as the Red Army made its way deeper into Poland, Stalin's intentions became clearer, as reports surfaced in the West that Soviets "liberating" Polish territory were actually arresting members of the Polish insurgency in large numbers.

Germany on the Defensive

Germany's defeat at Kursk in July 1943 was almost simultaneous with the Allied invasion of Sicily, and Hitler was forced to withdraw some generals and forces to fight the new threat in Italy.

This multi-front war began to take a serious toll on Germany's capability to control the territory it had seized over the previous four years. As Soviet forces advanced farther west during early 1944, the German military leadership also had to prepare for the expected British and American invasion of France. Consequently, Germany withdrew still more forces from the collapsing eastern front. Although Hitler was still far from giving up, his conquests were clearly in decline and his war machine gradually collapsing.

16. The Allied Invasion of France:

Events

June 6, 1944 D-Day invasion begins

July 20 Attempt on Hitler's life nearly succeeds

Late July Allied forces make first significant inland progress

August 15 Allied forces land on Mediterranean coast of France

Mid-August Hitler orders evacuation of southern France Soviet forces enter Germany from the east

August 30 Soviet forces capture Ploesti, Romania

September 10 First Allied troops enter Germany from west

October 18 Hitler authorizes conscription of all healthy men aged 16–60

Key People

Dwight D. Eisenhower - U.S. general and supreme commander of Allied forces in western Europe; planned Normandy invasion

Operation Overlord

By early 1944, the Allies, under the leadership of U.S. general Dwight D. Eisenhower, had been planning an invasion of France for more than a year. The Germans, anticipating such an invasion since 1942, had begun building the Atlantic Wall, a series of heavily armed fortifications all along the French coast. As the Allied invasion plan became more specific, it was dubbed Operation Overlord, and preparations and training for the mission began in earnest.

As part of the invasion plan, the Allies instigated a mass disinformation campaign in hopes of directing German forces away from the actual landing point. As part of this effort, the Allies made use of German spies in Britain who had been turned and were serving as double agents. These double agents helped convince the German leadership that the invasion would take place near Calais, the point where the English Channel was narrowest, when in fact the invasion was targeted farther south, in Normandy.

D-Day

The invasion was launched early in the morning of June 6, 1944—the famous D-Day—barely a day after U.S. troops had liberated the Italian capital of Rome. Overnight, roughly 20,000 British and American airborne troops had been dropped by parachute and glider a short distance inland of the Normandy coast, ordered to do as much damage as possible to the German fortified coastal defenses. Meanwhile, over 6,000 ships were making their way across the English Channel to deliver a huge expeditionary force onto five separate beaches between Cherbourg and Caen. The first wave alone brought 150,000 Allied soldiers to the French shore, and over the coming weeks, more than 2 million more would enter France via the Normandy beaches—to this day the largest seaborne invasion in history. Opposing the invaders were thousands of German troops manning the fortifications above the beaches.

The first day of the invasion was costly for the Allies in terms of casualties—especially at one landing point, Omaha Beach—but the Germans were vastly outnumbered and rapidly overwhelmed by the incoming forces. The German high command still believed that a larger invasion was imminent at Calais or elsewhere, so they withheld reserve forces in the area from moving against the Normandy invaders. The Allies therefore accomplished nearly all of their set objectives for the first day, which included fully securing the landing areas.

The Battle of Normandy

Breaking out of the Normandy coast and into inland France proved more difficult, in part because of stubbornly defended German defense posts at Cherbourg and Caen, which framed the area. The Allies were unable to advance inland in significant numbers until July 28, 1944, by which time the two German forts had been defeated. During August, the Allied forces that continued to land in Normandy were able to move rapidly into the heart of France.

Operation Dragoon

On August 15, a second Allied assault was made into France, this time along the Mediterranean

into Austria, capturing the capital of Vienna on April 13. By this time, the Allied forces coming from France had crossed the Rhine River and were moving swiftly toward Berlin from the west. The Allies decided to let Soviet forces enter Berlin first, while British and U.S. forces concentrated on other areas to the north and south.

Roosevelt's Death

On April 12, 1945, U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt, whose health had been failing for some time, died of a cerebral hemorrhage at his vacation home in Georgia. The United States saw an outpouring of grief, as Roosevelt had been president an unprecedented twelve years and, in addition to being an effective commander in chief and diplomatic leader, had almost single-handedly rallied the American people through the hardships of the war. Vice President Harry S Truman succeeded Roosevelt as president.

The End of Nazi Germany

Just days after Roosevelt's death, on April 16, 1945, the Soviets began their final offensive against the Third Reich. Over the coming days, more than 3,000 tanks crossed the Neisse River, assaulting Berlin's outer defenses while Allied aircraft bombed the city from above. On April 20, Hitler spent his birthday in an underground bunker and soon resigned to kill himself when the city fell. Although imminent defeat was obvious, Hitler not only refused to allow his troops to surrender but also insisted that the conscripted civilian army was to defend Berlin to the last man.

On April 25, the Allied armies advancing from east and west met for the first time, when a small group of American and Soviet soldiers met at the German village of Stehla. The highly symbolic meeting was marked by celebrations in both Moscow and New York. On April 28, the former dictator of Italy, Benito Mussolini, under arrest since his ouster nearly two years before, was executed by Italian partisans and hung upside down in the center of Milan. Two days later, on April 30, Adolf Hitler killed himself in the bunker in which he had been living since the beginning of the month. Later that evening, the Red Army hung a Soviet flag from the top of the Reichstag, the German parliament building in Berlin.

Over the following days, there was great fear of confusion throughout Germany. Some German forces surrendered, while others continued to fight. Among the remaining leaders, some went into hiding or sought escape abroad. Others followed Hitler's example and committed suicide.

The Formal Surrender

Early on the morning of May 7, 1945, General Alfred Jodl signed the official surrender on behalf of all German forces, which went into effect the next day. Some sporadic fighting continued in the interim, particularly in Czechoslovakia. During the course of May 8, nearly all remaining German forces surrendered, and that night, additional members of the German high command signed a formal surrender. The Western Allies thus celebrated May 8, 1945, as V-E Day (Victory in Europe Day). Because some fighting between Soviet and German forces continued into the next day, May 9 became the official Victory Day in the USSR.

The Seeds of the Cold War

As it turned out, the dividing line between the Red Army's position and the Western Allied armies' position at the end of the war in Europe would solidify into roughly the same line as the Iron Curtain, the line dividing Western Europe from Eastern Europe in the Cold War. Berlin itself would remain divided into Soviet and Western zones—which became East and West Berlin, respectively—for decades.

18.The Fall of Japan:

Events

March 1945 Allies begin mass bombing raids of Tokyo and other cities

July 16 United States successfully tests first atomic bomb

July 26 Potsdam Declaration signed

August 6 United States drops atomic bomb on Hiroshima

August 8 USSR enters war against Japan

August 9 United States drops atomic bomb on Nagasaki USSR invades Manchuria

August 15 Hirohito announces Japan's surrender

September 2 Japan signs formal surrender

Key People

Harry S Truman - 33rd U.S. president; after death of Roosevelt, made decision to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945

Curtis LeMay - U.S. general who orchestrated brutal incendiary bombing campaign against major Japanese cities in March 1945

The Tokyo Air Raids

During the same months that Allied forces in Europe were closing in on Germany, Allied forces in the Pacific were closing in on Japan. In March 1945, the U.S. Air Force began a series of heavy bombing campaigns against major Japanese cities. These attacks were the brainchild of General Curtis LeMay, who headed the 21st Bomber Command. His operations used America's new strategic bomber, the B-29, and directly targeted the Japanese civilian population in addition to industrial and military targets. The strategy was simply to destroy the Japanese will to resist.

Many of these raids were conducted on the capital of Tokyo itself, though other cities such as Kobe were also hit. In the spring and summer of 1945, the severity of these air raids grew exponentially, some causing firestorms that produced death tolls in the hundreds of thousands. By late summer, little of Tokyo and the other targeted cities were left standing.

The Potsdam Declaration

Between July 17 and August 2, 1945, Harry S Truman of the United States, Winston Churchill of Britain (and later Clement Atlee, who replaced him as prime minister during the conference), and Joseph Stalin of the USSR met in Potsdam, Germany, with other Allied leaders to discuss the future administration of Germany. On July 26, the three also held a special meeting to settle on the terms of surrender for Japan in order to end the war. The agreement was set forth in a document known as the Potsdam Declaration. In short, it demanded an unconditional surrender that included the complete demilitarization of the country and the replacement of Japan's current leadership by a "peacefully inclined and responsible government."

The Manhattan Project

During the summer of 1945, American scientists succeeded in completing a working atomic bomb, which was tested a single time, on July 16, at a remote location in New Mexico. Scientists around the world had theorized about the concept of such a weapon for years, and active research on its development had been taking place not only in the United States but also in Nazi Germany, Japan,