

War in Europe

TERMS AND NAMES

Neville Chamberlain Prime minister of Great Britain before World War II

Winston Churchill Prime minister of Great Britain during World War II

appeasement Trying to pacify an aggressor in order to keep the peace

nonaggression pact Agreement between Germany and Russia not to fight each other

blitzkrieg Lightning war strategy used by Germany against Poland

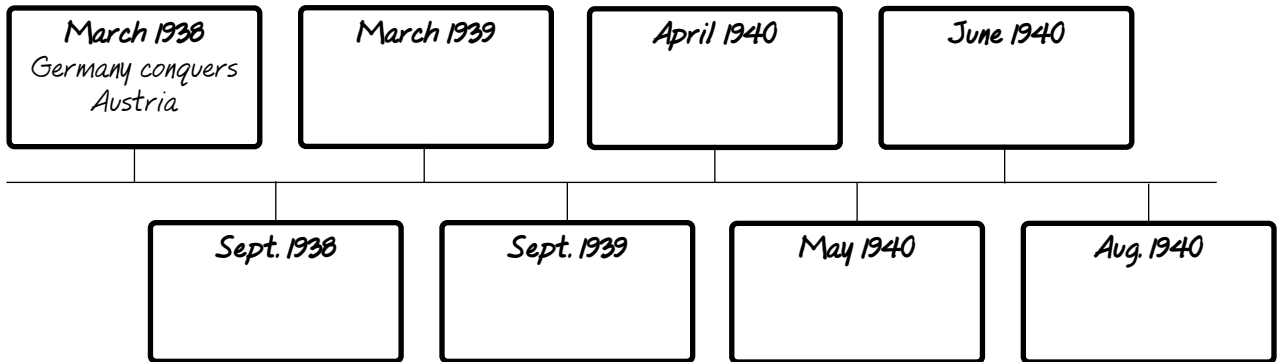
Charles de Gaulle Head of the French government in exile in England

BEFORE YOU READ

In this section, you will see how the expansionist policies of Hitler led to World War II in Europe.

AS YOU READ

Fill in the time line below with the major events in Hitler's and Stalin's attempts to expand their territory.



Austria and Czechoslovakia Fall

How did Britain and France react to Hitler's aggression?

Hitler decided that the new living space the German people needed would come from nearby nations. He would annex, or add, Austria and Czechoslovakia. And he was willing to use force to do it.

A majority of Austria's six million people were German-speaking and favored unification with Germany. In March 1938, German troops marched into Austria. They met no opposition. Germany announced an Anschluss, or "union" with Austria.

Then Hitler claimed that the Czechs were mistreating German-speaking people in an area called

the Sudetenland. He massed troops on the border. France and Britain promised to defend Czechoslovakia. Their leaders met with Hitler in Munich, Germany. Hitler promised that the Sudetenland would be his "last territorial demand." France, Britain, and Germany signed the Munich Pact in September 1938. It gave the Sudetenland to Germany.

Neville Chamberlain was the British prime minister who signed the Munich Pact. He called it "peace with honor." Another British leader, **Winston Churchill**, disagreed. He called the Pact dishonorable **appeasement**. That means giving up your principles in order to *pacify* an *aggressor*. Churchill predicted that appeasement would eventually lead to war.

1. How did Hitler begin to expand Germany's territory?

The German Offensive Begins

What did Britain and France do about Nazi and Soviet aggression?

Hitler did not keep the promise he made at Munich. In March of 1939, he conquered the rest of Czechoslovakia.

Then Hitler began to claim that Germans living in Poland were being persecuted. Many people thought Hitler would never attack Poland. They thought he would be afraid that the Soviet Union, on Poland's eastern border, would then fight Germany. But Germany and the Soviet Union signed a **nonaggression pact**, an agreement not to fight each other. In a secret part of this treaty, Hitler and Stalin also agreed to divide Poland between them.

On September 1, 1939, Hitler launched World War II by attacking Poland. The Germans used a new strategy called a *blitzkrieg*, or lightning war. They used tanks and planes to take the enemy by surprise and crush them quickly. Poland fell to the Germans in a month. Britain and France declared war on Germany. Meanwhile, the Soviets attacked Poland from the east, and grabbed some of its territory.

For the next few months, not much happened. This was called the “phony war.” French and British troops gathered on the French border. German troops also waited.

Meanwhile, Stalin seized regions that the Soviet Union had lost in World War I. He took the Baltic states in September and October of 1939. Finland resisted, and was conquered only after fierce fighting in March 1940.

In April, Hitler launched surprise invasions of Denmark and Norway. Then in May, he quickly took the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg. This war was very real indeed.

2. How did Hitler conquer much of Europe so quickly?

France and Britain Fight On

How did Hitler's attacks on France and on Britain turn out?

Germany attacked France in May 1940—but not where the Allies expected. It cut off Allied forces in the north. The British sent all kinds of boats—from fishing vessels to yachts—to bring nearly 340,000 British, French, and other Allied troops safely across the English Channel.

Meanwhile, Italy joined the war on the side of Germany. The Italians attacked France from the south. France surrendered quickly, in June 1940. The Germans *occupied* the northern part of France while a Nazi-controlled *puppet government*, called the Vichy government, ruled the southern part of France. The French general **Charles de Gaulle** set up a French *government in exile* in England. He promised to free France from the Nazis.

Hitler now made plans to invade Britain. He began with air raids over England. The Germans bombed London night after night in August 1940. The British air force (RAF) defended Britain against these attacks. They used a new technology called radar, and shot down hundreds of German planes. This air war was called the Battle of Britain. The new prime minister, Winston Churchill, rallied the spirits of the British people and declared that Britain would never surrender. Hitler gave up the idea of invading Britain.

3. What happened to Hitler's plans for conquering France and Britain?
