

Europe at War

By 1934, the Nazi leader Adolf Hitler had complete control of Germany (see pages 78 and 79). Hitler planned to create a powerful empire made up of all the German-speaking people in Europe. He began by taking over Austria in March 1938.



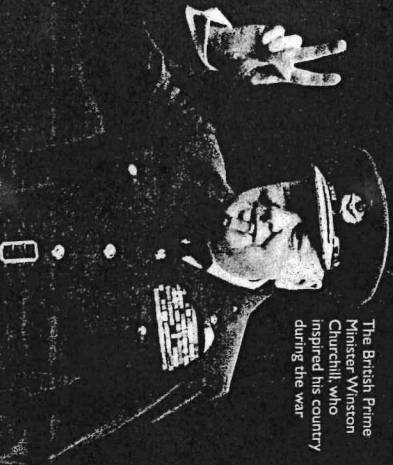
Europe under attack
Nothing much happened for the first six months of the war. Then, in April 1940, Hitler's troops began their attack. They used tanks and planes to advance at incredible speed. By June 1940, Hitler had taken over most of western Europe.

Escape by sea

As the Germans swept into northern France, many French and British soldiers were trapped near Dunkirk, on the north coast. The British organized a huge rescue, using small boats and yachts, as well as ships from their navy. In nine days, over 330,000 men were taken safely to Britain.

The Battle of Britain

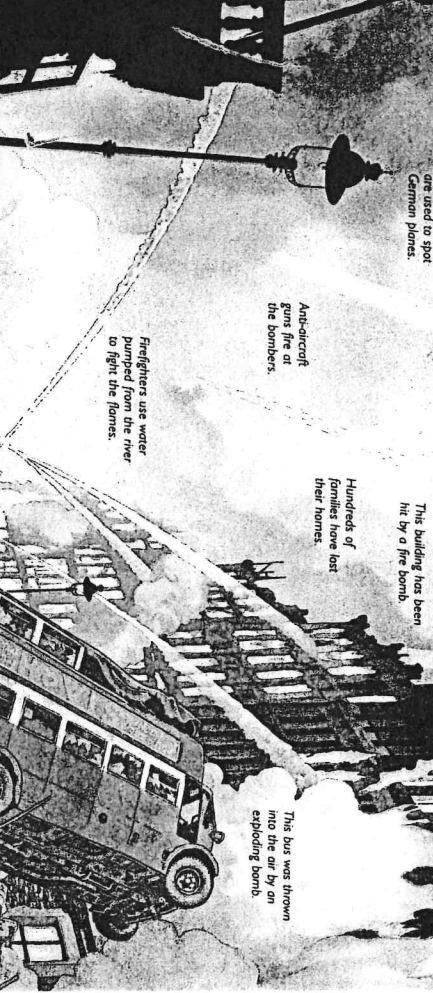
Hitler planned to invade Britain, but he knew he needed to destroy the British Royal Air Force first. From August to October 1940, British and German planes fought a fierce battle in the skies over southern England. The British had fewer planes, but still managed to win. After this defeat, Hitler gave up the idea of invading Britain.



The British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who inspired his country during the war.

The Eastern Front

At the start of the war, the Germans and the Russians had agreed not to fight each other. But in June 1941, Hitler broke this agreement and invaded the Soviet Union. By December, the Germans had almost reached Moscow. But they weren't prepared for the freezing winter weather, and the Russians managed to drive them back.



Hitler then tried to make the British surrender by bombing their cities. Night after night, German planes attacked, wrecking buildings and killing thousands of people. These attacks are known as the Blitz. The British fought back by bombing German cities, such as Dresden, where over 35,000 people were killed in one night.

This scene shows a typical London street during the Blitz. The bombing continued for nine months.

Powerful searchlights are used to spot German planes.

Anti-aircraft guns fire at the bombers.

Firefighters use water pumped from the river to fight the flames.

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This building has been hit by a fire bomb.

Hundreds of families have lost their homes.

This bus was thrown into the air by an exploding bomb.



Thousands of British children were sent to live in the countryside away from the bombing.

The bombs have made huge holes or craters in the street.

Gas and water pipes have been shattered.

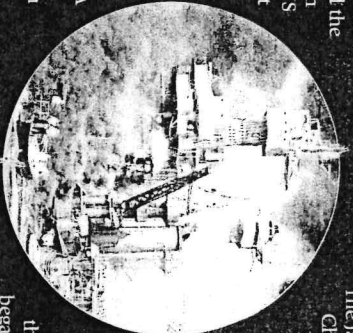
Rescue workers dig survivors out of the rubble.

The unexploded bombs could blow up at any minute.

The World at War

At first, the war against Hitler was fought mainly in Europe. The USA supported Britain and the Soviet Union by sending them weapons and tanks, but the US government didn't want to get involved in the fighting.

All this changed on December 7, 1941, when ships from the US navy were bombed by Japanese planes at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. The next day, the USA declared war on Japan. Hitler had signed an agreement with the Japanese, so he then declared war on the USA.



US battleships on fire after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor

War in the Pacific

The Japanese already controlled parts of China, which they had invaded in 1937. Determined to build up a new Japanese empire, they now advanced with frightening speed. By June 1942, Japan had taken over most of Southeast Asia and many of the islands in the Pacific Ocean (see map).

The Allies advance

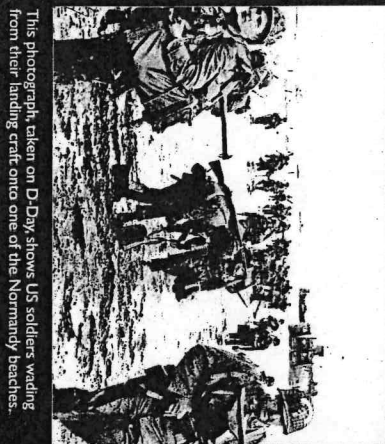
The countries that fought against Japan and Germany were known as the Allies. From June 1942, the Allies began to push the Japanese back across the Pacific. They also won important battles in other parts of the world, such as El Alamein in North Africa and Stalingrad in the Soviet Union.

D-Day

On June 6, 1944, known as D-Day, the Allies made a surprise attack on the Germans in northern France. Thousands of Allied soldiers crossed the English Channel and landed on the beaches of Normandy. Slowly, they fought their way across France, reaching Germany in September 1944.

Map of the Pacific

Japan
Area controlled by Japan by 1942



This photograph, taken on D-Day, shows US soldiers wading from their landing craft onto one of the Normandy beaches.

Victory in Europe

Meanwhile, Russian troops were advancing into Germany from the east. In April 1945, they reached the capital, Berlin. Hitler realized he was defeated and killed himself on April 30. The Germans finally surrendered on May 8, known as V-E Day. (V-E stands for "Victory in Europe.")

The Holocaust

As the Allies advanced across Europe, they found prisons, or concentration camps, where the Nazis had sent Jews, Gypsies and the mentally ill. Many of these people had been murdered by the Nazis. As many as 15 million people may have died in this way. This terrible event is known as the Holocaust.

The war ends

Although the war in Europe was over, fighting continued in the Pacific. On August 6, 1945, the USA dropped the first ever atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. About 80,000 people died in the explosion. Three days later, another bomb destroyed the city of Nagasaki, and the Japanese surrendered.



Atomic bombs, like the ones that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, form a huge, mushroom-shaped cloud when they explode.

Important dates

- Sep 3, 1939 Britain and France declare war on Germany
- April - Hitler occupies most of western Europe
- Aug-Oct 1940 The battle of Britain
- June 22, 1941 Hitler invades the Soviet Union
- Dec 7, 1941 Japan attacks US ships at Pearl Harbor
- June 6, 1944 The Allies land in France (D-Day)
- April 30, 1945 Hitler kills himself
- May 8, 1945 Germany surrenders
- Aug 6, 1945 Hiroshima is destroyed by an atomic bomb
- Aug 14, 1945 The war ends

The Cold War

During the Second World War, the USA and the Communist Soviet Union fought on the same side. But soon after the war, they became suspicious of each other. For the next 40 years, they fought a war of words and threats that became known as the Cold War.

Communism spreads

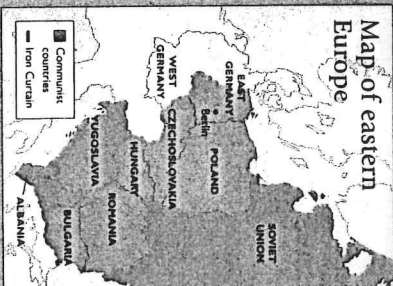
By the end of World War II, the Soviet Army had advanced across eastern Europe and into Germany. After the war, Soviet soldiers remained in eastern Europe, and the Soviet leader, Stalin, helped to set up Communist rulers there.

Taking sides

Western countries, such as the USA and Britain, grew worried that the Soviets wanted to control all of Europe. So, in 1949, these countries formed an organization called NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization). All the members of NATO agreed to defend each other if the Soviets attacked.

In 1955, the Soviet Union and the Communist countries of eastern Europe made a similar agreement among themselves, called the Warsaw Pact.

Map of eastern Europe



Germany divided

At the end of World War II, Germany was divided into four zones. The eastern zone was controlled by the Soviet Union, while the three western zones were run by the USA, Britain and France. In 1949, the Soviet zone became the Communist country of East Germany.

The rest became West Germany.

The Berlin Wall

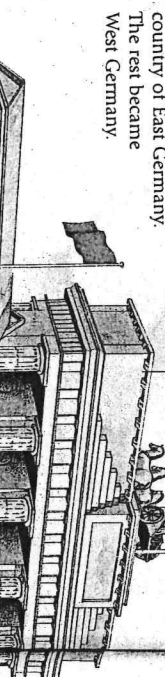
Berlin, the old capital city, now lay inside East Germany, and it too was divided into East and West. Life was much harder for people in East Berlin, and many of them tried to move to West Berlin. To stop this from happening, the Soviets built a huge wall between the two parts of the city. Any East Germans who tried to escape over the wall were shot.

This is part of the Berlin Wall, which became a symbol of the "Iron Curtain" that separated eastern Europe from the West.

East German flag

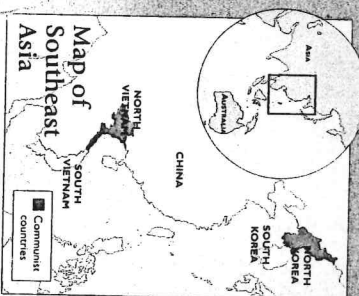


This is the Brandenburg Gate in East Berlin. It was built between 1788 and 1791 as a gateway into the city of Berlin.



Crisis in Cuba

During the Cold War, both sides built up huge supplies of weapons. In 1962, the USA discovered that the Soviet government was planning to use the island of Cuba, near the American coast, as a base for its nuclear missiles. The situation became very tense, as neither side wanted a nuclear war. After six days, the Soviet government was persuaded to back down.

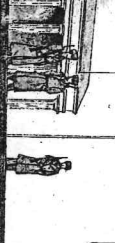


Map of Southeast Asia

This sign near the Berlin Wall warns people that they are about to leave West Berlin.

ACHTUNG!
Sie verlassen jetzt
WEST-BERLIN

East German goods



Korea and Vietnam

The USA and the Soviet Union never actually fought each other during the Cold War. But both sides sent weapons and troops to support Communists and anti-Communists who were fighting each other in different parts of the world. The main places where this happened were Korea and Vietnam.



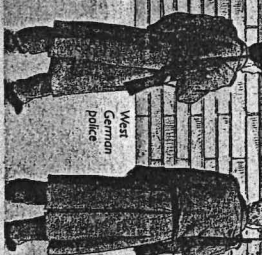
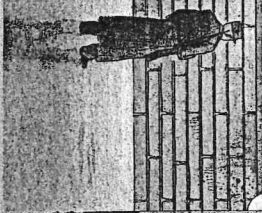
Wounded American soldiers being rescued by helicopter during the Vietnam War.

Changing times

During the 1970s, the USA and the Soviet Union became more friendly. This changed when the Soviets invaded nearby Afghanistan in 1979, and the USA began planning powerful new weapons. In 1991, the Soviet Union split up, and the Cold War finally came to an end (see pages 92 and 93).

Important dates

- 1945 World War II ends.
- 1949 NATO is formed.
- Germany becomes two separate countries.
- 1950-1953 The Korean War
- 1954-1973 The Vietnam War
- 1955 The Warsaw Pact is signed.
- 1961 The Berlin Wall is built.
- 1962 The Cuban Missile Crisis
- 1979 The Soviet Union invades Afghanistan.
- 1991 The Cold War ends.



West German police

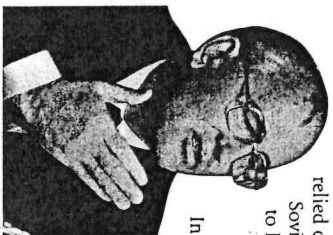
The Fall of Communism

By the 1980s, the Communist countries of Eastern Europe were facing serious problems. People there were much poorer than in the West, and in some of the countries there wasn't enough food for everyone. The Communist rulers were very unpopular, and they

relied on the support of the Soviet Union and its army to keep them in power.

A new leader

In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev became leader of the Soviet Union and began modernizing the country.



Mikhail Gorbachev, Soviet leader from 1985 to 1991

Gorbachev allowed people to set up their own businesses and to vote freely in elections for the first time. He also made it clear that the Soviet Union would no longer help the Communist leaders of Eastern Europe to stay in power.

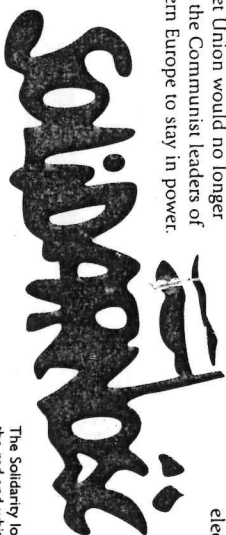
Map of former Communist countries



People power

In 1988, thousands of workers in Poland went on strike to protest against the government. The Polish Communist leaders were forced to allow elections, and the workers' trade union, known as Solidarity, won a huge victory. In August 1989, a non-Communist prime minister was elected, and a year later the Solidarity leader, Lech Wałesa, became President of Poland.

The Solidarity logo, which includes the red and white flag of Poland



Opening borders

East Germany was one of the strictest Communist countries, and people there were forbidden to travel to the West. In September 1989, Hungary opened its border with Austria. Thousands of East Germans began escaping through Hungary into Austria and West Germany. Meanwhile, inside East Germany, there were massive protests against the Communist government.

The Wall falls

On November 9, the East German government agreed to let people travel freely to the West. In Berlin, people climbed onto the wall that divided the two parts of the city. The gates were opened for the first time in over 25 years, and thousands of East Germans crossed into West Berlin.

In March 1990, East Germany voted to join West Germany and, on October 23, the two countries became one again. Berlin later became the capital of the new, united Germany.

Here you can see people from East and West Germany celebrating together at the Berlin Wall, just after the Wall was opened up in November 1989.



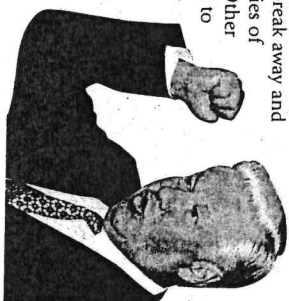
A violent end

By the end of 1989, all the old Communist leaders of Eastern Europe had been replaced. In most countries, this happened peacefully, but in Romania the brutal Communist ruler, Nicolae Ceaușescu, was taken prisoner and executed.

The break-up of the Soviet Union

Meanwhile, in the Soviet Union, the republics of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania decided to break away and form countries of their own. Other regions tried to do the same, and fighting broke out in some places.

Boris Yeltsin, President of Russia from 1991 to 1999



President Gorbachev resigned, and on December 31, 1991, the Soviet Union split up into 15 independent countries. The largest of these was the republic of Russia, led by the non-Communist Boris Yeltsin. With the fall of Communism, the Cold War between the West and the Soviet Union was finally over.

Important dates

- 1980 The Polish trade union Solidarity is set up.
- 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev becomes leader of the Soviet Union.
- August 1989 A non-Communist becomes prime minister of Poland.
- Sep 1989 Hungary opens its border with Austria.
- Nov 9, 1989 East Germans cross the Berlin Wall.
- Oct 23, 1990 East and West Germany become one country.
- Dec 31, 1991 The Soviet Union splits up.

