

CHAPTER  
**16**

Summary

CHAPTERS IN BRIEF *World War II, 1939–1945*

**CHAPTER OVERVIEW** *Germany's Adolf Hitler began World War II, which the United States entered after a Japanese attack on a U.S. naval base. Hitler's racial hatred resulted in the deaths of millions of people, many of them Jews. After years of struggle, the Allies won the war, but millions had died and large parts of Europe and Japan were destroyed.*

## 1 Hitler's Lightning War

**KEY IDEA** *Using sudden, mass attacks, Germany overran much of Europe and North Africa.*

In 1939, having conquered Austria and Czechoslovakia, Adolf Hitler decided to move on Poland. He had signed an agreement with Stalin of the Soviet Union. In it, they agreed to split Poland between them. This deal removed the threat of the Soviets attacking Germany from the east.

So, on September 1, the German army invaded Poland. Using planes, tanks, and troops, it moved suddenly in a technique called blitzkrieg—"lightning war." Britain and France declared war, but Poland fell before they could help. On September 17, Stalin invaded Finland and eastern Poland.

In April 1940, Hitler's armies conquered Denmark and Norway. Within two months, they also captured Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and France. Some French, led by Charles de Gaulle, escaped to Britain to continue fighting. By then, Italy's Benito Mussolini had joined Hitler's side.

Great Britain—now led by Winston Churchill—stood alone. To prepare for an invasion of Britain, the German air force launched bombing attacks to weaken the country. The British air force fought back. It was helped by the newly developed radar that warned of coming attacks. Also, the British had broken the German army's secret code. The air war over Britain lasted many months. Unable to break British defenses, Hitler called off the attacks.

He next turned to the Mediterranean and the east. Germany sent troops to North Africa, where its ally, Italy, was losing to British forces. German troops joined the battle and fought a seesaw struggle with the British. Hitler forced Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary to join Germany in the war. In April 1941, German armies quickly took control of Yugoslavia and Greece. In June, Hitler turned on his one-time ally and launched a surprise invasion of the Soviet Union. The Red Army, though the largest in the world, was not well-equipped or well-trained. The Germans quickly

pushed deep into Soviet land. As the Red Army was forced to retreat, it destroyed everything left behind to keep supplies out of German hands. Stopped from taking Leningrad in the north, the Germans turned on Moscow, the Soviet capital. A strong Soviet counterattack, combined with fierce Russian winter weather, forced the Germans back.

The United States watched these events. Many Americans did not want to join in the war. President Roosevelt wanted to help the Allies, however. He persuaded Congress to allow Britain and France to buy American weapons. Soon American ships were escorting British cargo ships carrying guns. By the fall of 1941, U.S. ships had orders to fire on German submarines. The United States and Germany had an undeclared naval war.

Roosevelt met with Churchill in August of 1941. Although the United States was not officially in the war, the two leaders issued a statement called the Atlantic Charter. It supported free trade and the right of people to form their own national government.

## 2 Japan's Pacific Campaign

**KEY IDEA** *Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii and brought the United States into World War II.*

The military leaders who ran the Japanese government also had plans to build an empire. They captured part of China in 1931. In 1937, they invaded the center of China but met strong resistance. Needing resources for this war, they decided to move into Southeast Asia. The United States feared that Japanese control of this area would threaten U.S. holdings in the Pacific. Roosevelt gave military aid to China and cut off oil shipments to Japan. The Japanese decided to attack the United States.

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese navy began a surprise attack on the U.S. Navy base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. In just two hours, Japanese planes sank a major part of the U.S. Pacific Fleet. The next

day, Congress declared war on Japan. The attack on Pearl Harbor was just one of many sudden strikes. Japan also captured Guam and Wake Islands, and the Philippines. It took Indonesia from the Dutch and Hong Kong, Malaya, and Singapore from the British.

In April 1942, the United States sent planes to drop bombs on Tokyo. The attack raised the morale of Americans. In May 1942, at the Battle of the Coral Sea, the Allies suffered heavy losses but were able to stop the Japanese advance and save Australia. The next month, the U.S. Navy scored an important victory near Midway Island in the central Pacific. In this battle, Japan lost four aircraft carriers, the most important naval weapon in the war. The victory turned the tide of war against Japan.

The United States now went on the attack. General Douglas MacArthur proposed hopping past the strongly defended Japanese-held islands. He wanted to attack weaker ones. The first attack came at Guadalcanal, in the Solomon Islands, where the Japanese were building an air base. However, it took six months for U.S. and Australian troops to clear Japanese soldiers off the island.

### 3 The Holocaust

**KEY IDEA** *During the Holocaust, Hitler's Nazis killed six million Jews and millions of other "non-Aryans."*

Part of Hitler's new order for Europe included getting rid of "inferior" people. Hitler believed in a German "master race." He had a deep-seated hatred of people who were not German and especially of Jews. He and his Nazis made persecution of Jews government policy.

During the 1930s, Hitler passed laws that took away the rights of German Jews. One night in November 1938, Nazi mobs attacked Jews throughout Germany. They destroyed homes and businesses and killed or beat many people. Thousands of Jews tried to leave Germany. Other countries accepted a large number but were unwilling to take all those who wished to leave. Hitler ordered all Jews in Germany and his conquered lands to live in certain parts of cities called ghettos.

Hitler took steps to kill as many Jews as possible. The plan was the "Final Solution" to what the Nazis called the "Jewish problem." Germans also turned on many other people—Roma (gypsies), Poles, Russians, and those who were mentally or physically disabled. The Germans put the most attention on Jews, however.

Thousands of Jews were shot to death by "killing squads." Millions were gathered and placed in concentration camps. These prisons used the inmates as slave workers. Many in the camps died of starvation or disease. Starting in 1942, the Nazis built "death camps." At these camps, thousands of Jews were gassed to death in huge gas chambers. In the end, six million Jews were killed by the Nazis. Fewer than four million European Jews survived.

### 4 The Allied Victory

**KEY IDEA** *The United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union scored key victories and won the war.*

In 1942, Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin planned the Allies' strategy. Stalin wanted Britain and the United States to attack Germany to relieve the pressure on his armies. They agreed but chose to attack in North Africa. In late 1942, the British army drove the Germans out of Egypt and back to the west. Meanwhile, American troops landed behind the Germans and began moving east. The Germans were finally forced to abandon Africa in May 1943.

At the same time, the Soviets enjoyed a major victory. German troops had invaded the Soviet city of Stalingrad in 1942. The Red Army forced the Germans to surrender in February 1943.

American and British soldiers next invaded Italy and captured Sicily. Mussolini was forced from power and the new Italian government surrendered. Hitler was unwilling to give up Italy. His army fought fiercely there until 1945.

While the Allied armies fought, people at home suffered. Some British and Soviet citizens died. In the United States, citizens faced shortages. Goods such as food, tires, gasoline, and clothing were in short supply. The government rationed these items—limiting how much a person could have—to make sure that there were enough for the armies.

Some Americans were even imprisoned. Since bitter feelings against the Japanese became widespread, mistrust of Americans of Japanese heritage grew. The U.S. government gathered thousands of Japanese Americans who lived on the West Coast and forced them to move to concentration camps in the western United States. Two-thirds of them were American citizens.

In early 1944, the Allies built a massive force to retake France. In June, an invasion of thousands of ships, planes, and soldiers was launched. The Allies

suffered heavy losses but gained control of northern France. A month later, Allied forces broke out and began to pour through German lines. By September, the Allies had forced the Germans out of France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and much of the Netherlands.

At the same time, the Soviets were pushing the Germans back in eastern Europe. In late 1944, Hitler ordered his army to make one final, large-scale attack in the west. In the Battle of the Bulge, it punched through Allied lines until an Allied counterattack forced it back to Germany. By late April 1945, Soviet troops surrounded Berlin, Hitler's headquarters. Hitler killed himself, and a week later, the Germans surrendered. Roosevelt had not lived to see this victory, however. He had died in early April. Harry Truman was now president.

In the Pacific, the Allies advanced on Japanese territory starting in 1943. By the fall of 1944, they had landed troops in the Philippines. The Japanese sent their remaining ships to try to destroy the U.S. Navy near the Philippines. In the Battle of Leyte Gulf, in October 1944, the Japanese lost badly, and their navy was crushed. American troops began to move closer to Japan. In March 1945, they captured an island called Iwo Jima. By June, they had won control of Okinawa, an island just 350 miles from Japan.

Japan was the next stop. But the U.S. military feared that an invasion of Japan would cost half a million Allied lives. In August, President Truman ordered an experimental atomic bomb dropped on the city of Hiroshima to try to quickly end the war. Three days later, a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. Tens of thousands of Japanese died. In September, Japan surrendered.

## 5 Europe and Japan in Ruins

**KEY IDEA** *World War II cost millions of lives and billions of dollars in damage. It left Europe and Japan in ruins.*

The war had left Europe in ruins, with about 60 million dead and hundreds of cities destroyed. Suffering continued for many years in Europe.

The old Fascist governments had disappeared. At first, the Communist parties grew strong in France and Italy. People who opposed communism grew alarmed. They voted leaders from other parties into power. When the economies of these lands improved, communism lost appeal. During efforts

to rebuild Europe, the Allies held trials in the city of Nuremberg, Germany. There, captured Nazi leaders were charged with crimes against humanity. They were found guilty, and some were executed.

The U.S. Army occupied Japan under the command of General MacArthur. He disbanded the Japanese army and took steps to give farmers and workers more power in the economy. He led the effort to write a new constitution for Japan, which changed how the Japanese viewed the world. The emperor was forced to declare that he was not a god. The new constitution gave all power to the Japanese people, who voted for members of a parliament that would rule the land. All Japanese over age 20—including women—were given the right to vote. In 1951, other nations finally signed a formal peace with Japan. A few months later, U.S. military occupation ended.

## Review

1. **Summarizing** What was the first step to Hitler? How did it affect later events?
2. **Analyzing Causes** What led to tensions between the United States and Japan before war broke out?
3. **Recognizing Effects** How did the American occupation change Japan?
4. **Following Chronological Order** Outline the fate of European Jews from the early 1930s to the Holocaust.
5. **Forming and Supporting Opinions** Do you think it was justified to drop the atomic bomb on Japanese cities? Explain your answer.