

Module 8: World War II - 1939 to 1945

Topic 1 Content: Setting the Stage for War: Germany and Europe Notes

Introduction



Germany and Europe would change forever once the Nazi Party came into power. Taking advantage of the discontent in Germany, Adolf Hitler promised that the German nation would be reborn. Hitler blamed many of the economic and social issues on the Jewish people. Using manipulation and intimidation, the Nazi Party would set the stage for the largest war in world history.

Click **Next** to learn how the rise of the Nazi Party began World War II.

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Difficult Times



Germany experienced very difficult conditions after World War I. Specifically, the Great Depression was particularly hard on the German people. Germany's economic status was based on foreign capital and foreign loans. The U.S. stock market crash had a crushing impact on the German people. Overnight, many Germans went from middle-class living to poverty and misery. They looked for any solution to pull them out of the Great Depression.

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Rise of the Nazi Party



Capitalizing on a rising tide of German nationalism and discontent with the economic situation, Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party came to power in Germany in January of 1933. After covertly building a substantial army, Germany began demanding territory from neighboring countries. Other European countries, including France and Great Britain, who did not wish to engage in war, allowed Nazi Germany to take that territory. Eventually, however, Nazi Germany became greedy and tried to take too much territory. When Nazi Germany invaded Poland in September of 1939, war broke out and World War II officially began.

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Secret Pact

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The two countries agreed not to attack each other and split Poland.

A map of Europe with Poland highlighted in red. The red area is split vertically down the middle. The western half contains two swastika symbols, representing Nazi Germany's territory. The eastern half contains a hammer and sickle symbol, representing the Soviet Union's territory. The rest of Europe is shown in a light grey color.

Before invading, Germany had agreed to a secret pact with the Soviet Union about Poland. In exchange for an agreement not to attack each other, both countries agreed to invade and split Poland between themselves. The Soviet Union invaded Poland two weeks after Nazi Germany did. The Soviet Union also invaded other Baltic countries.

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Early Success



Germany had many early military successes. In April 1940, Nazi Germany invaded and conquered Denmark and Norway. Continuing the invasions, Nazi Germany took control of France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxemburg. By June of 1940, Nazi Germany had a strong presence in Europe.

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The Invasion of Great Britain



In the summer and fall of 1940, Germany launched a series of massive air attacks via planes. This battle was called the Battle of Britain. The British successfully defended their island from airplane attack, although at great cost.

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The Invasion of Soviet Union



After realizing that invading England would be too difficult, Hitler turned his attention to allies of England, the Soviet Union. In June of 1941, Nazi Germany broke its non-aggression treaty and began a surprise attack against the Soviet Union. Why did the Nazis break their pact with the Soviet Union and begin an invasion? Hitler believed that if Nazi Germany could gain control of the Soviet Union, England would be an easier target to dominate and the United States would stay out of the war in Europe.