

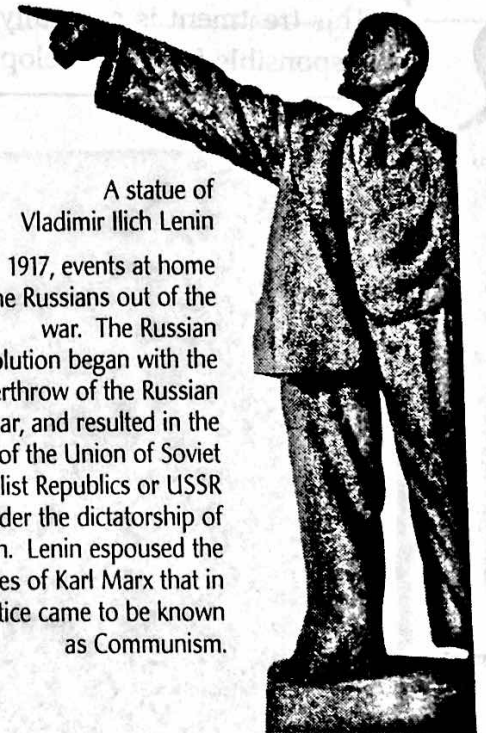
## World War I (1914–1918)

The first years of the twentieth century were relatively peaceful. There were tensions, and old quarrels that never healed, but the major powers formed opposing alliances that tended to prevent the outbreak of any major wars.

This period of relative calm ended in August 1914, when the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria, was assassinated in Bosnia by a Serb nationalist. Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, and the opposing alliances lined up against one another. Germany supported Austria-Hungary, Russia and France supported Serbia, and Germany declared war on Russia, then France, then the British Empire. Europe was at war, and it became the largest war the world had ever seen.



Archduke Frank Ferdinand and his wife at the beginning of their visit to Sarajevo



A statue of Vladimir Ilich Lenin

In 1917, events at home took the Russians out of the war. The Russian Revolution began with the overthrow of the Russian czar, and resulted in the birth of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or USSR under the dictatorship of Lenin. Lenin espoused the theories of Karl Marx that in practice came to be known as Communism.

The Political Situation

**World War I (1914–1918)**

World War I was a war unlike any other previously fought. The development of weapons like the machine gun made it possible to kill large numbers of soldiers at once. Aircraft were put to military use for the first time, both for observation and for the bombing of enemy troops. The concept of air raids on enemy territory away from the battlefield developed in World War I. Germany launched air raids on civilian populations in Paris and England in 1914, and during the next two years raided southeastern England over 60 times, causing much death and destruction. The submarine became an important factor in the war at sea. German insistence on unrestricted submarine warfare caused the United States to enter the war in 1917, a deciding factor in ending the conflict.

The war ended in 1918 when Germany had come to an end of its resources and the German people no longer supported their leaders. By the end of the war, nearly 10 million soldiers had died and over 20 million were wounded. In the peace treaty, Germany had to accept complete moral and financial responsibility for the war. This treatment is generally acknowledged to be partially responsible for the development of World War II.

The war in the air often resulted in individual combat between enemy pilots, and pilots on both sides became popular heroes. Well-known "air aces" were the American Eddie Rickenbacker, the Canadian Billy Bishop, and the German Baron Manfred von Richthofen, called the "Red Baron."



The "Red Baron" got his nickname from his red Fokker airplane.



British soldiers "relaxing" in a trench

To deal with artillery and machine gun fire, soldiers on both sides dug themselves into trenches. The trenches were six to eight feet deep, with a no-man's-land full of barbed-wire separating the trenches of opposing forces. The soldiers lived in dugouts off a network of support trenches. The trenches tended to be wet, muddy and infested with rats.

## Fascism and the rise of Nazi Germany

Fascism is a form of totalitarian government in which one ruler, called a dictator, and the members of his party control every aspect of life in a country. The most important characteristics of fascism are nationalism, glorification of the state, and the absolute control of the state over its citizens. The people in a fascist country have no human rights or democratic privileges. Fascism took hold in Europe as a response to the social and economic problems that followed World War I. Germany was particularly vulnerable to fascist ideology because of the country's economic collapse in the wake of the peace treaties signed at the end of the first World War. The people who were impoverished by this collapse were looking for someone to blame, and open to the idea of a strong leader who would solve all their problems. They found that leader in Adolf Hitler. One aspect of Hitler's policies was nationalism, and one of his goals was the expansion of German territory to give Germans *lebensraum*—living space. This desire to expand by taking over neighbouring countries was the primary cause of World War II.



Benito Mussolini

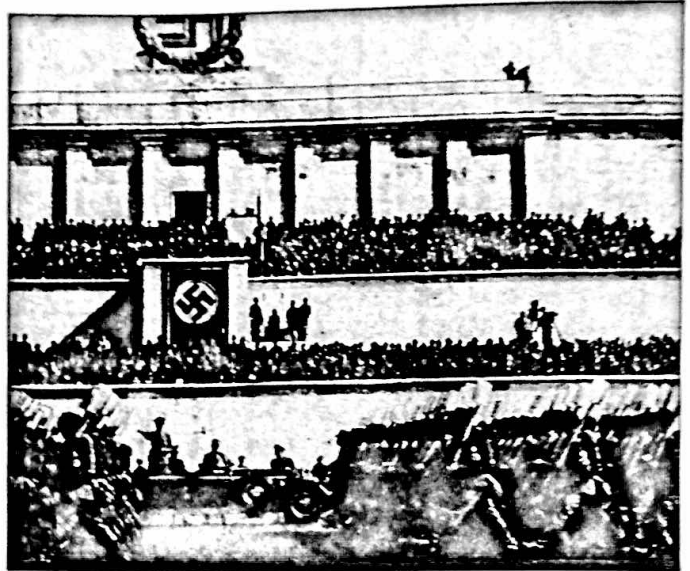
The first fascist leader to seize power was Benito Mussolini in Italy, but other fascist governments appeared as well, including Hitler's National Socialists, or Nazis, in Germany and the Franco regime in Spain.



Hitler's oratorical skills persuaded many people to follow him.

## Fascism and the rise of Nazi Germany

Hitler's other thrust was racism and anti-semitism, and he built up a uniformed militia to enforce those ideas. Nazi dogma classified the Germanic race, or Aryans, as superior, and blacks and Jews as inferior, and said that it was the duty of the "master race" to eliminate the inferior ones. Hitler blamed the Jews for many of Germany's problems and when he and the Nazis were elected to power, he brought in anti-semitic legislation. Jews were barred from holding government jobs, and Jewish businesses were turned over to Aryans. Concentration camps were set up to imprison Jews and other "undesirables." The Gestapo, the state police, was created to eliminate opposition to the Nazi regime. Fear of the Gestapo made many Germans keep silent rather than object to Nazi actions. During World War II, Hitler's policy of anti-semitism became a plan for outright extermination. Jews all over occupied Europe were rounded up and transported. By the end of the war, many millions of people had been starved to death, killed by firing squads, or murdered in the gas chambers. The majority of these were Jews, but the murdered included other Nazi targets like communists, gypsies, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses and Slavs.



One of Hitler's Nazi rallies



Men found in a concentration camp at the end of the war

## World War II (1939–1945)



This picture shows the devastation left behind by the German forces as they moved through France at the beginning of the war.

The German air force, the Luftwaffe, bombed the city of London in night raids with the hope of demoralizing the population. It had just the opposite effect.

During the 1930s, dictatorships came to power in Germany, Italy and Japan, all countries that were dissatisfied with their situation at the end of the First World War. This dissatisfaction set the stage for Germany's aggression in Europe. Hitler first annexed Austria, and then much of Czechoslovakia. When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, Britain and France declared war. The Germans' next action was to invade Denmark, Norway, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Belgium. France fell to the columns of German tanks in a matter of five weeks, and Germany occupied the northern half of the country and the coastlines. Britain, with the support of troops from her former colonies like Canada, Australia and India, remained the only opposition to Hitler, who had now signed a ten-year pact with Italy and Japan. Rather than invade Britain, however, Hitler decided on a blockade from the sea and air attacks.

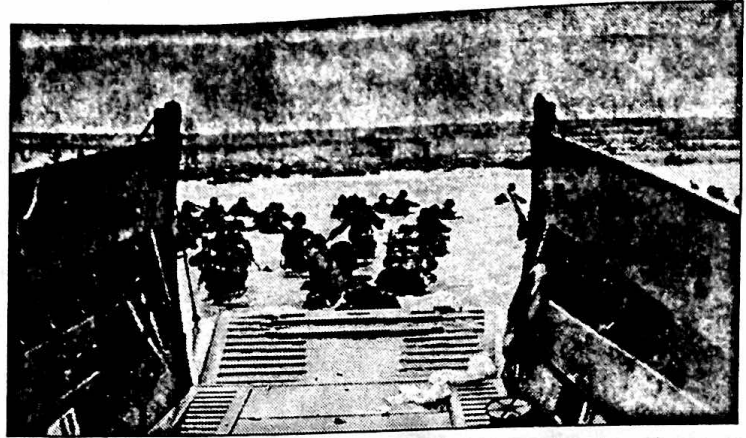
By 1941, Hitler dominated continental Europe. His forces were in control in France, North Africa, Greece and Yugoslavia, and he launched an invasion of the Soviet Union, causing the Soviets to join the Allies. The United States was doing its best to remain neutral in this conflict but that neutrality came to an end when Japan attacked the US naval base at Pearl Harbour, Hawaii, in 1941. The US declared war on Japan, and shortly thereafter Germany and Italy declared war on the US. American President Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill formed a joint military committee to plan the war's strategy.



The three Allied leaders, Winston Churchill of Great Britain, Franklin D. Roosevelt of the US and Joseph Stalin of the USSR

## World War II (1939–1945)

In 1942, the tide began to turn for the Allies. Over the next two years, allied victories in North Africa, Italy and Russia, and the bombing campaign throughout German-occupied Europe prepared the way for an Allied landing in Normandy in June of 1944. German forces were pushed back out of France and Belgium in a matter of months at the same time as the Russian army was forcing them back from the other direction. It had been obvious for some time that Germany would be defeated, but Hitler refused to surrender. He committed suicide in April 1945 as Russian troops moved into Berlin. The German military command signed an unconditional surrender a week later.



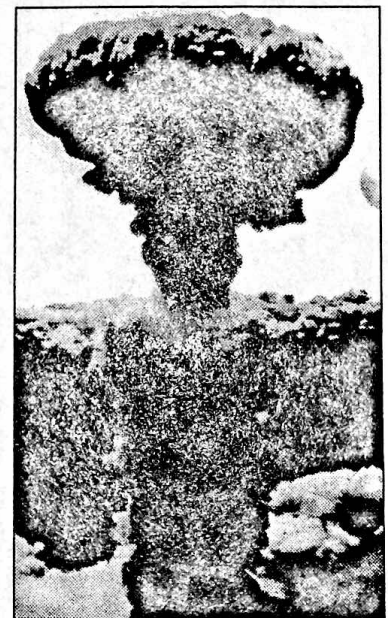
Allied troops land on the coast of Normandy, France, on D-Day, June 6, 1944.

Japan, which had occupied coastal China prior to World War II, went on to conquer most of Southeast Asia and the islands of the South Pacific and then headed for Australia and New Zealand. The war fought in the Pacific was a mixture of naval battles and opposing armies trying to move from island to island. By 1945, Japan's naval forces were largely defeated by the US, but Japan was not yet ready to surrender. To put an end to the war, American president Harry Truman authorized the use of the atomic bomb, the most powerful bomb that had ever been built, never before used in action. The bomb was dropped over the city of Hiroshima and three days later on Nagasaki, causing unbelievable death and devastation, and horrifying the world. Japan surrendered five days later. World War II was over and the process of rebuilding was about to begin all over the world.

Japanese kamikaze pilots on suicide missions flew planes loaded with explosives directly into American ships in an attempt to blow them up.



The bomb turned Hiroshima into a wasteland.



After the atomic bomb was dropped, a mushroom-shaped cloud rose five miles into the air. An estimated 80,000 people were killed instantly.

## The Cold War

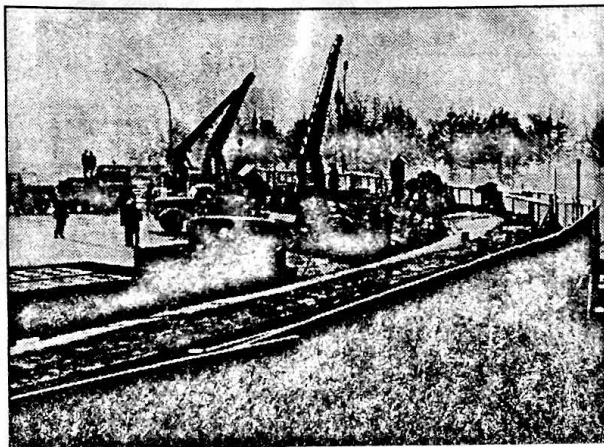


This map shows the division of Europe into East and West. Everything to the right of the dark line was under the control of the Soviet Union. Churchill called that boundary the Iron Curtain.

At the end of the Second World War, Germany was occupied by Great Britain, United States, France and the Soviet Union. The Soviets consolidated their gains during the war by seizing power in Eastern Europe. The United States developed an economic recovery program for Western Europe to supply aid and restore prosperity, so that these war-torn countries would be less vulnerable to Soviet influence and Communism. This struggle for power and influence, which became an ideological struggle between the capitalist democracies and the

communist dictatorships, became known as the "Cold War." And as communism spread beyond the Soviet Union, tension increased.

One aspect of the Cold War was the build-up of huge arsenals of nuclear weapons that would deter the other side from launching an attack. A great deal of pressure came from antinuclear groups in North America and Europe to put an end to the arms race and the threat of nuclear war. When it became clear in the 1980s that the arms race was a stalemate, the US and the USSR negotiated arms reduction treaties, but it was not until the collapse of the communist dictatorships in Eastern Europe and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s that the Cold War really seemed to be over.



After the war, the Soviet Union established the country of East Germany and set up a communist regime there. So many East Germans tried to leave by moving into West Berlin, the democratic enclave surrounded by East Germany, that the government built a wall around its borders and shot anyone trying to cross it.

## The United Nations

One positive development that came out of the Second World War was the United Nations, which was created to resolve differences between countries peacefully. Almost every nation in the world is a member, and although maintaining world peace is not easy and it is often difficult to get nations to agree on how to solve their problems, the world is undoubtedly a better place because the United Nations exist.