

World War II Begins

In the period between September 1939 and June 1941 Germany invaded and occupied nearly all of Europe. World War II began with the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. Germany signed a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union and agreed to a partition of Poland. In response to the invasion, France and Great Britain declared war on Germany. By June 14, 1940, Germany occupied Paris and Western Europe was under Nazi control. One year later, on June 22, 1941, in what was called Operation Barbarossa, Germany invaded the Soviet Union, violating their earlier pact.

Germany was capable of accomplishing these rapid successes through the development of a new type of warfare called Blitzkrieg (“Lightning War”), a highly mobile warfare with the rapid deployment and movement of armor and infantry in combination with air power. Most countries held out less than a month against this modern warfare.

In less than three years, Germany gained control of Europe and began the process of separating all Jews, Gypsies and other “non-desirables” from the general population.



German soldiers march into Warsaw carrying bayonets. October 5, 1939. USHMM, courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park

Allies of Germany

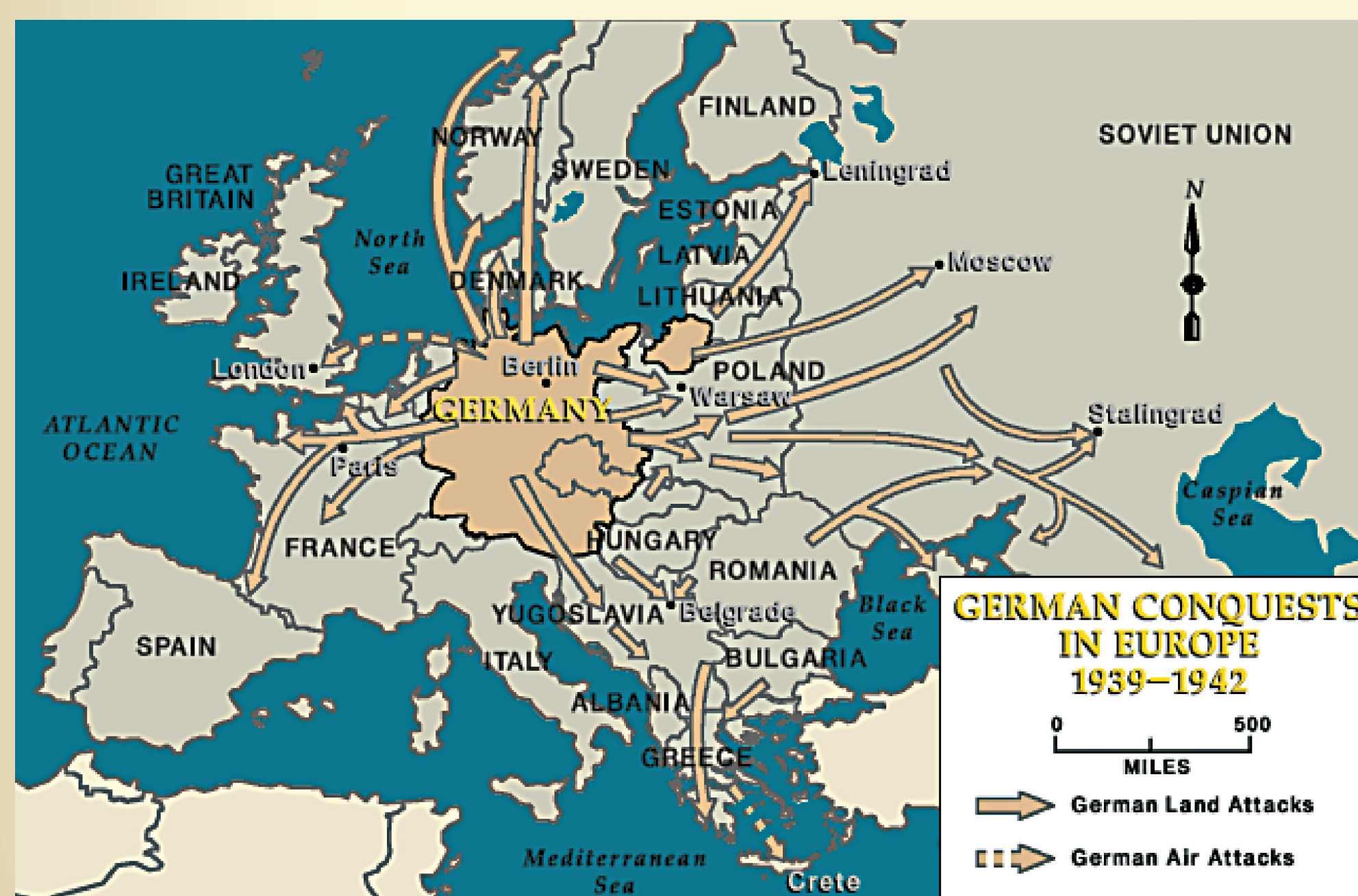
Albania
Bulgaria
Croatia
Finland
Greece
Hungary
Italy
Romania
Yugoslavia

Annexed/Occupied by Germany

Austria
Belgium
Czechoslovakia
Denmark
Estonia
France
Latvia
Lithuania
Netherlands (Holland)
Norway
Poland
Soviet Union (western)

Neutral

Ireland
Portugal
Spain
Sweden
Turkey



Map courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

“I was born on 18 January 1933 – a notable date, that’s when Hitler came to power. When I was a child we were living on a farm...My father settled there after World War I. There were only Poles living in that village...Well, when I was 7 years old, I was just about to go to school for the first time, when the war broke out. On 1 September. I was on my way to school, with a rucksack, pencils and things, when the war broke out. We didn’t go to school for about a month more, I don’t remember exactly. And later, the Russian invaded us, as they said, to save Poland, and so the partitioning of Poland took place – the Germans on one side, the Russians on the other.

A year or so after Hitler attacked the Soviet Union, we were prepared to be deported to Siberia...Only about half the village had been deported. We stayed. And the Germans came. The occupation lasted until 1944.”

Bronislaw
Klodzko, Poland
Mountain Voices website

