

Course: SELECTED CHAPTERS OF CZECH AND WORLD HISTORY

T6 Second World War 1939 to 1945

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## SECOND WORLD WAR 1939 TO 1945

The Second World War (or World War II) was the **largest military conflict in history of mankind**. Despite the fact that the war ended seventy years ago, still affects present-day world order. Possession of nuclear weapon, membership in Security Council and its privileges in United Nation organization, course of border-line, especially in middle Europe, are all the results of this world clash.

### The Origins of Second World War

There are many roots and many theories on the origin of the Second World War. There is a list of key preconditions that frame the way towards the war:

- **Instability of Versailles System** and its failure due to
  - **disinterest** (United Kingdom) and **inadequateness of means** (France) for maintaining the Versailles System,
  - **non-functional** League of Nations, and
  - increase of **political extremism** (Communism, Fascism, and Nazism);
- **Revisionism** of Germany, Hungary, and Italy;
- **Aggressive politics** of Axis countries (Germany, Italy, and Japan) and U.S.S.R.;
- Policy of **appeasement** of Western powers (i.e. United Kingdom and France).

Particular cause of the outbreak of Second World War is claimed to be the Appeasement Policy of Western power. But after the occupation of the rest of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 both United Kingdom and France change an attitude toward Germany. And after the attack to Poland these countries declared war to National Socialist Germany.

There are also disputes whether Adolf Hitler wanted to **unleash** the war or the outbreak of war of **unintended result** of his aggressive politics (A. J. P. Taylor). But there is wide consensus that **Second World War was triggered**, not burst out (compare with the opinion on beginnings of First World War).

### On the Way towards Second World War

During the years that preceded the Second World War the number of crisis in international relations and intensity of military conflicts were seriously increasing:

- **Japan aggression in China**, March 1932 = occupation of Manchuria (northern part of China) by Japanese forces;

- **Abyssinian War**, 1935 to 1936 = conquer and occupation of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) by Italian forces;
- Outbreak of **Second Sino-Japan War**, July 1937 = Japan took advantage of Marco Polo Bridge incident and attacked China and occupied its eastern territory;
- **Occupation of Czech borderland**, October 1938 = National Socialist Germany increased pressure on Czechoslovakia and western powers in order to gain Czech borderland (Sudetenland), territory inhabited by Germans;
- **Occupation of rest of Czechoslovakia**, March 1939 = Germany induces proclamation of independent Slovakian Republic and occupied Czech Lands;
- **Jablunkov Incident**, 26 September 1939 = the original term of German attack to Poland was set on 26 September 1939. But order not to attack did not receive some units of Abwehr and attacked Polish territory in Teschen Silesia (present day part of Czech Republic).

### Characteristics of Second World War

The Second World War was the largest war conflict in history. Fights took place in Europe, North Africa, Eastern and Southeast Asia, and in Pacific. Together approximately **110 million men** were mobilized and some 22 million of them fell during military service in 1939 to 1945. Total number of victims is estimated to be more than 50 million persons; in fact estimation of some historians could be higher, for example of 75 million men.

Together with First World War the Second World War is supposed to be **total conflict**. It means that due to **impact of ideologies**, especially in National Socialist Germany and in U.S.S.R., the war was conducted as clash of two systems that only one could survive. In order to reach victory the whole society and its resources were mobilized. All men capable of military service were enlisted in army, the rest of population, sometimes even children, were deployed in economy. Economy switched into **war economy**, e.g. compulsory work in producing sectors or ration stamp system for food etc. were implemented.

### Periodization of Second World War

There are several ways to divide the war into time units. According to **political point of view** there are two stages.

- **First Stage** lasted from 1 September 1939 to 22 June 1941 and its feature was **loose four-alliance of totalitarian states**, i.e. of Germany, Italy, Japan, and Soviet Union, their common and parallel expansion based on:
  - Axis Pact (Germany, Italy, Japan);
  - Pact Against Comintern (Axis and their allies);
  - Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact (Germany, U.S.S.R.).
- **Second Stage** lasted from 22 June 1941 to 2 September 1945 and its feature was **disintegration of four-alliance**:
  - on 22 June 1941 German attacked Soviet Union that switched to United Nations and became one of its most decisive members;
  - On 13 October 1943 Italy declared war to Germany;
  - On 8 August 1945 U.S.S.R. declared war to Japan.

According to development of **military superiority and strategic initiative** there are also two main stages.

- **First Stage** lasted from the beginning of war until the turn of 1942 and 1943; the strategic initiative bore four-alliance:
  - defeat and occupation of Poland; Denmark and Norway; Finland; Netherland, Belgium, Luxemburg, and France; Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania; Yugoslavia and Greece by Italy, Germany and Soviet Union;
  - invasion into Soviet Union and occupation its western territory by Germany;
  - attack to U.S. position in Pacific and Asia and occupation territory in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia by Japan.
- **Second Stage** lasted from the turn of 1942 and 1943 to the end of war; the point of turnaround is supposed to be period when decisive battles in three theatres took places at the same time:
  - Battle of Stalingrad between Germany and Soviet Union in Eastern Front;
  - Battle of El-Alamein and Torch Operation in North Africa Theatre between Germany and Italy and U.S. and United Kingdom;
  - Battles of Guadalcanal between Japan and United States.

## Comparison of Belligerents

The military power of belligerents changed in time; in first stage proportion of strength was in favour of four-alliance, while in second stage in favour of United Nations.

- **First Stage** (according to political criteria):
  - **economic and men-power superiority of four-alliance** and their allies (together more than 400 million inhabitants) over United Kingdom and France and their allies (without colonies ca. 170 million inhabitants); only China had more inhabitants (together some 530 million), but its territory was divided into competing movements;
  - military and economic supremacy, Germany and Soviet Union were after United States the two largest economics in world.
- **Second Stage** meant involvement of Soviet Union and United States on the side of United Nations and also more intensive involvement of British colonies, especially of India; United States were the most powerful economy in world
  - Axis countries and their allies had ca. 225 million inhabitants (without occupied countries), United Nations and their allies had one and half billion inhabitants (including colonies), i.e. prevalence was six times larger.

The following table shows the comparison of **military men power in millions** during the war. See raising superiority of coalition of United Nations, especially of Soviet Union and United States.

Year	Germany	United Kingdom	Soviet Union	United States
1939	1,4	0,7	N/A	0,3
1940	3,6	2,2	N/A	0,4
1941	7,2	3,3	4,2	0,9
1942	8,6	3,8	5,5	2,2
1943	9,6	4,3	6,4	7,0
1944	9,1	4,5	6,9	10,4
1945	N/A	4,7	11,3	11,9

## Polish Campaign 1939

In early morning on 1 September 1939 shots of guns of Schleswig-Hollstein, German cruiser, on Polish position in Westerplatte near Danzig started the Second World War.

Since spring 1939 German increased diplomatic pressure to Poland in order to gain certain Polish territory, so called Danzig Corridor and regions in Uppers Silesia and in Posen Region where lived a lot of members of German minority. Official pretext to campaign was alleged assault of Polish troops on German radio station in city Gleiwitz. But in fact this assault was act of German intelligence service.

According **Fall Weiß** (Case White) that specified advancement in Polish Campaign German forces were divided into two army groups, **Army Group South** that attacked from Silesia and Slovakia, and **Army Group North** that attacked from Eastern Pomerania and Prussia. The core of the assault were six **tank divisions** (Panzerdivisionen) and four so called **light divisions** (Leichtdivisionen) that were organized into tank corps. The aim of the campaign was to destroy Polish armed forces near Vistula River, to reach Warsaw and to divide Poland into two parts. The allies of Germany in Polish campaign were Slovakia and Soviet Union.

On the other side, Polish armed forces were divided into **six army formations** that were concentrated **all over borders** with Germany. But Poland relied not on its own armed forces, but on counter-attack of western powers, i.e. of United Kingdom and France.

The decisive day of the campaign was 5 September 1939 when German forces breached Polish defence lines and continued to Warsaw. Their advancement was slowed down in **battle of Bzura** (Western of Warsaw) on 9 to 22 September 1939 which became the last attempt to advert surrounding of army formation "Poznań". Despite the fact that on 3 September 1939 France and United Kingdom **declared war to Germany** situation in Polish theatre did not change, in fact only deteriorated when Soviet Union start to **occupy Eastern territory of Poland** on 17 September 1939. Next day Polish government left for exile to Romania, few days later the Warsaw capitulated and the last Polish units surrendered on 5 October 1939 (army formation "Polesie").

During campaign Polish army lost 66 000 men, losses of Germany, Slovakia, and Soviet Union were ca. 20 000 men. Polish campaign was the triumph **Blitzkrieg tactic** that was based on **indirect assaults** of **tank and air craft weaponry**. For understanding of its quality could be said that Wehrmacht lost only 50 tanks.

According to German-Soviet agreement of 28 September 1939 territory of Poland was **divided** between **Germany** and **Soviet Union**. Part of Poland were merged with Germany, other part became so called General Government under

German rule, while eastern parts were joined to Soviet Union as integral parts of Belarussian and Ukrainian republics. On both sides of new borders **persecutions** of former Polish citizenship took place, in German part according to race criteria, in Soviet part according to social criteria.

### **Battle of Atlantic 1939 to 1945**

Battle of Atlantic is term that names fights in area of Atlantic Ocean that took place **nearly for the whole time of war**. The aim of these fights was to control **marine lines of trade ships**; in the beginning to prevent supplying of United Kingdom, than of Germany.

- First clashed took place after September 1939:
  - From October to December 1939 battle ship Admiral Graf Spee were able to destroy number of trade ship and after pursuit of British battle ships were sank after battle of La Plata near South America shores.
- The most intensive fights were took place between summer 1940 and mid-1943 because:
  - Germany gained new harbours in Norway and in France and
  - at the same time build two powerful battle ships, Bismarck and Tirpitz.

Bismarck together with Tirpitz as its sister-ship became the most powerful battle ships of Atlantic theatre. Full displacement of Bismarck was 50 000 tons, her length was 251 meters and as her main weapons were eight 380 mm guns. Captain of this battle ship and of crew of two thousand men was Ernest Lindemann.

On 18 May 1941 **Bismarck** sailed out together with cruiser **Prinz Eugen** into Northern Atlantic in order to get into French harbours. From this new home Bismarck should sank trade ships sailing to the British Island. But both ships were recognized near Norway shores and British Home Fleet started to pursue them. On 24 May 1941 in **Battle in Danish Strait** German ships ruined H.M.S. Hood and damaged H.M.S. Prince of Wales, but could not get out of scope of British pursuing. On 27 May 1941 Bismarck was caught up by British fleet, damaged by airplane Swordfish and then ruined by gun shots of three ships, H.M.S. Rodney, H.M.S. King George V, and H.M.S. Ark Royal. This battle confirmed **supremacy of airplanes over battle ships** in open marine battle.

After destruction of Bismarck main weapon of Germany became U-boots. But since spring 1943 technological supremacy of Allies, new types of sonar, convoy



system, or aircraft reconnaissance forced German marine powers to reduce its fights on Norwegian Sea.

### **Northern Campaign 1940**

On 9 April 1940 German commenced campaign against **Norway and Denmark** under code name “Weserübung” (Weser River Exercise). The cause campaign was to arrange favourable position for planned Western campaign and especially German concerns whether the Allies will accept neutrality of Norway and Denmark in conflict.

- **Denmark** capitulated without defiance the same day, **Norway** resisted, but possibility of defence was weakening by existence of pro-German movement with Vidkun Quisling in its head.
- Few days later expedition forces of France and United Kingdom disembarked in Norway. The toughest fights were on port Narvik (from 9 April to 8 June 1940).
- Because of Western campaign British and French forces had to evacuate Norway. Due to this fact Norwegian forces capitulated on 10 June 1940.

During Northern Campaign German forces lost one ship and 5000 men, allies together 6000 men. Norwegian king Haakon VII left for exile to London where Norwegian exile government was formed, but Norwegian territory was under German rule as empire-commissariat. Denmark, due to its conduct during campaign, gained limited autonomy with King Christian X in its head.

### **Western Campaign 1940**

After 28 September 1939 German High Command prepared plan of invasion in western countries, so called Fall Gelb (i.e. Case Yellow). But realization of its plan was repeatedly postponed because of needs of consolidation of Wehrmacht after Polish campaign. During that time plan was changed according General Heinz Guderian; since then the aim effort was to attack by tanks in direction of English Channel and to divide French and British forces.

The attack was commenced on 10 May 1940 and ended the era of so called **Strange War** (also Sitzkrieg) when in fact war in western front was limited to skirmishes.

The first advanced German troops of **Army Group B** into territory of Belgium and Netherlands in 10 and 11 May 1940. The **battle of Eben-Emael** with Belgian units

took place. The attack in Belgium and Netherlands was caused to commence **Plan Dyle**. According to this plan Franco-British troops moved to the North, to the Belgian territory, but **revealed its right wing**.

On 12 May 1940 **Army Group A** that were located southern of Army Group B, commenced its advancement. The core of attack became **thick units** of formation Kleist that dispose of 50 % of all German tanks and that advanced over poorly defended Ardennes. The goal of these units was to reach sea shores. On 13 and 14 May 1940 German units prevailed in **battle of Sedan** in order to cross Meuse River and week later, on 20 May 1940 XIXth Tank Corps under command of General Heinz Guderian reached sea shores. It meant that Germans managed to surround British, Belgian and Dutch forces. Despite German superiority Adolf Hitler issued so called Haltbefehl (Stop-Order) on 23 May 1940 and enabled the British to realize **Operation Dynamo**, i.e. evacuation of British Expedition Forces into England. It meant that the only enemy of Germans in European continent were France.

Soon after the reorganization of German units Fall Rot (Case Red) was commenced. Its goal was to defeat France. On 5 June 1940 when attack started began **Battle of France**. France could not resist German advancement that was after 10 June 1940 supported by Italian attack into southern France. On 14 June 1940 Paris capitulated and soon after that on 22 June 1940 French government signed the armistice. According to the terms of armistice France was divided into Northern, by German troops occupied, and Southern territory under French government. This era of French history is called Vichy France because of residence of French government that was forced to be Germany ally.

Western campaign confirmed supremacy of tank warfare, especially their deployment in offensive wedge-like operation. German tank general Heinz Guderian said that "tank saves blood". And he was right. While Allies lost over 150 000 men, Germany and Italy together noticed ca. 50 000 losses.

### **Battle of Britain 1940**

After the end of Western campaign Germany began to prepare invasion to British Islands under code name **Unternehmen Seelöwe** (Operation Sea Lion). But before the operation was confirmed Battle of Britain already started. In fact battle lasted

- from the end of June 1940 to the end of May 1941 but

- according to intensity of fights **the most important** were events from 10 July to 31 October 1940.
- Condition of operation = air supremacy of Luftwaffe, liquidation of RAF

The aim of Battle of Britain was **to win air supremacy** as pre-condition of invasion into British Islands.

But during the battle German command four times **changed the tactics**. In first stage the aim of air attack were convoys in English Channel and harbours in southern England. On 8 August 1940 the new target became Royal Air Craft (operation Adlerangriff, i.e. Attack of Eagles). The largest assault of Luftwaffe was set on 13 August 1940 (operation Adlertag, i.e. Day of Eagles). But on 7 September 1940 Adolf Hitler decided to focus on dropping bombs on London (London Blitz) and after 1 October 1940 on largest cities. That in fact protected the Royal Air Craft from German attacks, restore its power and enable to preserve control of British airspace.

During Battle of Britain Royal Air Craft lost ca. 1000 airplanes and approximately 500 pilots while Luftwaffe lost ca. 1700 airplanes and almost 3000 pilots. Battle of Britain became the first **defeat of German forces** and once of all prevented possibility of disembarkation in England during the course of Second World War.

### **Italian Parallel War 1940 and 1941**

Italian Parallel War is term for aggression of Italy that took place in 1940 and 1941 “parallel” and independent on course of German expansion:

- On 10 June 1940 Italy declared war to France and United Kingdom and engaged in Western Campaign.
- On 20 August 1940 Italy attacked British colonies in Africa (Somalia and Sudan) and on 13 September 1940 invaded Egypt, but soon after that its advancement stopped in Sidi Barrani.
- On 29 October 1940 Italian Air Force (Regia Aeronautica) engaged in Battle of Britain.
- On 28 October 1940 Italy crossed the Albanian-Greek borders and commenced **Greek campaign**.

But during November and December 1940 Italian forces suffered harsh losses and huge defeat in all fronts. While in Greece Italian offensive was deflected and in November the fights took place in Albania, in Libya were Italian forces defeated in

**battle of Sidi Barrani** and on 9 February 1941 capitulated. Moreover on 27 to 29 March 1941 in **battle of Cape Matapan** southern of Greece shores Italian Naval Force noticed harsh loss of three cruisers and one damaged battleship. After this defeats Italy was in disastrous military situation and plead Germany for help; **Italy became fully depended on Germany.**

### **Balkan Campaign 1941**

Due to situation of Italy German forces prepared **Operation Marita** with its aim to help Italians and to seize control over Greece. Originally operation involved only Greece but on 27 March 1941 coup d'état took place in Yugoslavia and new government was formed of pro-British members. Yugoslavia became no longer ally of Germany. The next reason of operation was to secure Balkan for military campaign against Soviet Union. The Balkan Campaign became another example of so called Blitzkrieg:

- Fights in **Yugoslavia** lasted from 6 April to 17 April 1941.
- Fights in **Greece** lasted from 6 April to 27 April 1941.

During three week both country were occupied. Only **Crete Island** where British troops were dislocated resisted. That is why German command prepared another military operation under code name **Mercury**. Its aim was to drop military units both by sea and by air. Operation was commenced on 20 May 1941. 7th Airborne Division managed to take control over airports within one day but suffered harsh losses. After one week of fights in island British troops were forced to leave.

After Balkan Campaign the Yugoslavian territory was divided into Germany (ca 10 000 km<sup>2</sup>), Italy (4 595 km<sup>2</sup>), Hungary (11 198 km<sup>2</sup>), Bulgaria, and newly established Independent Croatian State (102 724 km<sup>2</sup>); territory of Serbia and was under direct German administration (51 100 km<sup>2</sup>). Territory of Greece became part of Italy and of Bulgaria.

### **Campaign in Northern Africa 1941 to 1943**

During February and March 1941 German troops were transferred to Northern Africa in order to help maintain Italian position in this region. Originally two division, among them one tank division, formed so called **Deutsches Afrikakorps** (German African Corps). This term marked not only one military corps but also stands for all German forces in Africa formed into **Panzerarmee Afrika** (Tank Army Africa). At the end of

campaign Germany send in total 13 divisions. The commander of German corps and later on army was General **Erwin Rommel**, whose nick name “Desert Fox” entered into history.

Soon after his arrival General Erwin Rommel overtook initiative:

- On 31 March 1941 Afrikakorps commenced offensive under code name **Sonnenblume** (Sunflower). During German advancement Tobruk, important port in North African shores, was sieged.
- On 13 November 1941 British commenced counter-offensive (code name **Crusader**) breached the siege of Tobruk.

At the end of 1941 the Germans were back in their initial position. That is why General Rommel attacked once again:

- During January 1942 German unit advance towards Egyptian borders, captured **Tobruk** (June 1942) and reached **El Alamein**.

El Alamein was strategic place in Northern Africa because terrain shaped narrow space to advance. On one side there was Mediterranean Sea, on the other there was large and impassable Qattara Depression. General Rommel attacked on British position in June 1942, but did not succeed. On the other hand British 8th army under commander General Bernard Law Montgomery launch counter-offensive **Lightfoot**. British made use of huge number superiority in man and in tanks and forced German and Italian troops to retreat. On 8 November 1942 opened **Operation Torch** meant that other British and American troops were disembarked in African territory in Morocco and in Algeria. The rest of surrounded Axis units got to capitulate in Tunisia on 13 May 1943.

### **Soviet Aggressions 1939 and 1940**

According to agreement between U.S.S.R. and Germany of 23 August 1939 and then on agreement of 28 September 1939 spheres of influence in Europe were marked out. Into Soviet sphere belonged four countries and partly other two. Those were **Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania**, Eastern part of **Poland** and of **Romania** (Moldavian territory). Within its sphere Soviet Union commenced aggressive expansion:

- On 17 September 1939 Soviet Ukrainian and Belorussian Fronts engaged in Polish Campaign and occupied Eastern territory of **Poland**; its Northern part

was integrated with Belorussian Soviet Republic and its Southern part with Ukrainian Soviet Republic.

- After Polish Campaign Soviet Union forced the Baltic States to conclude agreements allowing placing Red army in their territory.
- From 30 November 1939 to 13 March 1940 Soviet Union conducted war with **Finland** (so called **Winter War**). The reason was fact that Finland did not accept Soviet demands regarding placing Red army and territorial concessions (see below).
- During June 1940 Red army occupied **Estonia**, **Latvia**, and **Lithuania** and include their territory as part of Soviet Union.
- On 28 June 1940 Soviet troops occupied **Romanian** territory, present-day Moldova.

The largest military conflict was so called **Winter War** between Soviet Union and Finland. Pre-text for Soviet attack was so called **Mainila incident**, i.e. alleged shooting on Soviet position on 26 November 1939. Despite huge superiority in men and equipment Red Army could not simply invade Finnish territory and destroy its armed forces. During first stage of war Soviet Union commenced three main offensives with the aim to breach Finnish defence position on Mannerheim Line in southern part of Finnish-Soviet front. Moreover Finnish prevailed in number of battles, in battle of Taipale, of Summa, and the most famous battle of Suomussalmi.

Even third Soviet offensive commenced on 1 February 1940 breached over Finnish defence position. Soon after that Finland pledged for peace treaty that was concluded on 13 March 1940. According to this treaty Finland lost its part of its territory. But Soviet victory was bought out by high price. While Finland suffered 71 000 casualties, including 23 000 dead, Soviet Union lost some 400 000 men, including 130 000 dead.

Because of all these aggression Soviet Union gained ca. 475 000 square km of territory with **22 million inhabitants** in its western borders. Despite this fact those aggression led to deterioration of international position of Soviet Union; Soviet Union was, for example, expelled from League of Nations. The Winter War was reason why Finland became important ally of National Socialist Germany in its Soviet Campaign.

## Barbarossa Operation 1941

Relations between Soviet Union and National Socialist Germany deteriorated badly during 1940. Both countries prepared plans to invade each other (Barbarossa Operation vs. Zhukov Plan). After failure of Soviet-German talks in Berlin in November 1940 Adolf Hitler issued command no. 21 on 18 December 1940. Under code name **Fall Barbarossa** (Barbarossa Operation) German high command prepared attack to Soviet Union. The main goal was to reach and capture Moscow and build a defence line from Archangels in the North to Astrakhan on the Volga River in the South.

Barbarossa Operation was commenced on 22 June 1941 in 3:15 a.m. by attack on Soviet Air Force position. During first hours of war majority of airplanes in Baltic, Belorussian, and in Ukrainian regions were destroyed.

Ground Forces of Wehrmacht were divided into three main groups, while each group has its own goals:

- **Army Group North** (Heeresgruppe Nord) under command of General Wilhelm von Leeb attacked from Eastern Prussia into Baltic regions. This group disposed of 4th Tank Army (nominally Tank Group) under command of General Erich Höpner. Its goal was to reach Leningrad.
- **Army Group Centre** (Heeresgruppe Mitte) under command of General Fedor von Bock attacked from former Polish territory into Belarus. This group disposed of 3rd and 2nd Tank Armies under command of Generals Hermann Hoth and Heinz Guderian. It was the most powerful formation of Wehrmacht and its goal was to reach Moscow.
- **Army Group South** (Heeresgruppe Süd) under command of General Gerd von Rundstedt attacked from South of Third Reich and from Romania into Ukraine. This group disposed of 1st Tank Army under command of General Ewald von Kleist. Its goal was to reach Kiev.

In total National Socialist Germany and its allies (Finland, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, Italy, and Spain) deployed nearly 3 500 000 men, 3600 tanks and 3700 airplanes. But Red Army had approximately 5 000 000 men, 23 000 tanks and more than 20 000 airplanes. Despite this fact Soviet Union noticed number of harsh losses and lost battle in first weeks of Soviet Campaign. Joseph Stalin, Soviet dictator, need

to mobilize all human resources and German-Soviet war declared to be so called **Great Patriotic War**.

German troops promptly advanced into Soviet Union, for example Army Group North moved some 60 km forward. Wehrmacht deployed the same tactics as before. The core was to breach enemy defence by **using concentrated tank attacks on the flank** and to **surround defending units**. While infantry was authorized to liquidate the rest of defence, tank units continued in their advancement.

Until 21 August 1941 all three army groups advanced hundreds of kilometres and reached line Leningrad – Smolensk – Kiev – Odesa. But at that time Adolf Hitler **changed the course of attacks**. Instead of Moscow he commanded to assault to Ukraine. Within few weeks two tank armies (1st and 2nd) prevailed in number of battles and bring about other harsh losses for Red Army. At the end of September Wehrmacht was standing on front line from Leningrad to Zaporozhe.

But once again Adolf Hitler interfered into military command and ordered that all forces should advance to – Moscow.

### **Battle of Moscow 1941**

At the end of November 1941 the Third Reich was in its peak of power, controlled territory that was extending from Pyrenees in the west to the Moscow in the east. The only resisting powers were United Kingdom and Soviet Union.

Whereas in 1937 Germany had 66 million inhabitants and territory of 470 500 square km, in 1941 it was 117 million and 898 700 square km. It meant that with Germany merged, Austria (84 000 km<sup>2</sup>), Sudeten (28 680 km<sup>2</sup>), Protectorate of Czech and Moravia (49 362 km<sup>2</sup>), Lithuania (2000 km<sup>2</sup>), General Government (145 000 km<sup>2</sup>), Belgian region of Eupen and Malmedy (1 036 km<sup>2</sup>), French Alsace-Lorraine (14 522 km<sup>2</sup>), Yugoslavian Slovenia (more than 10 000 km<sup>2</sup>) and others.

At the end of September 1941 Adolf Hitler ordered to commence **Typhoon Operation**. The operation began on 2 October 1941 but Heinz Guderian and its 2nd Tank Army already advanced towards Moscow and reached Tula, 200 km south of Moscow. Once again Red Army suffered harsh losses. Hundreds of thousands of man were surrounded in Vyazma and Bryansk. During second half of November the advancement of German units got slow down due to weather conditions and on 5 December 1941 fully stopped only **25 km away from Kremlin**.



That day, on 5 December 1941, Red Army commenced large counter-offensive in order to defeat German troops in front of Moscow and to bring about change in course of Great Patriotic War. Soviet Union arranged strange reinforcement of Red Army but strategic mistake was made. Red Army attacked in whole broad of front. That is why Soviet Union could not make use of initial success and disperse its forces. Wehrmacht was force to retreat hundreds of kilometres; however Red Army became fully exhausted during March 1942 and due to high losses of manpower, weapons, and equipment needed to end up series of winter offensive.

### **Entry of United States into War and Pacific Theatre**

The United States hold **position of neutrality** in course of Second World War, but talks between U.S. president Delano F. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill suggests the United States support the fight of United Kingdom against Germany and its allies. Moreover relations of United States to both Germany and Japan gradually deteriorated.

On 7 December 1941 Imperial Japanese Navy under command of Admiral Chuichi Nagumo attacked on American military base in **Pearl Harbour** in Hawaiian island Oahu. The aim of the assault was to paralyze American forces in Eastern Pacific and to conquer Southern, East-Southern Asia and Pacific islands without American interference. But Americans had **luck in misfortune**:

- During Japanese attack aircraft carriers (warships) were not harbouring in port and were not destructed; Japanese forces could only destroy and damage U.S. battle ships and airplanes.

At the same time Japanese army commenced attack in South-East Asia. Japanese forces occupied colonies of Western countries, i.e. **Malaysia** and **Singapore**, **Indochina**, **Indonesia**, the **Philippines** etc. British and Americans troops suffered defeat. Until mid-1942 all South Eastern Asia was under Japanese control.

### **Fall Blau and the Battle of Stalingrad 1942 and 1943**

German highest command prepared new offensive in summer 1942. In comparison with Fall Barbarossa of 1941 the new plan, **Fall Blau** (Case Blue), involved only southern part of Eastern front. The aim of planned advancement was to **seize**

**Stalingrad** and to build defence in left wing of German armies that could enable to control of Southern Russia and **oil field in Baku**.

On 28 June 1942 so called Army Groups "A" and "B" commenced realization of Plan. In first stage German troops advanced and reached Don River. On 21 August 1942 units of 6th Army crossed the Don River and reached western bank of Volga River northern of Stalingrad. After reinforcement the attack to Stalingrad was commenced on 13 September 1942. The only armed force in the city was 62nd Army under command of General Vasily Chuikov. But against previous strategy Wehrmacht **did not commenced outflanking manoeuvre, but direct approach to the city**. This solution showed to be disadvantage for Germans, because they could not use aircraft or tank weapon in way of so called Blitzkrieg.

At the same time Adolf Hitler changed (again) aims of operation. He withdrew the 4th Tank Army from the direction of oil field in Baku and headed it towards Stalingrad. Despite this measure advancement in Stalingrad stopped some hundred meters from bank of Volga River during October 1942. Control of western bank in Stalingrad was key factor that enabled Red Army continuously reinforcement of defence of city. The battle of Stalingrad became one of the first examples of modern urban warfare. Harsh clashes for Pavlov House, Mamayev Kurgan etc. became milestones in development of new military tactics.

But battle of Stalingrad was decided in snowy fields kilometres out of the city. On 19 November 1942 Red Army commenced **Operation Uranus**. The aim of this operation was to seize the city by two parallel attacks, Northern by South-East and Don Fronts and Southern by Stalingrad Front. Three days after, on 22 November 1942, both wings joined near Kalach and surrounded the Stalingrad where 6th Army of General Friedrich von Paulus was left.

On 12 December 1942 German army formed into so called **Army Group South** under command of Field Marshal Erich von Manstein and commenced counter-attack in order to breach the siege. Rapid advancement gradually slowed down and then stopped only 40 km before Stalingrad. Field Marshal von Manstein was forced to retreat. The fate of 6th Army was sealed.

Germans tried to establish so called Air Bridge that could enable supply of 6th Army, but they were not successful. Surrounded units suffered from lack of ammunition and even of food. Commander of exhausted army was forced to capitulate on 31 January 1943. The rest of resisting men surrendered on 2 February

1943. Some 95 000 men were captured; these were the first German Prisoners of War in Soviet Union, but only 6000 of them returned back home after years of captivity.

Battle of Stalingrad was one of the **largest battles during Second World War**. Losses of both sides are estimate for one million of dead, captured, missing, and wounded. What makes the battle one of decisive moment in course of war is not only number of losses but also its strategic and operational value. Soviets learned the principles of German Blitzkrieg and successfully used it for their advantage.

### **Italian Campaign 1943 to 1945**

After the United States and United Kingdom gained the control over North African coast, both countries started to prepare invasion in Italy. Disembarking of British and American forces on Sicily on 10 July 1943 was prepared under code name **Operation Husky**. Because of the fact that armies of Allies reached Italian soil dictatorship of Benito Mussolini was overthrown and soon after that **Italy declared war to Germany**. Meanwhile rest of Italian territory was occupied by German troops.

At the same time, on 3 September 1943, British forces crossed over **Messina Strait** and reached Italian Peninsula and American and British forces disembarked near **Salerno** on 8 September 1943 and near **Taranto** on 9 September 1943. But advancement to the north was stopped on so called Gustav Line in December 1943.

The key position in German defence line occupied large monastic complex on the top of the hill Monte Cassino, because under this hill there was only one passable way to the Rome. Tough fights over the hill took place from 17 February to 18 May 1944. American forces attempted to flank over German positions and disembarked in the rear of battle zone near Anzio on 22 January 1944 (Operation Shingle). But even this manoeuver could not breach defence of Wehrmacht.

Even the fall of Monte Cassino German troops were forced to retreat to the Northern Italy where another defence line, unofficially named as **Goths Line**, was built. The Northern Italy, meanwhile transformed into so called Salo Republic when Benito Mussolini restored his dictatorship, was not captured until the end of April 1945.

## Battle of Kursk 1943

In early spring 1943 belligerents in Eastern front, i.e. Germany and Soviet Union **got exhausted of previous fights**. Soviet Union delivered harsh defeat to the Third Reich in battle of Stalingrad and Wehrmacht was forced to abandon large territory of Southern Russia and Caucasus Region. On the other hand Army Group South under command of Field Marshal Erich von Manstein brought about defeat of Red Army during the Third Battle of Kharkov. In March 1943 front line was stabilized around Kursk where made a **large bulge into German position**. Attention of both sides focused on this part of front. While Adolf Hitler prepared for offensive, Joseph Stalin decided to lead defence.

In March 1943 German High Command tried to defeat Red Army by flanking and surrounding their position according to the plan that was created under code name **Unternehmen Zitadelle** (Operation Citadel). Operation was commenced on 5 July 1943; two army formations were committed to lead the operation:

- The aim of **Army Group Centre** under commandment of General Günther von Kluge was to breach northern part of front and to advance to South towards city **Belgorod**.
- The aim of **Army Group South** under commandment of Field Marshal Erich von Manstein was to breach southern part of front and to advance to North towards city **Kursk**.

During the course of operation Wehrmacht did not reached any decisive victory. The first mistake was the fact that operation lacked factor of surprise. Red Army awaited German attack in Kursk bulge and later on was informed even about time and place of Operation Citadel. To avert German advancement three army formations, so called Fronts, were reinforced:

- In the northern part of Kursk Bulge there was located **Central Front** under command of General Konstantin K. Rokossovsky,
- in the southern part of Kursk Bulge there was located **Voronezh Front** under command of General Nikolai F. Vatutin, one of the most brilliant tactician of the Red Army, and
- **Steppe Front** under command of Ivan Konev was set aside as mobile reserve.

That is why Wehrmacht reached only local success. In southern direction its advancement was stopped in the first defence line. Although and in the northern direction advancement of Army Group South nearly breached third, and the last, defence line, was fully stopped in the **Battle of Prokhorovka** on 12 July 1943. The Battle of Prokhorovka became the largest tank battle in history.

Despite the fact that during Operation Citadel Red Army suffered higher losses, Soviet Union was, unlikely Germany, able to replace them. Operation Citadel represents turnaround point in the course of war in Eastern Front, because **Soviet Union definitely took over the strategic initiative**; soon after the Battle of Kursk two offensives were commenced:

- On 12 July 1943 it was **Operation Kutuzov** with the aim of capturing city Orel and to assault the rear of Army Group Centre and
- on 12 August 1943 it was **Operation Polkovodets Rumyantsev** that led to so called Fourth Battle of Kharkov (till 23 August 1943).

### **Invasion of Normandy 1944**

While in Eastern Front Germany was since summer 1943 in defensive, beginning of Allied initiative in Western Front is so called **Operation Overlord**. Its aim was to disembark British and Americans unit in the northern France in Normandy and hence advanced into France and finally to defeat German armed forces.

According to the talks of Big Three in Teheran in November 1943 United States and United Kingdom pledged to open second front in Europe in spring 1944. The final term was set on 5 June 1944 but because of weather condition the assault was one day postponed.

Operation Overlord was open during the night from 5 to 6 June 1944 when Airborne Divisions (6th British and 82nd and 101st American) and 23 000 men were dropped on the both flank of invasion area, on the right wing near city Carentan and on the left wing near city Caen.

The Allies gathered more than 3 000 000 men to open Western Front which 150 000 of them were supposed to be delivered in first day. In the morning of the D-Day five division of 21th Army Group under command Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery were deployed to gain a control over five beaches and secure there a beachhead:

- **Utah Beach** on the Cotentin Peninsula was the first beach for Allied units to disembark. American 4th Infantry Division and 70th Tank Battalion were charged to breach German defence. The task was fulfilled despite the fact that due to mistake in navigation invasion boats landed in different beached than planned.
- **Omaha Beach** is supposed to be the most blooded sector. It was due to tough German defence and due the fact that prepared Duplex-Drive tanks, amphibious device, failed to reach the beach. During morning American 29th Infantry Division gained the control of the beach, but for the cost of 10 000 total losses.
- In **Gold Beach** landed British 50th Infantry Division and immediately secured a beachhead. Division noticed only small losses, some 350 men were killed.
- To gain a control over **Juno Beach** was the task of Canadian 3rd Infantry Division. Despite the fact that division suffered harsh losses, in total nearly half of men were killed or wounded, until the end of D-Day division advanced 15 km into inland.
- **Sword Beach** was the second British sector, whose capture was the task of 3rd Infantry Division. Soldiers of this division noticed only weak German resistance and in early afternoon they joined British paratroopers and gained control over bridges over Caen Channel and Orne River.

Operation Overlord became one of the decisive moments in course of Second World War and success of American and British forces. During one day they together managed to build a beachhead. Losses were higher than on the German side, some 10 000 against 8000, but in comparison of expected relatively low.

Normandy Landing was the first part of **Battle in Normandy** that lasted till 3 August 1944. In days and weeks Allies could not breach German defence. The turnaround brought the **battle of Avranches** during which American tanks invaded French inland.

On 15 August 1944 Americans and British commenced other disembarking operation in Southern France. The aim of **Operation Dragoon** (originally Anvil) was to support Normandy landing, but failed due to delays. Despite this lateness operation brought about the result in fact that soon after landing in Southern France German troops hastily abandoned France.

## Battle in Ardennes 1944

During September 1944 Wehrmacht deflect the advancement of Allies in France and consolidated defence around Rhine River. At the end of 1944 Adolf Hitler reached a conviction that possibility of turnaround in course of Second World War is still imminent. That is why German High Command prepared three offensive operations in Western Front. The first one and the largest was the **Unternehmen Wacht am Rhein** (Operation Watch on the Rhine) that led to the Battle in Ardennes (Battle of the Bulge).

On 16 December 1944 German Group Army B under commandment of General Walther Model commenced advanced over poorly defended Ardennes. The aim of attack was to reach English Channel and capture Antwerp, to divide American and British troops, and bring about disagreement between allied powers.

The core of assault represented 6th Tank Army SS under General Sepp Dietrich and 5th Tank Army under General Hasso von Manteuffel. Germans also made use of unfavourable weather that protected Allies from using aircraft. Both tank armies were able to advance some 50 kilometres, but could not cross the Meuse River, precondition of further advancement. In **Bastogne**, important road cross, 101th Airborne Division managed to resist until the Allied switched into counter-offensive. On 26 December 1944 weather had changed, Americans and British could deploy their Air Forces, and stopped German advancement. In the beginning of January Allies switched into counter-offensive and on 28 January 1945 the German were cast back to their initial position.

During December 1944 and January 1945 Wehrmacht attempted to breach the front in other places. On 31 December 1944 Operation **Nordwind** (North Wind) was commenced and on 1 January 1945 Operation **Bodenplatte** (Baseplate), assault of Luftwaffe to the airports in Benelux and in Northern France in order to win air superiority.

All three operations, especially Battle of Bulge, bring about harsh losses both to Allies and to Germany. That is why that despite the fact that Wehrmacht reached noticeable successes from strategic point of view all three operations led only to more **exhaustion of yet insufficient power of the Third Reich**.

## Berlin Operation and German Capitulation 1945

While Americans and British were hopelessly stopped in the western borders of Germany in the beginning of 1945 Red Army prepared large operation with the aim to cross Oder River and prepare final assault to Berlin. On 12 January 1945 so called **Vistula-Oder Operation** was commenced. During three weeks Red Army advanced from Warsaw to the Küstrin and on 2 February 1945 gained a bridgehead on the right bank of Oder River.

From then Red Army prepared the final operation with the only goal; that goal was to **capture Berlin and to defeat rest of German forces**. Operation was commenced on 16 April 1945. Two Soviet military formations were deployed to defeat Berlin:

- **1st Belarussian Front** under General Georgy Zhukov was charged to attack directly to the Berlin and
- **1st Ukrainian Front** under General Ivan Konev was charged to attack southern of Berlin and surround German forces in Berlin.

During first day of operation Red Army, despite superiority in number, was not able to breach German defence; especially in Seelow Heights tough fights took place. The **Battle of Seelow Heights** lasted from 16 to 19 April 1945 when finally 1st Belarussian Front breached over deep defence lines.

On 24 April 1945 Red Army reached suburb of Berlin and commenced encirclement manoeuvre. In the following days both fronts were forced to undertake tough fights in Berlin. In defence of German Capital were deployed units of Volkssturm, form of Home Guard, and of Hitlerjugend, Hitler's Youth Movement. Those units had in fact no military significance, but increase of casualties among civilians. On 30 April 1945 Adolf Hitler committed suicide in his bunker underneath Berlin and on 2 May 1945 garrison of Berlin surrender to Soviet.

The death of Adolf Hitler and loss of Berlin were the last causes that made German leaders, new Chancellor became Admiral Karl Dönitz, to conclude the peace. On 7 May 1945 representatives of Wehrmacht signed **unconditional capitulation** in Reims and once again on 8 May 1945 in Berlin. Not all units accepted the term of capitulations. Especially Waffen-SS refused to surrender. The last fight of war took place on 12 May 1945 near Milín in territory of restored Czechoslovakia.



## War in Pacific 1941 to 1945

In European theatre war ended in May 1945 but fights in Pacific and in South-Eastern Asia continued. After the **Battle of Midway** on 4 to 7 June 1941 and especially the **Guadalcanal Campaign** that lasted from 7 August 1942 to 9 February 1943 Japan lost strategic initiative once for all. In 1944 suffered harsh losses of vessels, especially of aircraft carriers and battle ships, in **Battles of Philippine Sea** (19 to 20 June 1944) and of **Leyte Gulf** (23 to 26 October 1944) and from beginning of 1945 Americans prepared for invasion in Japanese Islands:

- From 16 February 1945 to 26 March 1945 battle of **Iwo Jima** took place. Americans captured airport from which Japanese islands could be reached.
- On 1 April 1945 Americans commenced Operation Iceberg, i.e. disembarking in **Okinawa**. Tough fight during which nearly all Japanese soldiers were killed in action and high losses of civilian inhabitants persuade American High Command to deploy new atomic weapon in order to avoid own losses.
- On 6 August 1945 atomic bomb “Little Boy” was dropped to the Hiroshima.
- On 8 August 1945 U.S.S.R. declared war to Japan and commenced Manchurian Campaign.
- On 9 August 1945 atomic bomb “Fat Man” was dropped to the Nagasaki.

Because of catastrophic deterioration of Japanese military situation new government of pledge for armistice and Emperor Hirohito issued an order to stop the fights in all fronts on 14 August 1945. The **unconditional capitulation of Japan** was signed on the deck of battle ship Missouri on 2 September 1945. That was the end of Second World War.

## Summary

Second World War was the **largest military conflict in history** according to the both number of combatants and of involved devices as well as number of victims. Because the impact of ideologies in war the majority of victims were civilians. War was conducted out of war conventions and out of respect of human right by all involved members.

End of war bring **new category of crimes**; those were crimes against peace, against humanity, war crimes, and their punishment that are observed until present days.

That is why the Second World War became largest example of **unconventional warfare**. Third Reich as well as Soviet Union implement so called force labour. According to the ideology of Nazism and Communism millions of men became victims because of their racial, religious, or social origin. Member of United Nations Coalition, especially Americans and British, deployed military strategy called Strategic Bombardment whose victims were primarily civilian inhabitants.

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