

WWII Introduction to World War II

After World War I, Germany was defeated. The peace agreement that ended the war left the country humiliated but not crippled. In their **humiliation**,¹ Germans looked for a powerful leader. Many Germans were dissatisfied with their government and wanted change. In the 1930's, a political group called the Nazi Party came to power.

A man named Adolf Hitler was the Fuhrer, or supreme leader of the Nazi Party. In 1933, Hitler was appointed chancellor of Germany. He became head of the German **parliament**.² Hitler wanted power. He broke the World War I peace **treaty**³ and began to build an army. Hitler threatened the balance of peace all over Europe.

Meanwhile, two other countries were following Germany's lead. Powerful **dictators**⁴ in Italy and Japan were building up their own armies. Italy, Japan, and Germany would become the Axis Powers of World War II. Their hunger for military might was quite different from the U.S.'s desire for peace. The United States watched the other countries from a distance. People in the U.S. were worried, but they were **isolationists**.⁵ Americans did not want to get involved in another European war.

¹ **humiliation**: loss of pride or self-respect

² **parliament**: the law-making body of government in some countries

³ **treaty**: an agreement negotiated between two or more countries

⁴ **dictator**: a person who rules with total authority, often in a cruel or brutal manner

⁵ **isolationist**: a person who supports a national policy of avoiding international political and economic relations

On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. World War II began. Britain and France were allies with Poland and declared war on Germany. Hitler's strategy was called *blitzkrieg*. This German word translates to "lightning war." The German army **toppled**⁶ countries before the countries knew what hit them. By June, Hitler had captured Paris, France.

For two years the United States tried to ignore the war. At the end of 1941, the U.S. was pulled into the war. The country was attacked by Japan. On December 8, 1941, the U.S. declared war on Japan. In return, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States. For the second time in 25 years, the world was fighting a global war.

The main Axis powers in World War II were Germany, Italy, and Japan. The biggest Allies were the U.S., Britain, France, and the U.S.S.R.

⁶ **topple**: to push over; defeat