

René Jean-Paul Dewil

# The Family Vincius

# Gembloux

## 1940 - 1960

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## The Characters

### The Family Vincius:

Max Vincius	1820-1900	Married to Sara Benavicius in 1840.
Sara Benavicius	1823-1902	Married to Max Vincius.
Kurt Vincius	1840-1910	son of Max Vincius
Hannah Sonnenfeld	1845-1913	Married to Kurt Vincius
Max Vincius the Younger	1863-1939	Son of Kurt Vincius, married to Maria Rosenthal
Maria Rosenthal	1866-1930	Married to Max Vincius the Younger in 1882
Andreas Vincius	1864-1942	Son of Kurt Vincius, married to Lore Kremer
Lore Kremer	1865-1942	Married to Andreas Vincius in 1885
Julian Vincius	1866-1942	Son of Kurt Vincius, married to Hanne Altman
Hanne Altman	1870-1942	Married to Julian Vincius in 1886
Haim Vincius	1842-1920	Son of Max Vincius, married to Leah Goldstern
Leah Goldstern	1843-1910	Married to Haim Vincius in 1865
Avram Vincius	1866-1920	Son of Haim Vincius, married to Manyah Kalpern
Manyah Kalpern	1866-1930	Married to Avram Vincius in 1890
David Vincius	1868-1928	Son of Haim Vincius, married to Rosa Kalpern
Rosa Kalpern	1869-1935	Married to David Vincius in 1892
Mikhael Vincius	1843-1920	Son of Max Vincius, married to Fredia False
Fredia False	1845-1915	Married to Mikhael Vincius in 1870
Naomi Vincius	1871-1950	Daughter of Mikhael Vincius, married to Osyp Raisfeld in 1890
Osyp Raisfeld	1871-1955	Married to Naomi Vincius in 1890
Rivka Vincius	1873-1956	Daughter of Mikhael Vincius, married to Johann Handelsmann
Johann Handelsmann	1870-1946	Married to Rivka Vincius in 1890
Julian Vincius	1885-1952	Son of Andreas Vincius and Lore Kremer Married in 1915 to Charlotte Baraine
Malou Vincius	1917-2005	Daughter of Julian Vincius and Charlotte Baraine, married 1950 to Christian Damman (1915-1992)
Anton Vincius	1919-1995	Son of Julian Vincius and Charlotte Baraine,

		Married 1946 to Marie-Ange Drumont (1922-2010)
Maxim Vincius	1920-1990	Son of Julian Vincius and Charlotte Baraine, Married 1946 to France Neuville (1920-2012)
Mauve Vincius	1940-2018	Daughter of Julian Vincius and Charlotte Baraine, married in 1962 to Daniel Jonas (1939-2020)
Johann Vincius	1886-1942	Son of Andreas Vincius and Lore Kremer, Married to Adèle Lederer (1886-1942)
Jacob Vincius	1904-1942	Son of Johann Vincius, Married in 1924 to Deborah Bernstein (1908-1942)
Simion Vincius	1906-1942	Son of Johann Vincius, Married in 1925 to Abigail Hartog (1912-1942)
Matthias Vincius	1908-1942	Son of Johann Vincius, Married in 1928 to Yenta Bat Udel (1912-1942)

### **The Kleinberger Family:**

Esther Kleinberger	1845-1917	Daughter of Fried and Anna Kleinberger, lover of Kurt Vincius
Richard Vincius	1867-1931	Son of Esther Kleinberger and Kurt Vincius Married in 1888 to Rosa Danemann (1875-1930)
Marlene Vincius	1869-1943	Daughter of Esther Kleinberger and Kurt Vincius married 1884 to Anders Lipinski
Peter Vincius	1894-1972	Son of Richard Vincius, married 1918 to Michaela Kohle (1897-1975)
Frieda Vincius	1896-1980	Daughter of Richard Vincius, married 1920 to Otto Markusa (1894-1976)
Ernst Vincius	1897-1978	Son of Richard Vincius, married 1921 to Eva Trakei (1898-1979)
Joseph Lipinski	1887-1965	Son of Marlene Vincius, married 1912 to Regina Schmied (1889-1940)

Erich Lipinski	1889-1970	Son of Marlene Vincius, married 1918 to Bettina Danksa (1891-1960)
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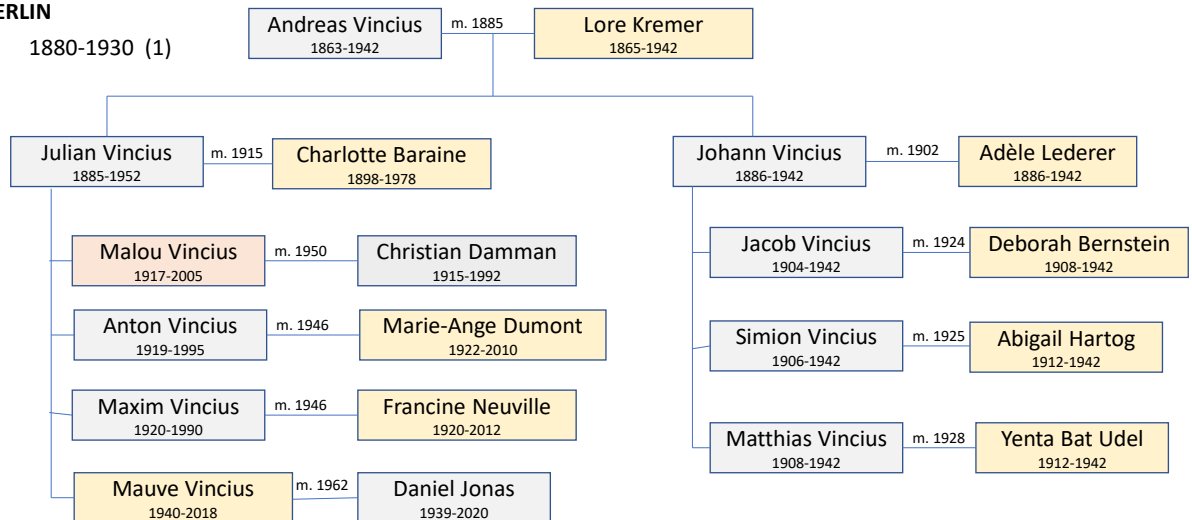
**The von Chrapitz Family:**

Leandra von Chrapitz	1825-1907	Second wife of Max Vincius, married in 1865
Julius von Chrapitz-Vincius	1865-1938	Son of Leandra von Chrapitz and Max Vincius, married in 1883 to Anna von Fiebris (1875-1930).
Maria von Chrapitz-Vincius	1867-1942	Daughter of Leandra von Chrapitz and Max Vincius, married in 1884 to Andrej von Gomolenski (1865-1942).
Philipp von Chrapitz	1884-1942	Son of Julius von Chrapitz-Vincius, married in 1908 to Charlotte Lisnewski (1880-1960).
Otto von Chrapitz	1886-1944	Son of Julius von Chrapitz-Vincius, married in 1906 to Elisabeth von Grabia (1883-1958).
Dorothea von Gomolenski	1887-1954	Daughter of Maria von Chrapitz-Vincius, married in 1913 to Albrecht von Papau (1870-1942).
Micol von Gomolenski	1889-1964	Daughter of Maria von Chrapitz-Vincius, married in 1906 to Rudolph von Witszke (1890-1942)

## The Vincius Families in Charts

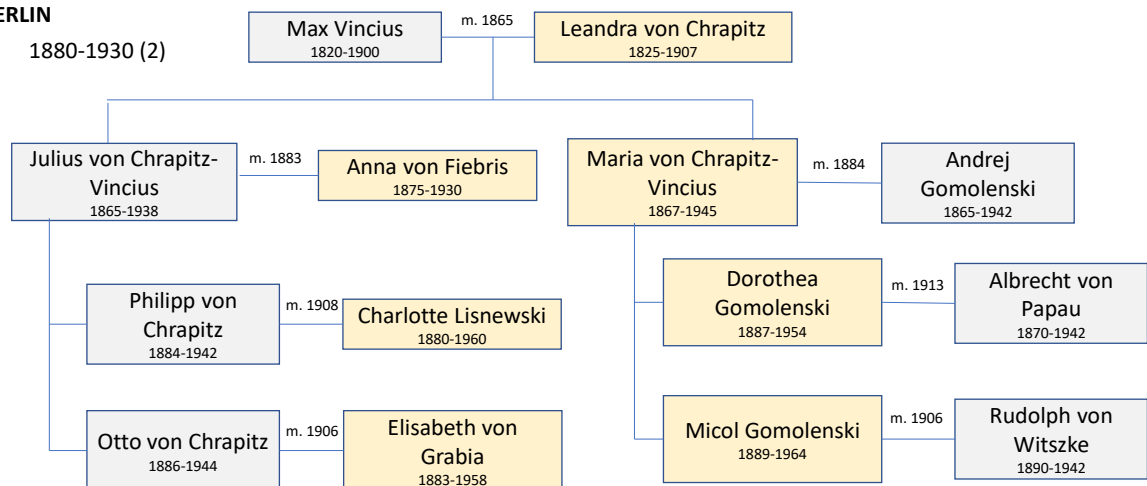
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1880-1930 (1)



## BERLIN

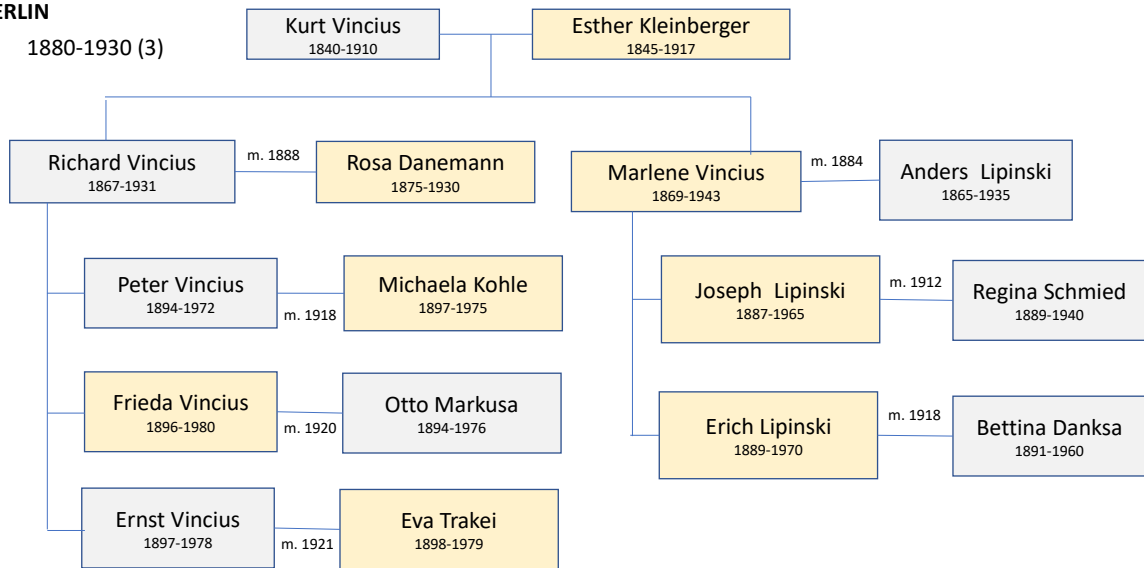
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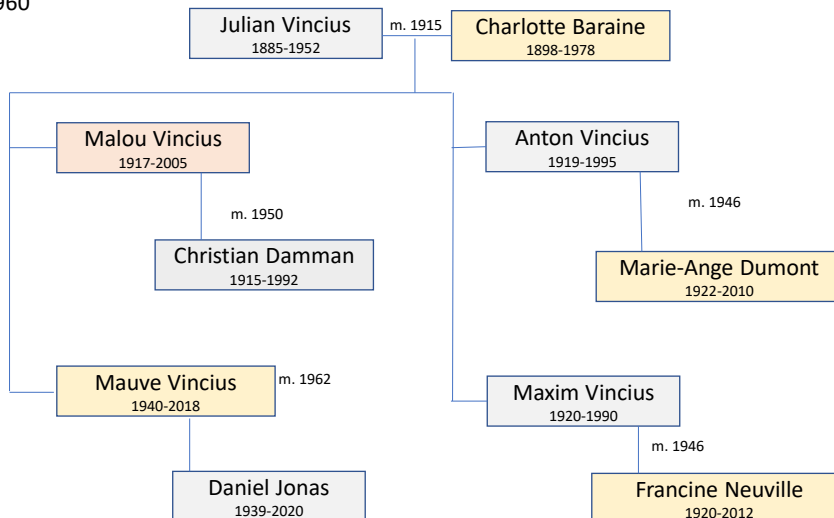
## The Family von Chrapitz

**BERLIN**

1880-1930 (3)

**The Kleinberger Family****Luxemburg**

1930-1960



## The Leaders of the Nations

### Russia and Poland

#### Chairmen of the Central Executive Committee of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets (1917–1938):

Mikhail Kalinin (1875 - 1946) In office 1919 - 1938

Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (1870 - 1924), alias Lenin. Head of the Government of Soviet Russia from 1917 to 1924 and of the Soviet Union from 1922 to 1924.

Ioseb Besarionis dze Jughashvili, alias Stalin (1878 – 1953). In office 1924–1953. Georgian. Head of the Government of the Soviet Union from 1924 to his death.

Georgy Maximilianovich Malenkov (1901 – 1988). In office March 1953 – February 1955.

### Germany

#### The Weimar Republic President:

Paul von Hindenburg (1847 - 1934). In office: 1925 - 1934. General and Field Marshal of the German Army. Full name: Paul Ludwig Hans Anton von Beneckendorff und von Hindenburg.

#### After the Weimar Republic:

Adolf Hitler (1889 – 30 April 1945). *Führer* and *Reichskanzler*, Chancellor in office 1933-1945.

#### Chancellors of Germany:

Hermann Müller (1876 - 1931). In office: 28 Jun 1928 - 27 Mar 1930.  
 Heinrich Brüning (1885 - 1970). In office: 30 Mar 1930 - 30 May 1932.  
 Franz von Papen (1879 - 1969). In office: 1 Jun 1932 - 17 Nov 1932. 169 days.  
 Kurt von Schleicher (1882–1934). In office: 3 Dec 1932 – 28 Jan 1933. 56 days.

Konrad Adenauer (1876–1967). In office: 15 Sept 1949 - 15 October 1963.

### Austria

#### Habsburg Emperors:

Franz-Joseph I (1830 - 1916) R. 1848 - 1916. Emperor of Austria-Hungary. Dynasty of Habsburg-Lorraine. Married in 1853 to Duchess Elizabeth of Bavaria (called 'Sissi', 1837-1898). Son of Ferdinand I.

Karl I the Blessed (1887 - 1922) R. 1916 - 11 November 1918 (resigned). Grand-Nephew of Franz-Joseph I and great-great-grandson of Franz I.

Presidents of Austria:

Wilhelm Miklas (1872–1956). In office: 10 Dec 1928 to 13 Mar 1938.  
 Arthur Seyss-Inquart (1892–1946). In office: 13 Mar 1938 under Nazi dominance.

Karl Renner (1870–1950). Acting 1945 – 1950.  
 Leopold Figl (1902–1965). Acting 1950- 1951. 172 days.  
 Theodor Körner (1873–1957). Acting 1951 – 1957.  
 Julius Raab (1891–1964). Acting 1957- 1957. 138 days.  
 Adolf Schärf (1890–1965). Acting 1957- 1965

**France**Presidents of France:

Gaston Doumergue (1863 - 1937). In office: 1924 - 1931.  
 Paul Doumer (1857 - 1932). In office: 1931- 1932.  
 Albert Lebrun (1871–1950). In office: 1932 – 1940.  
 The office of President did not exist from 1940 to 1947.

Chairmen of the Provisional Government:

Brigadier General Charles de Gaulle (3 June 1944 – 26 January 1946)  
 Félix Gouin (26 January 1946 – 24 June 1946)  
 Georges Bidault (24 June 1946 – 28 November 1946)  
 Vincent Auriol (interim) (28 November 1946 – 16 December 1946)  
 Léon Blum (16 December 1946 – 16 January 1947).

Presidents of the Fourth Republic:

Vincent Auriol (1884–1966). In office: 1947 – 1954.  
 René Coty (1882–1962). In office: 1954 – 1959.

Presidents of the Fifth Republic:

Charles de Gaulle (1890–1970). In office: 1959 – 1969.

**Great Britain**

George V (1865 - 1936) R. 1910 - 1936.  
 Edward VIII (1894 - 1972) R. 1936. He abdicated 11 Dec 1936. Reign of 327 days.  
 George VI (1895 – 1952) R. 1936 – 1952.  
 Elizabeth II (1926 - ). R. 1952 - .

Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom:

Ramsay MacDonald (1866 - 1937). In office: 1929 - 1935.

Stanley Baldwin	(1867–1947). In office: 1935 – 1937.
Neville Chamberlain	(1869–1940). In office: 1937 – 1940.
Winston Churchill	(1874–1965). In office: 1940 – 1945.
Clement Attlee	(1883–1967). In office: 1945 – 1951.
Winston Churchill	(1874–1965). In office: 1951 – 1955.
Anthony Eden	(1897–1977). In office: 1955 - 1957.
Harold Macmillan	(1894–1986). In office: 1957 – 1963.

### **Kings and Presidents of Greece**

King George II	(1890-1947) R: 1922 – 1924 and 1935-1947. House of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Glücksburg.
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The Second Republic of Greece was proclaimed on 25 March 1924.

#### Presidents of the Hellenic State (1827–1832):

Ioannis Kapodistrias	(1776–1831). In office: 1827 – 1831 (assassinated).
Augoustinos Kapodistrias	(1778–1857). In office: 1831 – 1832 (resigned).

Archbishop Damaskinos of Athens (1891–1949). Regent: End Dec 1944 - Sept 1946.

King George II	(1890–1947). R. 1946 – 1947.
King Paul	(1901-1964). R. 1947- 1964. Brother to George II.

### **Hungary**

Miklós Horthy	(1868–1957). In office as Regent: Mar 1920 - Oct 1944.
Ferenc Szálasi	(1897–1946). In office: 16 Oct 1944 - 28 Mar 1945 as Leader of the Nation and Prime Minister.

#### Presidents of the Hungarian Republic (1949-1989)

Zoltán Tildy	(1889–1961). In office: 1946 – 1948.
Árpád Szakasits	(1888–1965). In office: 1948 – 1949.

#### Presidents of the Hungarian People's Republic (1949-1989)

Árpád Szakasits	(1888–1965). In office: 1949 – 1950.
Sándor Rónai	(1892–1965). In office: 1950 - 1952.
István Dobi	(1898–1968). In office: 1952 – 1967.

### **Kings and Presidents of Bulgaria**

House of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha-Koháry:

Boris III	(1894-1943) R. 1918 – Aug 1943.
Simeon II	(1937 - ) R. 1943 – Sep 1946 (monarchy abolished by referendum).

#### First Regency Council for Simeon II:

Kiril, Prince of Preslav	(1895–1945) In office 1943 – 1944 (deposed).
Bogdan Filov	(1883–1945).
Lt. General Nikola Mikhov	(1891–1945).



Second Regency Council for Simeon II:

Todor Pavlov (1890–1977). In office 1944 – 1946 (monarchy abolished).  
 Venelin Ganev (1880–1966).  
 Tsvetko Boboshevski (1884–1952).

Presidents of the People's Republic:

Vasil Kolarov (1877–1950). In office: Sept 1946 – 1947.  
 Mincho Neychev (1887–1956). In office: 1947 – 1950.  
 Georgi Damyanov (1892–1958). In office: 1950 - 1958†.  
 Dimitar Ganev (1898–1964). In office: 1958 - 1964†.

**Kings and Presidents of Rumania**House of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen:

Michael I (1<sup>st</sup> reign) (1921 – 2017). R. 1927 - June 1930.  
 Carol II (1893 – 1953). R. 1930 – 1940.  
 Michael I (2<sup>nd</sup> reign) (1921 – 2017) R. 1940 – 1947.

Presidents of the Rumanian Republic:

Constantin Ion Parhon (1874–1969). In office: 1947 – 1952.  
 Petru Groza (1884–1958). In office: 1952 – 1958.  
 Ion Gheorghe Maurer (1902–2000). In office: 1958 – 1961.

The main Nazi Leaders, alphabetically:

General Ludwig **Beck**, Chief of the Army general staff until August 1938, resigned; his successor was General Franz Halder.

Werner von **Blomberg**, Defence Minister under Hitler, until January 1938.

Karl **Brandt**, Hitler's personal doctor.

Wilhelm **Brückner**, Hitler's adjutant.

Josef **Bürckel**, Leader of the Rhineland, later Reich Commissioner for the reunification of Austria with the Reich, headed by Seyss-Inquart and others.

Kurt **Daluege**, SS Senior Leader in 1934, Head of the Police Force in 1936, Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia in 1942.

Richard Walther **Darré**, Minister of Agriculture, Head of the Reich Food Estate.

Sepp **Dietrich**, Leader of Hitler's SS bodyguard.

Admiral Karl **Doenitz**, Commander-in-Chief of the *Kriegsmarine*, the German Navy.

General Werner von **Fritsch**, Commander in Chief of the Army until 3 February 1938, when he resigned. Killed on September 1939 in Poland. Followed up by Colonel-General von Brauchitsch.

Walther **Frank**, Goebbels' principal deputy in the Propaganda Ministry.

Joseph **Goebbels**, Propaganda Minister.

Carl **Goerdeler**, Price commissioner.

Hermann **Göring**, Air Force Leader

Walter **Gross**, Head of the Racial Policy Office of the NSDAP.

Franz **Gürtner**, Reich Justice Minister under Hitler.  
 Joachim **Haupt**, Head of management of the *Napolas*.  
 Count Wolff-Heinrich **Helldorf**, head of the Berlin Police Corps.  
 Erich **Hilgenfeldt**, Organiser of the NSDAP charity sector.  
 Heinrich **Himmler**, Reich Interior Minister for Police, SS, Gestapo, etc. after Wilhelm Frick.  
 Heinrich **Hoffmann**, Hitler's photographer.  
 Colonel Friedrich **Hossbach**, Hitler's military adjutant.  
 Ernst **Kaltenbrunner**, Head of the Austrian SS, later Secretary for Security of Austria.  
 Otto Steinhäuser, Vienna Chief of Police after the Anschluss.  
 Hans **Kerrl**, Minister of Religions and Churches, early 1935.  
 Hans Heinrich **Lammers**, Head of the Reich Chancellery.  
 Robert **Ley**, Reich Organisation Leader, the German Labour Front Leader.  
 Joachim **Mayer-Quade**, SA Leader of the Northern March.  
 Otto **Meisner**, State Secretary running the former President's Office.  
 Erhard **Milch**, Göring's State Secretary, former director at Lufthansa.  
 Reinhard **Muchow**, NS Factory Cell Organisation's leading figure, shot in a brawl 1933.  
 Heinrich **Müller**, Head of the Gestapo  
 Baron Konstantin von **Neurath**, Minister of the German Foreign Office, until 1938, then Reich Protector of Czechia.  
 Franz von **Papen**, Vice chancellor of Germany under Hitler.  
 Fritz **Reinhardt**, State Secretary in the Finance Ministry.  
 Joachim von **Ribbentrop**, Foreign Affairs Minister as of 1938.  
 Doctor Robert **Ritter**, head of the Reich Health Office as of 1936.  
 Bernhard **Rust**, Prussian Minister of Education and Religion in 1933. As of 1 May 1934, Minister of Education and Science Minister under Hitler.  
 Hjalmar **Schacht**, President of the Reichsbank until 1937.  
 Julius **Schaub**, Hitler's adjutant.  
 Adolf **Scheel**, Nazi Student's League head, the universities, as of 1936.  
 Baldur von **Schirach**, Head of the Hitler Jugend.  
 Kurt **Schmitt**, Reich Economics Minister, former director of the Allianz Insurance company. He resigned in January 1935 to be replaced by Hjalmar Schacht until 1937; later in 1938 replaced by Walter Funk as Minister and in 1939 as President of the Reichsbank.  
 Lutz **Schwerin** von Krosigk, Finance Minister under Hitler.  
 Franz **Seldte**, Labour Minister

Regional NS leaders: Walther Köhler, Adolf Wagner, Wilhelm Keppler, Robert Wagner (for Baden), Martin Mutschmann (Saxony), Robert Ley (early on in Southern Rhineland), Julius Streicher (Franconia- Nürnberg), in 1932 Georg Strasser's successor as the Party's Reich Organisation Leader, editor of the newspaper *Der Stürmer*.

## Part I. The First Phase of the War. 1939-1940

## The German Invasion of Western Europe

Poland was a land of plains. Its borders had few natural defences. All along its 1500 kilometres of frontier with Germany, it was vulnerable to fast and massive assaults. Poland lay equally open to assaults from the south. By 1939, it had not acquired the financial power to build border defences of forts and anti-tank reinforcements. Moreover, as the country had since the 1770's almost always been subjugated by Russian Tsarist troops, and not only regained its independence only by diplomatic negotiations at the Peace of Brest-Litovsk and earlier on by the Treaty of Versailles, it had mostly cared for its defence on its eastern borders rather than on the west side. South, it had the swamps of Pripet and the great barrier of the Carpathian mountains to lend it some natural defences. It lacked those on its longest borders west and east.

Poland and Great Britain signed a treaty of mutual assistance on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August of 1939. This treaty consisted of 8 articles. The most important one stated that if either of the countries came to be attacked by another European power, the other would support the attacked country with all its forces.

France did not have to sign such a special treaty. It sufficed for her to renew by a protocol the essential points of the then already existing treaty of military alliance between Poland and France.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of April 1939, speaking in the huge Albert Hall of London, Neville Chamberlain affirmed Britain would not remain passive, arms crossed, at the destruction of one country after the other on the continent. In the event that Germany wanted to modify by force the statute of Danzig, a general war would begin, in which Great Britain would undoubtedly participate and play a decisive role. And on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June of 1939, Winston Churchill declared at the Carlton Club the British Nation and her empire had reached the limits of its patience. In the event the Nazis would continue with acts of violence against other countries, leading to war, Great Britain would not remain passive.

The Polish Army of 1939 consisted of 30 infantry divisions and 40 cavalry regiments, their traditional troops. They did have 8 armoured tank battalions, with in all about 600 tanks. The Army consisted of about 266,000 soldiers, plus about 30,000 men guarding the frontiers. In time of war, the Army could grow to 3 million men. The Polish Army lacked modern equipment and modern organisation.

In times of crisis, such as happened in 1939, the country could at most align 50 divisions of in all maybe half a million soldiers. The Army was well disciplined. Its fighting spirit was excellent, its officers well trained. Poland could count on an air force of 750 airplanes and 108 seaplanes. The Polish first line of defence against western armies rested on the troops in the regions of Lomsa and Graudenz. A group of about 200,000 soldiers held Posen and another, similar group, remained in the south around Kraków. The second defence line had been fixed along the Vistula Stream and along the River Narew. An army waited in the region between Lodz and Warsaw. A third lay between the River San and the Vistula. The Polish High Command kept cavalry brigades to support the right flank of its armed forces, facing East Prussia, between Bialystok and Suwalki.

Marshal Smigly-Rydz led the High Command of these Polish forces. The command of the northern front lay with General Rostenkowski, the southern front commander was General Sikorski. The armed forces around Warsaw defended the capital under General Artnowski. The German Army acted under the command of General von Brauchitsch. It advanced on Poland in two thrusts. In the north, advanced General von Bock, whose forces included those of the 13<sup>th</sup> German Army of General Kuchler. These amassed in East-Prussia. Here stood also the troops of the 8<sup>th</sup> German Army of General Blaskowitz, of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army of General von Reichenau. Towards Ostrava the 14<sup>th</sup> Army of General von List faced the Polish towns of Katowice and Kraków, further inland. Von List's Army continued marching towards the south, behind the border of Poland with Czechoslovakia, into the Carpathian Mountains.

The Polish western border was very long. The German armies attacked all along this western frontier! After a few days already, the Polish military had to give in and ply back. The German soldiers did not attack in one straight line. They delivered massive blows along the weakest points, advancing very fast and breaking through the Polish lines like as many hammer blows, without bothering what could develop on their flanks and behind them. Where their opposition might be more sustained, such as happened around Posen, Poznań in Polish, the German regiments slowed down their advance, dithered, and watched what happened to their troops advancing in the south.

In the north, the German Army of General von Kluge entered the now Polish corridor of Danzig, Gdansk in Polish, in one movement operated out of Pomerania over Bromberg to Thorn. They made contact with von Kuchler's troops, which attacked out of East Prussia. More German troops advanced to Danzig behind the shields of von Kluge's and Kuchler's columns. The Polish forces in the corridor found themselves soon cut off from the rest of Poland. Kuchler turned east to the Narew, and then to the rivers Bug and the Vistula, where he attacked the Polish defence lines of the 'Five Rivers'. His left wing moved to Suwalki, to confront there a strong force of Polish cavalry.

In the west, General von Rundstedt sent his troops against Posen and against Lodz. From Lodz, the German troops tried to reach Warsaw, but the Polish forces offered a fierce resistance and could hold the territory between Lodz and Warsaw.

During those confrontations, the 14<sup>th</sup> German Army of von List could advance rapidly from out of Moravia in Czechoslovakia. These troops took Katowice, Czestochowska, Radom and Kielce, to reach Tarnow and advance ever eastwards to the fortified city of Przemyśl.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of September 1939, the German forces moving from Posen and from German Pomerania reached Warsaw. The Polish front extended then from Suwalki in the north to the River Bug and Bialystok, to the old fortress of Modlin, equally to near Warsaw.

A little later, in the centre of their attacks, the German soldiers moved to Lwów, the city they called Lemberg. In the north, they quickly breached the defences of Warsaw. In the northeast, they pushed over the River Narew and over the Bug. Those forces also reached Warsaw. Around the large port of Danzig, the Polish troops fought desperately. The German soldiers could only take Gdynia, east of Danzig, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September.

Arriving from the northeast, the Germans rolled further south over Lublin and Zamosc, between Lublin and Lwów. The pincher movement from the west and from the north around

Warsaw, evolved thus to the encirclement of the Polish capital, cutting off all communications between the capital and the rests of the Polish Army. The Polish troops retreated farther eastwards. The Polish High Command was at its headquarters at Tarnopol then, almost isolated and cut off from the major part of its combating divisions. German troops completely surrounded Warsaw!

By the 17<sup>th</sup> of September, the German and Polish troops stood in front of each other along a line that went from Bialystok over Brest-Litowsk to Lublin and from there to Lwów-Lemberg and to Striy in the south of the country. On that same day, the armed forces of the Soviet Union passed the Polish frontier in the east. Stalin pretexted to defend the Bielo-Russian and the Ukrainian interests in Poland. Just before that time, the Polish Government had sought asylum in Rumania. The rests of the Polish Army fought on two sides now. The one after the other of their beleaguered regiments had to surrender. The last to go were the Polish troops that had defended Modlin.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of September, the German command sent an ultimatum to Warsaw, to urge the Polish forces there to capitulate. The Polish soldiers promptly refused the offer. The German troops then bombed Warsaw. The city forces fought on until the 27<sup>th</sup> of September, under command of the City Mayor Stephan Starzinski. But Warsaw had to surrender.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of September, at Bialystok, Germany and the Soviet Union signed a treaty to fix the new frontiers between their countries. This was the fifth change of the Polish borders in recent history! The final German-Soviet agreement was drawn up and signed on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 1939, seven months after the invasion of Poland. Poland ceased to exist but in name and memories!

The superiority of the German assault was due to its use of massive groups of tanks in their assaults. The tank divisions pushed their enemy in front of them, without waiting for their infantry. The German aviation meanwhile bombed the enemy troops, ruptured their command and communications, and attacked the enemy infantry that lay behind. These tactics would be called the *Blitzkrieg*.

When Germany entered Soviet territory in *Operation Barbarossa*, the later all-out attack on the Soviet Union, the German leaders renamed the area. West Prussia, Upper Silesia and the province of Posen were renamed the *Reichsgau Wartheland*. This extended the territories called West Prussia before World War I. Central and Southern Poland was renamed to the *Generalgouvernement* or *Restpolen*, the *General Government*.

How could this happen? The Poles, as nobody else in Europe, were not prepared for a new kind of war, executed with new weapons such as fast tanks and airplanes combined, in tactics that applied the qualities of all weapons together. Hitler wanted expansion, more living space, and he held the Poles in contempt. He and his followers, the Nazis, considered the Poles more as animals than as human beings, so the Poles were treated as sub-humans. Polish culture, if recognised at all, was to be eradicated. Catholic Churches were rapidly closed, and large numbers of the clergy imprisoned and-or killed.

Poland resisted. About 770 revolts in the country led to 20,000 Poles being killed in reprisal actions. More than 300 villages were destroyed by German terror actions. And in 1943, more than 1 million Poles were working for the German war industries.

From 1939 to 1941, the German Jews were deported into the *General Government of Poland*. During the winter of 1939 to 1940, 100,000 Christian and Jewish Poles were herded in unheated cattle-wagons into this newly created *General Government*. By March 1941, over 400,000 Polish Jews had been deported, and about as much sent to Germany to work in forced labour. The Jews were to be confined in a huge district of South-Eastern Poland, of Lublin.

After the partitioning of Poland between Germany and the Soviet Union, before Operation Barbarossa began, East Poland became the aim of Sovietisation. The land was collectivised in 1940. Religious education was abolished.

On 5 March 1940, Stalin and his Politburo signed the order to kill 20,000 members of the Polish elite in Eastern Poland. Among these were 15,000 Polish Army officers, killed in May. The corpses of about 4,000 of them were found in the Katyn Forest near Smolensk in April of 1945. The deed was attributed to the German Army first, until the truth was established. The Polish men had been shot by the Soviet Secret Police, the NKVD. Under Stalin's order about 22,000 people were thus executed. Waves of arrests characterised the Soviet occupation of Poland. Over 100,000 Polish citizens were seized and 8,500 of them sentenced to death. Over 400,000 Poles were sent to concentration camps in Siberia or in Kazakhstan. During the transports alone died about 5,000 people. In the following summer, over 11,000 died of hunger and disease.

The savagery of the German occupation of Poland had no remote counterpart in how the German Army treated occupied Western Europe. The same can be said of the then Soviet occupation.

September 1939 – May 1940. The *Drôle de Guerre*.

On 8 November 1939, an attempt on Hitler's life took place in the *Bürgerkeller* in Munich, the same place where he had launched his unsuccessful putsch in 1923. To commemorate the event, Hitler spoke in 1939 to the Regional NSDAP Leaders and to old fighters of the Nazi movement. Hitler left early after his speech to return to Berlin. Then, a bomb exploded in the hall. The gallery and the roof caved in. Three people were killed, and 5 later died of injuries. Many were wounded. A bomb had been concealed in one of the hall's central pillars. Providence seemingly had preserved Hitler!

The chief of the SS Security Service Intelligence was Walter Schellenberg. Hitler ordered the kidnapping of two British agents across the border at Venlo, in the Netherlands, presumably the perpetrators of the explosion. The Germans shot a Dutch officer who tried to intervene in the arrest. Later, a German cabinet maker, Georg Elsec, confessed when he tried to flee into Switzerland and got caught. Elsec was sent to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp.

Right after the declarations of war by the western powers, Germany was only more or less prepared for a great conflict, France and Great Britain were even less so.

Germany had an advantage over France. Yet, it did not attack France immediately. Great Britain at least had its fleet, which was operational. It blockaded the German communications over the seas. Germany had built submarines, its rather successful weapon of World War I. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of September 1939 already, a German submarine sent to the bottom of the north-

east coast of Ireland a transport ship, the *Athenia*. On land, once more, a British Expeditionary Force landed quickly in France. As in the last war, it took positions on the left wing of the French forces guarding France's northern frontier. Its commander was Lord Gort. Belgium and the Netherlands had declared their neutrality in the conflict. This meant little to Hitler! Great Britain called in its conscription by a 'National Service Act'. All men of from 18 years old to 41, were called to arms. Throughout the winter of from 1939 to 1940, this situation of war without attacks, lasted until the 9<sup>th</sup> of April 1940. On that date, the German troops entered on the same day Denmark and Norway.

During that time, the Soviet Union imposed non-aggression pacts on the Baltic States of Lithuania (signed on the 28<sup>th</sup> of September), Latvia (signed on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October) and Estonia (10 October 1939). Lithuania had to cede Vilnius to the Soviet Union. Another non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union had already been signed with Finland on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January 1932, but on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October of 1939, the Government of the Soviet Union declared it wanted to re-negotiate the status of Finland.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of November, during these talks, an armed incident took place in the isthmus of Carelia. Rejecting the diplomatic offers of President Roosevelt of the USA, the Soviet Union broke off all diplomatic relations with Finland and it invaded the country on the 30<sup>th</sup> of November 1939. Helsinki formed a Government of national interest under President Ryti. The Soviet Union declared its support for a counter-government of the so-called Popular Republic of Finland under the presidency of Otto Kuusinen, a man of Communist opinions. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December, Moscow, signed a treaty of mutual assistance with him, as well as a change of the mutual frontiers.

The Russian military forces launched an assault on Finland, which was, however, rapidly stopped by the Finnish troops. The Soviet troops were unprepared and poorly led. The Fins outmanoeuvred the Soviet troops at the *Mannerheim Line*. The Fins had built a powerful line of defence in Carelia, this *Mannerheim Line*. Marshal Mannerheim was the Finnish Commander-in-Chief.

The Soviet forces could not break these defences. In this war were used for the first time the later called Molotov cocktails! As Finland possessed no air force worth mentioning, the Soviets bombed Viborg and Helsinki without opposition. The Russian Red Army continued its offensive, advancing to the interior of Finland. From the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> of December, the Fins launched a counter-offensive.

The commander of the Finnish troops was Marshal Mannerheim. The Russian troops had to draw back under the weight of the Finnish offensive, which was a real surprise! David seemed again to have won over Goliath! As of the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 1940, the Russian forces retreated! The very mobile Finnish soldiers destroyed entire Soviet divisions. Nevertheless, as the Soviet Union bombed Finnish towns such as Albo, and obliterated them, the war situation became more critical for Finland. The Finnish forces held on to their positions and threw back further Russian assaults. Finally, the Soviets asked for negotiations, which took place in Moscow. The talks led to an agreement signed on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March in 1940, after a campaign of 140 days. The Finnish Parliament ratified the agreement on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March. Finland ceded to Russia the isthmus of Carelia, with the town of Viborg near Leningrad-St Petersburg, with its bay and islands, as well as a series of lesser towns and villages around



Lake Lagoda. The Soviet Union obtained the free transit of goods from Norway to Russia. The two countries decided furthermore to build railways between the Finnish town of Kemijärvi and the Russian town of Kandalakcha to ease the transport of Swedish and Norwegian goods to Russia. Stalin had wanted all of Finland! In rage over his failure, Stalin purged and disgraced former Soviet officers in senior positions to inactive service.

Hitler, meanwhile, was forced to postpone the armed confrontation with the Western Powers throughout the winter of 1939 to 1940, because of poor weather conditions of constant, heavy rain. By the summer of 1939 too, shortages of steel were leading to the scaling back of the armament construction programme in Germany. The production of Junkers Ju-88 bombers was back and placed on top of the agenda. On 17 March 1940, in early spring, Hitler appointed Fritz Todt, his favourite engineer, and the former mastermind of Germany's new motorway programme, as the *Reich Minister for Ammunitions*. The head of the Army's Procurement Office, General Karl Becker, shot himself.

### *France*

In France, the main commander of the Army was General Weygand. France had installed its defensive Maginot Line between herself and Germany. But it had not much advanced the motorisation of its Army. The books written by Colonel Charles de Gaulle on the use of armoured tanks in the battlefield had largely been overlooked by the French High Command, though eagerly read by the German General Heinz Guderian. Guderian was the great strategist of assaults by tank divisions of Germany. France had also not developed much its air force, whereas the success of the *Blitzkrieg* came from the combination of ground and air weapons. The President of the Council of Ministers of France, the Prime Minister then, was Eduard Daladier.

France had remained satisfied with herself and with the results of the last war. She believed the era of the greater offensive battles had passed! Her military strategy was based on defence. She had constructed the Maginot Line of fortifications between her and her German arch-enemy, and had neglected whatever was needed for an offensive war: the massive use of tanks in entirely motorised divisions and the development of an impressive air force. After the declaration of war with Germany, the French Army launched a timid action in September 1939 in the Forest of the Warndt against Germany. By half October, the French troops retreated to the River Mosel and on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November evacuated the border town of Forbach.

During the winter of from 1939 to 1940 and in the following spring, only limited, isolated actions took place, far from the Franco-German borders. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1939, a German submarine entered the Bay of Scapa Flow in Scotland, where the British fleet had its major ships. It torpedoed a British cruiser, the *Royal Oak*, before fleeing back to the open sea. In December, the German battleship *Graf Spee* was pursued by a British flotilla of warships, the *Exeter*, *Achilles* and the *Ajax*, under Commodore Harwood. Battered, in need of repair and of oil, the German ship fled into the Rio de la Plata estuary near Montevideo. This was neutral territory, but the German ship could not be repaired in the harbour. The crew of the

*Admiral Graf Spee* sunk their ship, so that it did not fall into British hands. Its commander, Captain Langsdorf, committed suicide.

After the defeat of Poland, France sank in political discussions over what to do next. Was Poland, despite the French guarantees, so far from France, worth a new European War? Such a question had to have been thoroughly studied and answered months ago, of course, but it hadn't. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 1940, the Cabinet of Ministers of Daladier gave way to a Cabinet under Paul Reynaud. This lost itself in internal discussions, just like the former Government. The *Maginot Line* had been fortified in defence, but on the other side of the frontier stood the as impressive German *Siegfried Line*. France would not attack Germany over neutral Belgium. So, France simply waited for any German attack.

### *Great Britain*

In Great Britain, the new Cabinet had at its head now Sir Anthony Eden. Winston Churchill had been chosen as the new Lord of the Admiralty. His main opponent in the cabinet became Lord Halifax, the State Secretary at the Foreign Office. Halifax was a formidable figure in British politics, and in favour of negotiations with Hitler, before taking any war actions. Finally, after the defeat of the Allies in Scandinavian operations, and after the sudden attack of German military forces against the Netherlands and Belgium, the intervention of Great Britain in the war became unavoidable. Sir Anthony Eden passed power to Winston Churchill. In a memorable speech on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May 1940 before the Commons in the British Parliament, immediately rejecting Halifax's pacifist attitude, Churchill promised only blood, sweat and tears to the British people in the new all-out war. Hitler threw back the responsibility for the war on Great Britain and France. This was a pattern one could see repeating itself until current times!

Before the invasion of France, the German Army had launched offensives against Denmark and Norway. The invasion of these countries by the German *Wehrmacht* began on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April 1940. Much of the iron needed by the German armament industry came from Swedish iron ore mines. In the winter, for many months, the iron ore could not be brought by ships over the Baltic Sea. This vital waterway was frozen over in winter and spring. The Swedish iron ore therefore had to be transported over land by railway to the Norwegian port of Narvik on the Atlantic coast, which remained open in winter due to the warm Gulf Stream. The Gulf Stream brought the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico to as northly as the Norwegian North pole harbours. Narvik was therefore an open, crucial harbour for the German iron and steel war industry.

### *The German invasion of Denmark and Norway*

The leader of the Norwegian Fascist Party was Vidkun Quisling. He was a former Minister of Defence of Norway. Quisling warned against the threat of Communism. Quisling could convince Hitler an Allied invasion of Norway was likely to happen soon. Hitler then ordered

a formal invasion of Norway and Denmark, named as the *Weser Exercise* for these two countries. The Germans met little resistance when they entered the country. The invasion by the German troops of Denmark on 9 April 1940 took but 2 hours, and Denmark surrendered!

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of April 1940, the British and French Governments proposed to the Norwegian Government to block the harbour of Narvik by a barrier of sea-mines. Oslo protested against this violation of its neutrality, but the next day already, on 9 April, German troops entered Denmark and Norway. Germany invaded Denmark in violation of the Danish neutrality declarations, and in violation also of non-aggression treaties signed by the countries. Germany of course claimed it had sent its troops to protect the kingdoms from British offensives. The German ambassador in Copenhagen urged the Danish King Christian to withhold from any armed resistance. The Danish people nevertheless did go into the resistance. Many young Danes escaped to England, and Danish workers began a period of systematic sabotage of the German occupier.

Iceland was Danish. British forces occupied the land on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 1940. These would be replaced as of July 1941 by US, American troops. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 1941, Iceland asked to put an end to its union with Denmark. The Icelandic Parliament, the *Althing*, organised a plebiscite in May 1944, bringing about the independence of the Icelandic Republic.

In Norway, the German invasion could not count on the support of the Norwegian population, nor on the Norwegian Army, and not on naval superiority versus the Allies. The German fleet sent against Norway consisted of 2 battleships, the *Scharnhorst* and the *Gneisenau*, the heavy cruisers *Admiral Hipper* and the *Blücher*, and 14 destroyers. It had its modest aviation. Norwegian coastal batteries sunk the *Blücher*. A British fleet steamed to Bergen, the closest port of Norway to Scapa Flow, the Shetland Islands and the Norwegian Atlantic coast. German aeroplanes attacked this fleet. The British almost immediately lost a destroyer. Two more destroyers were heavily damaged and the cruiser *Rodney*, the admiral's ship, was hit hard. The British battle cruiser *Renown* damaged the two German battleships. On 10 and 13 April of 1940, two attacks by the British fleet sank 10 German destroyers at Narvik and also 15 transport ships. The Germans used 270 merchant ships to carry in their 108,000 soldiers. The Allies sent no invasion force to Norway. The German Army could bring to Norway all the troops it needed for the occupation of the country. It thus airlifted 30,000 soldiers in. The king of Norway called for the resistance to continue fighting in his land, and he left Oslo with his cabinet to continue the fight out of England.

The German *Luftwaffe* bombed Oslo and its land troops occupied the city as of the 9<sup>th</sup> of April. Shortly thereafter, the German military invested Trondheim and Stavanger, Hangersund, Kristiansand and Bergen. The battle for the port of Narvik was tough. Narvik was, of course, the most vital to the Germans.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of April 1940, a flotilla of 6 German torpedoboats led by the Commodore Bonte had left Wilhelmshafen. After a short fight, the German navy took the Westfjord. The German General of the ground troops summoned the Danish commander to surrender the forts that defended the entry to the fjord. But a second British flotilla of the Home Fleet, led by Captain Warburton Lee arrived, with the mission to attack the invading German fleet transporting the German invaders. The British ships attacked. They sank six of the German cargo ships and the destroyers of Commodore Bonte. A German ship loaded with

ammunitions exploded. Then, the British ships encountered the German torpedoboats. Another sea-battle ensued. The British *Hardy* was put out of combat. Captain Warburton Lee perished in this ship. Other British destroyers suffered war damage. The *Hunter* was torpedoed and sank. The British ships retreated to the open sea. On German side, the Commodore Bonte was killed on board of the *Heidkamp*.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of April, three days later, the British fleet arrived in force with 9 torpedoboats and the Battleship *Warspite*. They entered the fjord of Narvik once more, where the German ships were repairing their damages. The *Warspite* sunk no less than 9 German destroyers. The same day, this British fleet disembarked French and British invading troops, led by the generals Bethouart for France and Mackensie for Britain. These had orders to take Narvik from the Germans. More to the south on the coast, French troops under the Generals Audet and Carton de Wiart tried to retake the harbour of Trondheim. The German invasion had not yet succeeded!

King Haakon VII of Norway launched an appeal by radio to the Norwegian people, to continue the battle for liberty, to continue resisting. In the region of Trondheim, however, an already strong detachment of the German *Luftwaffe* had arrived. Soon, the British and French troops suffered hard under heavy bombing. These troops had no anti-airplane canons, as these pieces had not yet disembarked. The generals asked in vain for attacks of allied airplanes against the German air force around Trondheim.

In the meantime, German troops advanced on Narvik, to the aid of General Dietl, who still held on to the besieged Narvik. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of April, the German soldiers broke the allied front at Lillehammer. The French and British troops had to embark at Namsos. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 1940, these allied forces returned to Great Britain.

The Battle for Narvik continued. The French General Bethouart and the British General Auchinleck succeeded in taking Narvik. But on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June, a German fleet bombed Narvik, forcing the Allies out of the harbour. Two days later, on 4 June, the British carrier *Glorious* was sunk with all its aircraft still onboard. The Allies had no airfields in this operation, and not enough anti-air canons to fight the German *Luftwaffe*. On 7 June, the Norwegian king fled to Great Britain on the cruiser *Devonshire*. On 8 June, the British forces that had occupied Narvik sailed home. The German Army could transport men and canons over land, whereas the Allied troops had to come over the seas, from Britain, at almost 3,000 kilometres from Narvik. The Allies had to admit their Norwegian expedition had ended in failure. These land- and sea-battles showed for the first time how modern battles would be fought, with very rapidly enormous losses of war materials and machines, quick movements of soldiers, great loss of combatants, as well in ground troops as in marines.

The defeat in Norway caused the Chamberlain Government of Great Britain to fall. Chamberlain died within a year. The new Cabinet led by Winston Churchill was formed. He was 65 years of age. He chose a Government of national unity. In France too, the Government fell. Paul Reynaud did not want to support General Gamelin at the head of the French Army. Reynaud handed over the resignation of his government to President Lebrun.

Sweden remained neutral. It had effectively been reduced to a German client state. Swedish shipyards would build warships for the German navy.

When the Nazi troops entered the Netherlands, Belgium and the Grand-Duchy of Luxemburg, neither France nor Great Britain had an effective Government in place!

## The Invasion of Western Europe

General von Rundstedt had led the planning for the invasion of Poland. Now, von Rundstedt's Army Group South received the lion's share of the invasion of France. The German *von Manstein Plan* began on 10 May 1940 with a central strike through the supposedly rugged Ardennes Forests into Belgium, resulting in strategic chaos for the Allies. Cutting the larger Allied defences in two, then pushing to the Atlantic coast was the crux of the plan. The Allies, stacked on the Belgian border, were cut off from communications with most of southern France. The French Army was driven into the sea. The reasons of the stunning French, Belgian, Dutch and British defeats were manifold.

The French tactics of static defence were antiquated. The war now was a war of movement. The French reserve was almost inexistent; it lacked power and mobility. The British, French, Belgian and Dutch defences were uncoordinated. Their troops had instantly a low morale, and the high command remained fossilised.

The *Wehrmacht* invaded France with about 1 million soldiers. This was with fewer than the total number of men under arms in the Netherlands, Belgium, France and the BEF. The Germans as well brought more than 4,000 artillery pieces less and 1,000 tanks less! The German soldiers won by better tactics. They attacked in 3 groups designated as A, B and C, in 1940. Senior Army Group Commanders were Gerd von Rundstedt, who had received 45 divisions, Fedor von Bock advanced with 29 divisions, and Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb led 18 divisions. The Generals Heinz Guderian, a *Panzer* group Commander and specialist of Tank War, and Erich von Manstein, a staff planner and Corps Commander, felt the Ardennes could be cut through to become an open doorway to the Atlantic Coast. These same commanders would later mark the invasion of the Soviet Union.

France had concentrated 57 divisions in the north, to fight against only 29 oncoming German divisions. But these were deployed and used in the old way. The French also deployed 37 divisions along the Maginot Line, where the Germans confronted them with 19 divisions. The strongest German force of 45 divisions pushed through the Ardennes, where the French had not expected them. General Ewald von Kleist led 134,000 soldiers, 1,222 tanks, 545 half-track armoured vehicles, 40,000 lorries and cars through the Ardennes. The German commanders advanced even faster than their more cautious superiors had intended.

General Fedor von Bock was the commanding general of Army Group B in the north. All crews and drivers had to keep advancing for 3 days without a break. The best German combat units were dosed up with amphetamines dubbed '*Panzer chocolate*' to help them keep awake!

On 13 May already, the German Army Group von Kleist reached the Meuse. Von Kleist called on 1,000 German bomber planes to destroy the French defence positions in waves. The German troops then passed the Maas stream in hundreds of rubber dinghies. The Germans

then turned west, not to the Maginot East Line! British bombers counter-attacked, but were heavily damaged by anti-aircraft fire. They lost 30 bombers out of a force of 71!

In 1939, the Netherlands, like almost all Allied countries, were not at all prepared for war! The country had an Army, but it depended entirely on other nations for its armament. It had not enough artillery, disposed only of ancient pieces, way not enough anti-tank arms, and its anti-airplane guns could not be called effective. Its eastern frontier was about 400 kilometres long. Its only defence there were waterways not too hard to pass. To defend Holland, it had built the *Waterlijn*, a series of interconnected waterways that could be put under water over a breadth of one to 5 kilometres. The fortresses on that line were old, of a concept that might have sufficed in times long past, but which could easily fall to the modern, heavier artillery. These poor defences were not in any way connected to any Belgian defences. They stopped at the border with Belgium, a country that had equally declared its neutrality in any European war.

The German Army had placed 10 divisions north of the Rhine, 9 between Cleves and the line of from München-Gladbach to Düsseldorf, thirty divisions more between Nijmegen and Roermond facing the Dutch province of Limburg. The troops of General von Kückler that would attack consisted of the 18<sup>th</sup> German Army, with 5 infantry divisions, a tank division, a cavalry division, the 22<sup>nd</sup> airborne division, the 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment of parachute troopers, and the 7<sup>th</sup> air force division. The German plan was to attack Holland and Brabant along the line Arnhem-Rhenen-Utrecht, in the direction of the Moerdijk, Dordrecht and Amsterdam. Other troops would move north to Friesland and the dikes of the Zuiderzee. The airfields would be blocked immediately by airborne and parachute troops, to attack the communication systems, the command centres and the seat of the Government. Right after midnight of the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 1940, the German planes bombed the airports of Schiphol, Bergen, Soesterberg, Waalhoven, Haamstede, Hilversum and Den Haag.

The German Army had placed mines in the sea to withhold Dutch ships to come to the rescue of Allied soldiers. In the morning of the 10<sup>th</sup> May, air raids were executed on the capital of Den Haag, at 05h00 and at 10h00. With these, the invasion of the Netherlands began.

The Dutch aviation did what it could. It downed German airplanes, but suffered heavy losses. Three hours after these raids, the German ambassador submitted a note to the Dutch Government, advising it to cease all resistance. The Government of the Netherlands refused and declared war on Germany. Several airports had fallen into German hands already, among which the ones of Valkenburg, Ypenberg and Ockenburg. Parachutists landed near the Maaldrift, near Rotterdam and Dordrecht, in the Dunes of Staal. The combats centred on Rotterdam. Torpedoboats that guarded Hoek van Holland, joined in the battle, cannonading the German forces that attacked Feyenoord. The Dutch destroyer *Van Galen* also joined in the battle, having come from the naval base of Den Helder. German air raids sunk it. At 10h00 in the morning, the German troops took 2 bridges in the Moerdijk. They occupied that morning the island of IJsselmonde and the island of Dordrecht. Airborne troops attacked the Dutch capital of Den Haag. The Dutch Commander-in-Chief was Lieutenant-General H.G. Winkelman. In the afternoon and evening, the Dutch forces re-occupied the airport of Valkenburg and also the small town of Katwijk. The Dutch soldiers pushed back the German troops around Den Haag. The Dutch Army recaptured the airport of Ockenburg in the

environs of Den Haag. A little later, the same happened to the airport of Ypenberg. The German command brought in reinforcements to near Katwijk. The destroyer *Van Galen* opened fire on them, and so did Dutch airplanes. A German airborne attack on the headquarters of the Dutch at the Wateringen near Den Haag did not succeed. The last rests of the Dutch Air Force attacked the oncoming German troops.

In the south of the country, the German Army tried to pass the Maas Stream. All the bridges over the stream had been destroyed, at the exception of a railway bridge at Gennepe. The second defence line of this bridge also fell in the hands of the enemy. A German armoured train could, however, pass the stream there, which allowed the German troops to fall in the back of the Dutch defenders on the lines from Raam to Peel. The German troops could pass to the west banks of the stream. In the afternoon, the Dutch troops had to retreat.

The German troops also passed at Venlo and at Lotteren. The German 1<sup>st</sup> Tank Division pushed onto Maastricht, hoping to pass the Albert Canal, the northern defence positions of the Belgian Army. These objectives could not be reached the same day, but the Germans broke through the Dutch defences at several points along the line of Maastricht to Nijmegen. The German *Luftwaffe* meanwhile bombed the Dutch positions of from Raam to Peel. In the night of that first day of German offensives, the Dutch withdrew to the Zuid-Willemsvaart. Their 3<sup>rd</sup> Army Corps placed south of Baarle-Hertog retreated to behind the River Waal.

The Dutch troops east of the IJssel retreated west of the river, exploding the bridges over it behind them. Nevertheless, the German troops passed the river and pushed on. The Dutch troops tried to delay the German actions, destroying as many bridges over the Canal of Dieren as they could. In the provinces of the northern Netherlands, already in the evening of the first day, the Dutch Army had to retreat under the German pressure. The German troops regrouped for the offensives of the next day.

The German High Command flew in more reinforcements for the battle of the heart of Holland, near Rotterdam. The soldiers were flown in by the park of Feyenoord, which served as airport to the Germans.

In the south, the bridge of Henshen had been destroyed. The one at Keizersveer was still in use, however. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of May, the Germans attacked it with bombers. The Dutch could not re-take the bridges of Moerdijk. Motorised units of the 7<sup>th</sup> French Army advanced to the rescue in North-Brabant. The Dutch commandment asked these to reconquer the Moerdijk bridges from the south. German bombers prevented this, so that the French troops had to draw back. The Battle for Holland continued the whole day along the Noordkanaal, the North Canal, of which the Dutch tried to hold the eastern banks. The Dutch soldiers attacked the Germans grouped north of the Moerdijk with grenades and machineguns. Hundreds of German parachutists then descended from the skies south and south-east of Dordrecht.

The Dutch forces on the Zuid-Willemsvaart came under attack on a front of 70 kilometres. As of 11h00 in the morning of the 11<sup>th</sup> of May, German troops arrived on the east banks and broke through the Dutch defences at Someren and Vechel, pushing the Dutch forces once more backwards. These positions too could not be defended for long. In the evening of the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the hostilities, the German troop had the route to Zeeland open to them, as well as the

roads allowing them to assault the central redoubt of the Dutch troops. The German soldiers also advanced in the north.

The Battle for Rotterdam started again on the third day of the invasion, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of May. An armoured division of German troops and units of the *Waffen SS* advanced to Dordrecht and joined the airborne German soldiers who occupied the dikes south of Rotterdam. The Dutch troops were in retreat everywhere. Parts of the Dutch troops around Peel were made prisoners by the German Army. Other groups could evacuate to Antwerp in Belgium. They were brought from there to Flemish Zeeland. The French troops held on a while to Breda, so that the entire population of that town could be evacuated in the evening to Belgium. They were 40,000 people in all! The Dutch resistance on the Raam-Peel line fell to pieces.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of May, the Dutch troops tried to fill the breach made by the German soldiers in their defences near Rhenen. This attack failed. The following night, the Dutch troops drew back. This proceeded only with difficulty, for the other Dutch units had inundated the area as one of the last defences of the heart of Holland. Meanwhile, the French soldiers abandoned the line Turnhout-Breda and withdrew to Rosendael, from where they were forced to retreat to Antwerp.

As the German troops redeployed for their final assault, the 13<sup>th</sup> of May remained relatively calm around Holland. The Germans had reached the outskirts of Delft. That day, the Dutch High Command decided to transport the remaining Dutch troops to Great Britain, to continue the battle from there. The Supreme Command was handed over to General Winkelman.

On the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup> of May, the Germans understood the battle to take the rest of the Heart of Holland could become difficult. The German *Luftwaffe* then battered at the Dutch towns that remained free. The Germans bombed Rotterdam and Utrecht in massive raids and destroyed these proud cities almost completely. By that bombing perished thousands of civilian victims.

The Dutch sent the rests of their fleet to Great Britain. By radio, General Winkelman asked for an armistice. Further deaths would be futile. In the afternoon of the 14<sup>th</sup> of May, the Dutch Army surrendered and put down arms. Isolated combats lasted for a few days still on the Island of Walcheren, where French and Dutch troops continued to fight the German forces. The German aerial bombings, notably of the town of Middelburg in Zeeland, forced the last troops there to retreat south to Flemish Zeeland by the port of Vlissingen. Those Dutch troops finally passed to England too, to continue the war as the 'Dutch Royal Brigade Princess Irene'. The Queen of the Netherlands had by then also arrived in England. The battle for the Netherlands was over. The country had resisted for five days against the overwhelming German onslaught.

## The 18 Days Campaign in Belgium

On the 28<sup>th</sup> March of 1939, France and Great Britain had signed a declaration in London, with Paul Reynaud for France and Neville Chamberlain for Great Britain, to not negotiate nor conclude any armistice or treaty of peace unless by common agreement. This declaration, the



first diplomatic act of Paul Reynaud, would be broken due to the multiple defeats of the French Army in 1940, by the then Government of Field-Marshal Pétain. The French Government had been re-arranged on the 4<sup>th</sup> of June 1940.

The war in Belgium started at 04h00 in the night of the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 1940. The *Luftwaffe* bombed practically all the Belgian airfields in a few hours. The Belgian aviators tried to save what they could. They had built aerodromes in odd places, terrains without aligned take-off spaces, in just plain fields. Most of their military aeroplanes could flee to those secret, second airfields while their original bases were being bombed and entirely destroyed. The Belgian air forces remained almost intact after this first attack!

At 08h30 in the morning only, the German ambassador in Belgium, von Bülow-Schwartz presented himself at the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to hand over to the Foreign Minister, then Paul-Henri Spaak, a paper that contained a version with the reasons of the German attack. Before the ambassador could hand over its paper, Paul-Henri Spaak interrupted him, and of course said the country had received no ultimatum as such, had therefore been attacked treacherously, in violence of the German-signed Treaty of 13 October 1937. The German aggression was a clear insult to universal conscience. Belgium would defend herself. The German ambassador nevertheless read his letter. Great Britain and France would have attacked Germany through Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxemburg. Hence, Germany needed to pre-empt such assaults and ensure the neutrality of the three countries. The *Reich* guaranteed to keep intact the European territory of Belgium and of its colonies, also its royal dynasty, as far as no resistance would be opposed to the occupying German troops. Otherwise, Belgium would risk destruction of its land and its independence. Germany thus took Belgium and the Netherlands in its protection! Too bad Belgium and the Netherlands wanted nothing of this sort of protection!

The German government addressed the memorandum to Belgium and the Netherlands on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 1940. Germany asserted in the text that a French-British allied offensive was imminent on its industrial Ruhr region, which would pass through Belgium and the Netherlands. As the latter two countries had allied themselves to France and Great Britain, despite their earlier vows of neutrality, the *Führer* had ordered his troops to ensure the neutrality of these countries by all means available to the *Reich*. Belgium had organised strong defences against the eastern frontiers, not against its southern frontier. Belgium and the Netherlands had allowed RAF flights over Belgium. Belgium had concentrated troops directed against Germany. Great Britain and France had made preparations to attack Germany over Belgian and Dutch territory. At the moment, however, this document was being given to Paul-Henri Spaak, the German troops were already advancing over the borders of Belgium and the Netherlands, and over Luxemburg!

Minister Spaak declared Belgium would indeed resist. He declared Brussels an open city, defended by no troops. The Belgian Government had then already, at 06h00, appealed for help to the French and British Governments.

The Belgian Army consisted of 6 infantry divisions, 2 divisions of reconnaissance troops called the *Chasseurs Ardennais*, 12 reserve infantry divisions, 1 brigade of cyclist frontier guard troops, one cavalry corps of 2 divisions, 1 motorised brigade, 2 light regiments, 4 regiments of aviators, 2 regiments of aerial defence against troops in Zeppelin balloons, 4

regiments of artillery, garrison troops in its fortresses, and a few specialised groups. The Belgian Army was organised for defence only, so the infantry divisions had 48 pieces of artillery with them, anti-tank guns, lance-grenade rifles, excellent machineguns, mortars and artillery groups. The soldiers of the largest part of the Army, however, were only badly armed with ancient rifles. The Army consisted of 600,000 men in all, which was nevertheless a considerable number for such a small country. Tanks had been bought, but due to political infighting over the concept of neutrality, which prohibited weapons of aggression, had remained unused and untrained-for in their hangars.

The defence front of the Belgian soldiers was the Albert Canal from Antwerp to Liège in the north. There were powerful forts at Liège and around, such as at Eben-Emael, Neufchâteau, Battice and Chaudfontaine. From Liège, other forts defended the stream the Maas to the French border at Givet. From west to east, besides the Belgian forces, soon advanced the 7<sup>th</sup> French Army, moving through Belgian territory to Breda in the Netherlands, and the British Expeditionary Force, the BEF, which moved over Tournai to Brussels. Other French forces moved along the Maas. French cavalry of the 2<sup>nd</sup> French Army rode in over Mézières and Sedan in France against the German divisions pushing in by Luxemburg. This 2<sup>nd</sup> French Army would remain on the west bank of the Maas, from Namur to Givet, Charleville-Mézières and Sedan to the French Maginot Line. From Namur northwards, inland, would begin the second front line, running over Leuven to Antwerp. The defences on this line had been finished in 1940. They ran from Koningshooikt in the north, near Antwerp, to Wavre in the south. It was therefore called the K-W Line. On the most southern stretch, this front had no fortifications, only tank obstacles of large concrete blocks placed in line. Pieces of land could be inundated over the length of the line to Wavre.

Despite their flights to secret airfields, the Belgian Air Force lost about half its airplanes on the first day of the hostilities. Belgian had mostly only reconnaissance planes to act as high eyes for the infantry beneath, a few Italian-built fighter planes and a few bombers.

At the beginning of the invasion, the German troops destroyed the fort of Eben-Emael. They secured the bridges over the Albert Canal that had not been blown up by the Belgian soldiers, despite also air-force attacks by the Belgian bombers, the bridges at Veldwezelt, Vroenhoven and Briegden. One Belgian escadrille bombed the bridge of Vroenhoven, losing 11 of its 12 airplanes! The Belgian Army lost thus almost entirely its bomber squadrons in this effort.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of May, the forts of Eben-Emael fell to the Germans. The enemy used parachutist troops to destroy the gun positions on top of the structures, and by using heavy howitzers. The Belgian soldiers counter-attacked for a day and a half. They could not throw back the armoured German divisions, which had already advanced over the bridges of the Albert Canal. As the German Army had breached the defence line of the Albert Canal, the Belgian Army withdrew by the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> of May to the K-W Line.

The Belgian troops continued to defend their territory. They succeeded in destroying the bridge of Gellich, which had remained intact. Heavy combats took place also in the Belgian Ardennes, where the Belgian soldiers destroyed as many viaducts and bridges as they could. They set up other constructions of defence, with much barbed wire, to force the German columns off the roads and into the woods. They blew up roads and launched attacks in small groups to harass the advancing Germans. This unexpected resistance slowed down

considerably the advance of the oncoming enemy troops. The Belgians also used very effective artillery to allow the British and French troops to reach the K-W Line. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of May, the Belgian king transferred his command to the leading generals of the Allied troops.

As the Belgian troops withdrew, they left the forts on their own, though Belgian garrisons were still inside. They were doomed, but the forts held on. The fort of Chaudfontaine fell only on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May, Pontisse and Barchon the next day, Evegnée on the 19<sup>th</sup>, Neufchâteau on the 21<sup>st</sup> and Pepinster even only on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

After the 12<sup>th</sup> of May, the British Army fought on the front between Leuven and Wavre with 3 divisions. More to the west, between the Rivers Dijle and Schelde, the British had 6 more divisions. The front of from Wavre to Gembloux was held by units of the French Army. The 7<sup>th</sup> Corps of the Belgian Army still defended Namur. South of Namur, until Charleville-Mézières, stood the 9<sup>th</sup> French Army. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of May, the German forces broke through the French defences at Houx, so that the German troops could infiltrate the Maas Valley from the Belgian town of Yvoir to the French frontier town of Givet.

On 12 and 13 May, even up to the 14<sup>th</sup>, the 18<sup>th</sup> Belgian Infantry Division, a division of the reserves, held to its positions and fought off the German troops that advanced on the town of Tienen. Only on the 14<sup>th</sup> of May, these troops and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Division withdrew to the River Gete. There, the resistance at the Gete and at the small town of Aerendonck allowed other Belgian troops to reach and even pass the K-W Line.

During the next 3 days of 14, 15 and 16 May, the 7<sup>th</sup> French Army, defeated in the Battle of Marck, withdrew to Zeeland. The German troops entered the town of Rosendael. In the south, the French troops of the 9<sup>th</sup> Army, after having fought hard in the region of Sedan, had to retreat, constantly harassed by the German air force. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of May, the 1<sup>st</sup> French Army was in danger of being overwhelmed by the German forces. The Allied High Command then decided to abandon the K-W Line and to retreat. As at Liège, the Belgian forts around Namur continued the battle. The fort of Marchovelette fell on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May. Suarlée, Saint Héribert and Malonne fell on the 21<sup>st</sup>. Dave, Maizeret and Andoy surrendered on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May.

The Belgian Army retreated to Gent and Terneuzen, after hard skirmishes on the Rivers Nete and Rupel, on the Canal called of Willebroek and on the River Dender. The French forces, the French 9<sup>th</sup> Army, withdrew to between the River Sambre and Maas. In the north, the 7<sup>th</sup> French Army marched to Antwerp, then to serve as reinforcements to the 9<sup>th</sup> Army.

In the night of the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> of May 1940, the French and British troops drew back to Brussels and the Canal to Charleroi. On the 17<sup>th</sup>, the Belgian Army also left the K-W Line, without much greater resistance, in view of what happened on the other fronts. The lands between them and the German troops were inundated as much as possible. The German forces slowed down.

Antwerp was evacuated as of the evening of the 17<sup>th</sup>. The Belgian Army tried to delay the German assaults. They did this until the 19<sup>th</sup> of May, when the German troops succeeded to reach the Schelde and pass it. The Belgian cavalry then withdrew from the delaying

movement. The Belgian troops kept fighting rear-guard actions to resist still to enemy attacks. They did this until the evening of the 20<sup>th</sup> of May.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of May, in France, the German divisions fought battles on the Oise and reached Amiens and Abbeville. The front at the Maas Stream had been broken through. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of May, the French Upper Command was handed over to General Weygand. He now headed all the Allied troops. Under his command, the Allied forces tried counter-attacks to hold back the German tank divisions from reaching the sea, thereby cutting off the Belgian, French and British troops still fighting hard in Flanders.

The German soldiers pushed on against the small Flemish towns of Maldegem, Ursel, Vynckt, Isegem and Menen from north to south. Some of the heaviest fights had taken place against the British BEF troops near Oudenaerde. The Belgian reserve divisions, with the rests of the army in retreat, fought still on the River Leie, but had to withdraw from Gent. The move from Gent and from the Canal of Terneuzen was concluded in the night from the 23<sup>rd</sup> to the 24<sup>th</sup> of May.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of May, the German armoured divisions had already occupied Boulogne and Saint Omer. The Allied troops in Flanders risked being entirely cut off, not only in the north where the German divisions had taken the south of the Netherlands, but also in the east, as the enemy troops had occupied the largest part of Belgium. In the south, the German tank divisions and their accompanying infantry pushed on along the Belgian-French frontier, though on French side to the sea, and seemed already have reached the coasts of the North Sea in certain ports. Parts of the BEF tried holding the junction of their troops between Cambrai and Péronne in France.

The Belgian Army was thus caught between the North Sea and the on-storming German troops. Moreover, an enormous mass of civilian refugees clogged the roads in Flanders. The German dive bombers opened fire on and bombed these people. The Belgian king wanted to avoid a massacre. The last battles in Belgium lasted for 4 days yet. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of May, the German troops breached the Belgian defences. Four German divisions cut through near the town of Kortrijk. Belgian counter-attacks still pushed back the enemy, thanks to their very effective artillery. But the Battle for Belgium was lost.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of May, the BEF was considering saving what could be saved by a return of all forces of the BEF to England over the Channel.

The Belgian Army continued to resist. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of May, the German High Command threw in fresh troops in the direction of Menen to Ieper, aiming to separate the Belgians from the British BEF. This attack was momentarily stopped along the line of Ieper to Roeselare. More breaches developed on the Leie River, at Isegem, Nevele, and Ronse. Stopping the breaches took heavy fights, such as at Nevele and Ronse and also at Vynckt, where the division of the *Chasseurs Ardennais*, the Ardennes Fighters, held the Germans off by heroic actions. More northerly, the Germans equally broke through at a derivation canal of the Leie near Balgerhoek.

Other breaches happened on the 27<sup>th</sup> of May, at Maldegem, Ursel, Tielt and Roeselare. The German troops attacked hard and relentlessly from all sides, from the east and the south. The Belgian Air Force had been almost entirely annihilated, but for a few reconnaissance airplanes at Oostende. The Belgian troops could be bombed instantly without German losses.

The Belgian Army arrived at its last forces, though it continued combat. At that moment of the war, the Belgian and British troops were completely surrounded by powerful German divisions. The Germans had taken a vast territory from Calais and Boulogne to Abbeville near the coast, over Amiens. Cambrai had fallen, though not yet Lille.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of May, the command of the Belgian Army considered the situation hopeless for its troops. It was the moment to stop the resistance to the German divisions and to save the refugee population on the roads of Flanders.

At 17h00, the Belgian king sent a member of parliament to the German High Command, to ask for the conditions of a cessation of the hostilities between the Belgian and German armies. The *Führer* accepted only an unconditional surrender of the Belgian armed forces, which the Belgian king accepted at 23h00, proposing the cease-fire as of the 28<sup>th</sup> of May at 16h00. A protocol was signed between the German General von Reichenau and the Belgian General Deroussant. The Belgian Army would lay down arms. Its soldiers would become war prisoners. The officers of the Belgian Army were allowed to keep their weapons.

The Castle of Laken near Brussels would be left to the King Leopold III, to reside there with his family and servants. The cease-fire began on the 28<sup>th</sup> of May at 04h00 in the morning. This terminated for Belgium a campaign of 18 days. The cease-fire was only signed between the Belgian and the German Army. The French and the British troops continued the war. The French soldiers and the French people reproached bitterly the Belgian king to have stopped the armed hostilities. But what choice had he, what else could he have done to avoid a massacre among the fleeing columns of refugees? The Belgian Government wanted the king to flee to England, but King Leopold refused, wanting to share the fate of his people and soldiers. He became a prisoner and hostage to the Germans. The Government itself reached England, to continue the war from out of Great Britain.

## The Battle for France

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of June of 1940, Mussolini spoke to the masses from the balcony of the Venetian Palace in Rome. He proclaimed once more the rights of Italy on the Mediterranean and he opened the war on France. The *Duce* affirmed Italy had to resolve the issue of its land borders and open the roads to the Atlantic Ocean. In other words, he too wanted a piece of France, and a large one!

From the 10<sup>th</sup> of May to the 4<sup>th</sup> of June, the Battle of the North Front continued to rage in France. On this day, as in Belgium, the French airports had been bombed and destroyed in the general attack on France by the German Army. The 7<sup>th</sup> French Army under General Giraud had entered Belgium to pass to the Netherlands. Later, it positioned itself with the Belgian Army on the K-W Line. The 9<sup>th</sup> French Army under General Corap moved along the Maas, south of Namur. The German troops arrived in front of Sedan on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May. The 7<sup>th</sup> French Army, after its defeat on the Marck, had moved to Zeeland.

The German troops entered Sedan triumphantly on the 14<sup>th</sup> of May. Before noon, the Germans could throw a bridge over the Maas. The bridge was used by the German tanks, by the German artillery and infantry units to pass the stream and attack the fortifications around Sedan. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of May, they rolled on to the region of Thin-Signy and joined the German

troops that had passed the Maas at Givet and stood on the heights of Rocroi. The 1<sup>st</sup> French Army meanwhile, had retreated from Namur to the Canal of Brussels to Charleroi.

On 15 May 1940, the French Prime Minister Reynaud telephoned to Churchill with the simple message of 'we have been defeated'. Churchill arrived on 16 May in Paris for a brief visit. The French Commander-in-Chief of the French armies was General Maurice Gamelin. He told Churchill he could not stage one sole counter-attack, because of inferiority of equipment and inferiority of method. On 19 May, President Reynaud dismissed Gamelin. General Maxime Weygand replaced him. Weygand had retired in 1935. He too found a co-ordinated offensive was not possible. Weygand correctly concluded that King Leopold II of Belgium had already given up the useless struggle. Attempts to locate the British Commander-in-Chief, Lord Gort, failed.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of May, the German troops that had passed the Maas at Givet attacked the continuation of the Maginot line along the Belgian border. They decisively broke through the French defences, using also their units that had come from Sedan. A breach of more than 100 kilometres in the French fortifications on the Oise then lay open. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of May, the German troops rode and passed by this opening, took Saint-Quentin and approached Cambrai, Laon and Reims. All these sites were well-known battlegrounds of the First World War!

The German tanks and armoured cars rode westward, not deeper, then southwards into the French inner lands. On the eastern flank of the French Army, the German soldiers took one of the famous forts in the region, the Fort 505, as well as the nearby redoubts of Carignan and Montmédy. More to the west, the French Army retreated to Valenciennes and Menen. The 9<sup>th</sup> French Army meanwhile, reinforced by 2 corps of the 7<sup>th</sup> Army that had advanced to the Netherlands, and for which General Giraud had replaced General Corap, retreated disastrously. Here, the *Blitzkrieg* played on in all its horror and efficiency. The German aviation bombed the enemy forces of the French Army in front of the on-rolling tank divisions. The Communication Centres of the French Army were rapidly destroyed, as well as the railway stations and the roads on which long columns of refugees, mixed with the retreating French soldiers moved.

The German troops used to their full capacity and possibilities the two newest weapons introduced in the last months of the First World War: tanks in armoured divisions, and the air force. General Weygand arrived only from Syria on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May. He then took the Highest Command that had been earlier on withdrawn from General Gamelin.

The German tank divisions assaulted on from Cambrai to Arras. The troops that had conquered Péronne also took Albert and Amiens in so short a time as barely could be believed on French side. They rode on to Abbeville, re-enacting the assault to the sea of the First World War, only now infinitely faster and not because the French troops denied them to strike further south.

The Allied troops knew some successes too. At Arras, the British units, assisted by some French colonial groups, stopped the enemy and forced heavy losses upon the Germans. Other French troops that had been defending the Forest of Mormal, south of the line Valenciennes-Maubeuge, held on steadfastly and inflicted further losses on the German infantry divisions. Yet, the German troops advanced still.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of May, the German tanks approached the towns of Saint-Pol and Montreuil. They took Abbeville. On the front from Valenciennes to Arras, the French and British attacks, trying to open the roads to the south, were contained by the Germans. Heavy fighting took place on this front. More to the south, the town Laon fell into German hands, so that the German troops could once more stand and pass the most famous ridge of the Chemin-des-Dames. The Germans entered Rethel-sur-Aisne.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of May, the rests of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> French Army groups stood isolated into the northern regions of France. A large iron band of German troops had cut them off from the inland of France. General Weygand, the former strategist of the High Command in the First World War, realised he had urgently to get his men out of this stronghold. He called an Allied meeting at Ieper in Flanders, in which he explained his plans to link the French and British troops of the northern front together again, in one, coherent line. He proposed his plans to realise the joining at a point where the offensive forces of the enemy seemed the weakest: in the region of the town of Albert to Arras. The Allied troops would have to move southwards, to counter-attack in the directions of Bapaume and Cambrai. At the same time, the Allied troops, French divisions, assembled around the Somme Stream. They attacked northwards and reached the beleaguered BEF troops near Bapaume.

The defenders of the Forest of Mormal capitulated on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May. Some French resistance continued at the citadel and at a few forts of Maubeuge. Near Arras, Douai and Valenciennes, then raged the battle for France. The German troops could contain the French counter-attacks. They even continued their progress to the west of Arras.

The advance of the German armoured divisions to the sea continued inexorably. A German brigade took Noyelles, then Fliers and Étaples to Boulogne. Other units advanced to Montreuil and Saint-Omer and from there to Calais. This went on, not always without heavy losses for the German troops. At Samer, the BEF held and stopped the enemy temporarily after heavy fighting. But the German troops seemed not to care even for where their support troops remained, and attacked relentlessly. The French and German troops fought already on the Somme. On that stream, south of the attacking German columns, the French held in defensive battles. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May, the Germans at least partially occupied Boulogne. At Arras, the BEF feared correctly being encircled. The BEF retreated to the sea. A French counter-offensive reached up to 10 kilometres of Bapaume.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of May, the British High Command envisaged to re-embark its BEF to England. The British retreated about everywhere to the beaches of the North Sea, from Neuville-Saint-Vaast at Vimy, then at Pernes near Béthune. But the German columns entered Saint-Omer, on the road to the sea, menacing Gravelines on the coast and even Dunkirk. In that region, several waterways could delay the German assaults. Bridges were exploded as part of the delaying effort. The Germans occupied Boulogne, attacking the citadel. The Allied troops fought back at Boulogne. The sack into which the Germans had trapped them closed tight, north and south. The large band of the main thrust of the German offensive had completely cut off the troops that still fought around the Belgian-French border. The German divisions also pushed forward in Flanders. In the German band that moved to the sea, from Valenciennes to Gravelines, remained only a group of Allied troops. These moved from Douai to Lille and Armentières, and then going over a series of villages and towns with Flemish names such as Hazebrouck, Cassel, Wormhout, Hondshoote over Bergues to

Duinkerken. The English called this port Dunkirk. The group of Allied soldiers was thick from Gravelines to De Panne on the coast, with in its centre the harbour town of Dunkirk or Dunkerque in French. The counter-offensive launched by the French Army lost its impact on the Somme, and finally stopped!

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of May, the German divisions that had come from out of the region of Givet on the Maas, attacked the Canal of La Bassée at Douai in the direction of Lille. Although the French Army defended these positions well, the German onslaught could not be stopped. The BEF retreated. In the evening, the German divisions reached Marck and the Pont d'Andres. Boulogne could no longer be held. The German command asked the French troops to surrender.

At 10h20, the garrison of Boulogne capitulated. Calais fell on the 26<sup>th</sup>. The French retreated towards Lille, drawing with them the troops that had defended the line of Douai to Valenciennes. The German columns reached Gravelines and Aire, the Canal of the River Aa and even the Leie. The French offensive on the Somme had stopped. The French began to work at their new fortified defence line, called the Weygand Line.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of May, on the French-Belgian border, the German troops pushed on towards Orchies. They passed the Schelde west of Valenciennes and entered Douai. They then threatened Lille. The BEF abandoned La Bassée, Marville and Hazebrouck. The British troops hoped being able to defend the Canal, but the German units reached already the environs of Wormhout and Ledringem. Cassel was on fire after a heavy bombardment by the German artillery.

Lille surrendered on the 28<sup>th</sup> of May, even though its citadel, at the north-western end of the city, held on for 3 more days. After very violent clashes, the towns of Armentières, Ledringem and Wormhout fell. As a result, Dunkirk came to lie within the range of the German artillery!

On that 28 May, Belgium capitulated. The British and French Armies began to fall back to the port of Dunkirk. At Dunkirk, 860 ships, of which 700 British, took off nearly 340,000 soldiers to England. Of these, 200,000 were British, the rest mostly French.

Meanwhile, the British BEF still protected the embarkment of the main part of its troops at Dunkirk. All sorts of ships, large ones and small, had been called to pick up the brave, but failing British troops from the beaches. Heavy fighting continued at Oost-Capelle and at West-Capelle.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of May, the German offensive cut the French troops in two. One contingent defended Dunkirk. Another tried to hold the port of Bergues. Everywhere else, the German soldiers dominated. The Allied soldiers defended then merely a thin zone along the beaches. Nieuwpoort was already threatened by a German offensive launched from the direction of Hondschoote. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of May, Dunkirk, Bergues and de Panne came to lie under heavy artillery fire and terrible attacks from the German *Luftwaffe*. The departure of Allied troops from France ended in the night of the 31<sup>st</sup> of May to the 1<sup>st</sup> of June. The German troops could then fully concentrate on Dunkirk. The British were embarking as quickly as they could for England. The BEF fled entirely from Dunkirk. They had to sacrifice their weapons and provisioning.



From the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June on, the German troops began to attack the Maginot Line in the east, from both sides of the small town of Forbach. On the 5<sup>th</sup> June at about 4h30, the German armed forces of General von Bock had organised a new offensive, using 3 army groups in a massive assault on the front line of from Abbeville to the south by Laon and Péronne. These troops moved southwards, passed the Somme nearly unchallenged, and then broke their assault on the French Weygand defensive line. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of June, the first defences of this front broke on the western side. Hard fights ensued at the Bresles and on the Béthune Rivers. This movement tried to isolate even the French troops that held still the thin coast area between the Seine and the Somme. South of Laon, the German troops passed the canal.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of June, the Germans took Béthune and the German units could pass the River Aisne at Soissons. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of June, the enemy reached Rouen. The German progression continued south of Soissons.

At the same moment, the German Army Group of General von Rundstedt attacked in the Champagne and west of the Maas. On the 10<sup>th</sup>, the German troops stood on the Lower Seine and on the Oise, west of Paris. They experienced some issues with a powerful anti-tank line there.

The French troops held their positions on the Aisne and on the Marne. The German soldiers, like almost everywhere else, rode around the obstacle and then applied their tactics of overwhelming and encirclement, made possible by their great mobility.

The French Army found itself thus in a critical situation. Italy wanted a piece of French territory and found the time opportune to declare war on France. The French Higher Command had nevertheless kept a fine army in the Alps, which fought with much success against the Italian troops.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of June, the Germans threatened Le Havre and had occupied Rouen. Their troops passed the Oise River at Senlis and at Compiègne. German cavalry reached the monument of the Armistice of 1918 in the Forest of Compiègne, in the open space of Rethondes. Further to the east, the German troops stood at the Marne and they occupied Reims. The 12<sup>th</sup> of June, they took Châlons-on-the-Marne. Hard combats still went on near the Meuse, to delay the German advance. The French towns fell in quick succession to the German troops: Le Havre and Montmédy on the 13<sup>th</sup> of June, Ecouen too, so that the German armies arrived at the outer forts of the defences of Paris. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of June, at around 09h00, German troops entered Paris, now declared an open city. German tanks rolled in by the Gate of Saint-Denis.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of June, in the east, started the frontal attack on the French Maginot Line by the Army Group of General von Leeb, near Saarbrücken. Verdun fell on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June. The Germans broke through the Maginot Line over a length of 25 kilometres, between Saint Avold and Saarlbe. The German troops passed the Rhine into France east of Colmar, west of Freiburg-im-Breisgau.

After the 15<sup>th</sup> of June, the battles diminished in France. The war became now limited to the pursuit by the German armed units, by the German armoured, tank and motorised units, helped by the German aviation, of the fleeing French forces. The French retreated ever more rapidly. Orléans was taken on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June. The German divisions reached the French-Swiss border on the 17<sup>th</sup>. The Germans took Besançon and occupied the city. The

communications of the French army groups in the Champagne, the Vosges and Alsace-Lorraine with the rest of France, were cut. Toul and Épinal were threatened.

By then, the French Government was at Bordeaux. Marshal Pétain and General Weygand urged the Government to sue for an armistice with the German Army, but President Regnaud still wanted to continue the war on the side of the British.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of June, the Germans took and passed the so very famous heights of Saint-Mihiel near Verdun. The army of von Leeb pushed through the Maginot Line and reached Metz. On the 17<sup>th</sup>, after the taking of Dijon, the German troops rolled on into the Jura Region. They passed the Yonne at Auxerre. A column threatened the High Loire region. The Germans took Le Creusot, the centre of the French heavy industry. While Metz surrendered, Belfort and Colmar soon did the same. Toul and Épinal came under siege.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of June, at 00h07, Marshal Pétain took the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. He received full powers to negotiate with the German Army. Pétain announced to France his decision of starting negotiations with the German leaders at 13h30. He asked the Germans for the armistice. Winston Churchill was readying to discuss the issue of the war and the French defeat with Reynaud, when he heard the fall of the Reynaud Government had become a fact. Churchill had a document, a project already handed over by the British ambassador to the French Government, which stated France and Great Britain were in this war not two nations, but only one, indissoluble nation. It proposed to hold only one common War cabinet, charged with the supreme command of the operations. Churchill heard of the fall of the Cabinet Reynaud, however, and remained in London.

Many of the French military failed to grasp just how fast and far the German armoured divisions could move in combat. Most of the French airplanes were obsolete as tactical support for the ground forces, whereas such use by the German armies had been the basis of their rapid progress. The advantage in warfare had changed from defence to attack! Few military observers had followed this fact to its logical conclusion.

The sudden surrender of half a million stunned French armies on 22 June 1940 ended the Battle of France!

Young French generals were Charles de Gaulle, Henri Giraud, Philippe François Leclerc, René-Henri Obry, and Jean de Lattre de Tassigny. The commanding, aged French generals were defeatists: Maurice Gamelin was 67, Alphonse Joseph Georges was 64, Maxime Weygand was 73. Marshal Philippe Pétain, 84, had collaborationist views on the situation. De Gaulle was promoted to the rank of general during the invasion of Belgium. Soon, he was appointed to Under-Secretary for Defence in the French Government. In the summer of 1940, with British help, he fled from France and became the leader of the exiled Free French, a small force of 2,000 soldiers and 140 officers. In the beginning, the French troops in the colonies remained loyal to the Vichy regime. In September of 1940, the French troops that had stayed loyal to Vichy even repulsed an abortive landing of the Free French forces at Dakar. By end 1942, the French Free forces had still only 50,000 men, whereas more than 230,000 had stayed loyal to Vichy. De Gaulle was only fully recognised as the uncontested head of a Government in waiting, working out of London, as of the summer of 1943.

Hitler had ordered the German advance to halt before Dunkirk. Göring boasted his airplanes would finish off the Allied troops, and von Rundstedt advised him to give the tired soldiers a respite before they turned southwards to Paris. Neither Fedor von Bock, nor von Brauchitsch could change his mind. This halt allowed most of the British and French troops to escape from Dunkirk. It had been a tactical error of Hitler.

Two days later, Only about 40,000 French troops remained in Dunkirk and surrounded the port. The Germans took them prisoners. Then, the German Armies turned south with 50 infantry divisions and 10, now somewhat depleted tank divisions. They still had against them 40 French infantry divisions and 3 French armoured divisions. By far not enough to stop them! By the 6<sup>th</sup> of June, the German forces crossed the Somme Stream and 3 days later they rode into Rouen.

On 12 June 1940 already, General Weygand had prophesied that further resistance was useless. It was time to make an armistice and an honourable peace with Germany. Marshal Pétain, aged, was called in, and agreed. On 16 June, the French Government reconvened at Bordeaux. Reynaud resigned as Prime Minister.

Losses in all afflicted to the Allies were 120,000 French soldiers killed or missing, 10,500 Dutch and Belgians, and 5,000 British soldiers. About 1.5 million French soldiers surrendered! On 14 June, German troops entered Paris.

The enemy armies continued to take and occupy more French towns: Cherbourg, Rennes, and Le Mans fell. The German columns passed the Loire Stream and reached the Cher. In the east, a German column rode past Châlon-sur-Saône and pushed on to Lyon. The Germans took the towns of Toul, Nancy and Lunéville. The French retreat continued about everywhere. Brest surrendered. The German tanks ran over the Loire and through towns without stopping. Only at Saumur were the Germans rebuffed by the resistance of the students of the famous Cavalry School there. Bourges surrendered. Near Gien-sur-Loire, 700 French tanks fell into German hands. The retreat of the French troops had turned into a rout. The German troops occupied Strasbourg, Toul, Lunéville and Épinal without fierce resistance. The French soldiers seemed no more to want to fight in what they thought was a lost cause. Lyon fell on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June.

Some resistance of the French soldiers and further advance of German troops nevertheless continued in the Vosges, between Saint-Dié and Gerardmer, and also on two sides of Thionville, in the environs of Hagenau, by a few forts, but the German air force battered these to silence. Skirmishes continued too on the front of the Alps. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June, skirmishes were still happening on the Mount of the Lower Saint-Bernard, on the Mount Cénis and on the Genèvre, until the town of Menton on the coast of the Mediterranean. The armistice with Germany would only start after the signature of a similar act with Italy. The French Government sent such a demand to Italy.

On the 23<sup>th</sup> of June, La Rochelle still fell to the German troops. The enemy tanks advanced now as fast as they could to Royan. In the southern Alps, the Italian troops too advanced, though slowly.

Marshal Pétain abhorred the democratic institutions of the French Third Republic. He refused to see why the French soldiers should fight to death to defend this Republic. France lay in chaos. Whole towns had been deserted! Lille had gone from 200,000 inhabitants to 20,000.

Chartres from 23,000 to 800! Bordeaux had doubled in population in a few weeks. Pau, a town of normally 30,000 people, now held 150,000 people crammed in the town. The French political system fell apart under the strain of war.

The Germans moved the private railway carriage of Marshal Foch, used in the First World War to sign the surrender of Germany, out of its museum, and rolled it to the Forest of Compiègne. Hess, Göring and von Ribbentrop were present. Hitler arrived and took the seat occupied by the victorious Foch in 1918. The armistice between France and Germany was signed there. On 24 June 1940, all fighting in France ended.

The defeat of France can only be understood by the sudden implosion of morale in the French leaders. In an instance, the Germans had an issue more: the forces needed by them for the occupation of a territory vaster than theirs. France fell in less than 50 days, and suffered in that short time 350,000 casualties! Only 50,000 German soldiers were killed, later died of wounds or were missing. Only! The Germans had 100,000 wounded soldiers. Between September 1939 and June 1940, the German *Luftwaffe* lost 2,000 fighter planes, bombers, and hundreds of airplanes for key transports. The *Third Reich* had to deploy 100,000 soldiers in the occupied territories to keep resistance at a minimum. Then, the *Wehrmacht* wanted to turn to Great Britain, but it could not invade the country, nor bomb it into submission. June 1940 was not the end of France! By end June 1945, there would be French soldiers in occupied Germany, and no Germans left in France!

The later Russian invasion would be very different from the invasion of France. The vast expanse of the Soviet union allowed for easier strategic retreat than in France. Moreover, the murderous authoritarianism of the Soviets made capitulation a capital crime. Without an end to the Allied maritime embargo, imposed by Great Britain on Germany, most thought it unlikely Hitler would start yet another war with the Soviet Union, which also supplied 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of German oil.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of June at 19h11, was signed also the armistice between France and Italy. This happened in Rome.

The ambassador of Great Britain received the text from Minister Baudouin. Great Britain, by Winston Churchill, confirmed that despite the act of the French Government of Bordeaux, Great Britain would always keep to heart the cause of the French people.

The cease-fire would become effective from the Alsace to the Mediterranean on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June at 01h35 in the morning. Until that hour, the German troops had still overrun Royan, Angoulême, Saint-Étienne and Aix-les-Bains. On the 26<sup>th</sup>, the German troops occupied Bordeaux and then the French coastal towns up to the Spanish border. All seemed lost on the continent to the Allies. The triumph of Germany was complete.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of France was still Paul Baudouin. He had to inform himself of the conditions of the *Reich Government* of the armistice granted to France. The Spanish ambassador to France, Le Querida, a friend of Marshal Pétain, was a partisan of the armistice. Baudouin asked Le Querida to serve as intermediary between France and Chancellor Hitler.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of June, Franco's Spanish troops invaded the until then international zone of Tangiers, which Spain wanted to annex.

Great Britain had obtained from the French Government the promise that the French fleet would not be handed over to the Germans, but that had been before the negotiations on the armistice by Pétain-France and Germany.

General de Gaulle left France from Bordeaux around the 16<sup>th</sup> of June. On the 18<sup>th</sup>, he could deliver a first message on the BBC radio. De Gaulle proclaimed that whatever happened, the flame of the French resistance was not to be quenched. He expressed his faith in the future for the independence of France. France was not alone in its ongoing struggle. France had, on the side of Great Britain, to continue opposing Germany. The war had not stopped with the Battle for France. A new world would ensue. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 1940, the Government of Great Britain recognised General de Gaulle as the head of the armed forces of Free France. The Government of Great Britain and de Gaulle signed a pact in London, recognising the general as the head of the Free France armed forces. The agreement held articles for the organisation, the utilisation and the service conditions of the force of French volunteers. It was a strictly military convention. De Gaulle remained in favour of the British, even after the 3 July 1940 sinking of the French fleet at Mers-el-Kebir in Algeria on Churchill's orders. This proved the loss of 1,297 French sailors.

On 28 June 1940, Hitler flew to Paris with his architect Albert Speer and the sculptor Arno Breker, for a personal sight-seeing trip. They visited the Opera Garnier, the Eiffel Tower, Les Invalides, and Montmartre. On 6 July, Hitler held his victory parade in Paris. This was the highest point of Hitler's popularity in Berlin between 1933 and 1945. Everyone in the world was amazed at the speed of the German victory. But the war was not at an end by the capture of Paris!

All this time, the family of Julian Vincius lived quietly in the capital of the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg. Julian learned of the developments from the newspapers, of which he was still an avid reader. He also heard bribes of the situation in Berlin from his friend, Ernst Vincius. Ernst could also give him inside information of how inebriated the Nazi Party Leaders were with the victories won on the battlefields. The new Germany of the *Third Reich* felt nothing could stop their ardour. No people could withstand their courage and knowledge of fighting modern wars. What better proof was there of their new educational policies and their armament production, their intellect, the leadership qualities of their *Führer*, Adolph Hitler, than the ease by which the German Army had cut through the West European Armies of already so many countries, including France? There were no limits to the military power of Germany and to the knowledge of the German military of how wars could be won! Germany could subdue not just Western Europe, but the peoples of the entire world! The *Third Reich* and its *Führer* would create a new world under the leadership of the genius *Führer*! First they had taken France, then they would take the world!

## The Vincius Family and Luxemburg in the War

Before the war, the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg had remained in economic partnership with Belgium. In 1935, the Belgian Government had to devalue the Belgian Frank. The Luxemburg Government fell. The next Prime Minister, Pierre Dupong, the leader of the Government, separated the Luxemburg Franc from the Belgian one. Dupong would remain Prime Minister until 1953. Luxemburg had always defended its neutrality. It acted very strictly in this stance. For instance, though Luxemburg was admitted to the United Nations in December 1920, the Parliament did not ratify the membership treaty, considering it contrary to its Constitution. Luxemburg also did not sign in 1925 the Armaments Reduction Acts, nor the Agreements of Locarno. In December of 1930, both Belgium and Luxemburg did sign the Convention of Oslo, moving into a political union to work for peace.

On 10 May 1940, the German armed forces swept past Luxemburg. The German troops passed the borders around 4h30 in the early morning. The 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Tank Divisions of General Ewald von Kleist invaded the country. They did not encounter any resistance worthwhile mentioning, save for some bridges destroyed and some pastures mined. The Luxemburg Volunteers Corps stayed in their barracks, knowing all resistance futile. Some resistance was given by the Police Force, but all that was to little avail and before noon already, German troops entered the capital. Casualties happened, but they were few.

The Luxemburg Grand Ducal family had already escaped. They had fled to France, together with Pierre Dupong, Joseph Bech, Pierre Krier and Victor Bodson, their Government. The 5<sup>th</sup> Minister, Nicolas Marque, could not escape in time and the Germans deported him east. The other Ministers and the Royal family would reach Bordeaux, and received visas for Portugal by the ambassador Aristides de Sousa Mendes. With these, they moved into Portugal via Spain and travelled to North America.

By 19 June they had arrived in Spain, by 24 June in Portugal. The ministers and the Grand Ducal Family moved to London, to form a Government in exile. Many Luxemburgers considered this as a desertion and as an abandon of their duties, but the ministers wanted to avoid collaboration with the enemy. They formed an Administrative Commission for Luxemburg with Albert Wehrer as General Secretary of the Government. The named ministers and the Grand Duchess Charlotte with her family went to live in Montreal, Canada. Later, the Grand Duchess Charlotte spoke on the BBC to give hope to the Luxemburg people.

In Montreal, with the Grand Ducal Family, remained Victor Bodson and Pierre Dupong, but Joseph Bech and Pierre Krier remained in London, joining the Belgian and Dutch politicians. Together, they would sign in September of 1944 the *Convention of the Benelux*, called after the 3 countries.

Luxemburg remained under German military occupation during the war. Initially, Hitler incorporated Luxemburg in the *Gau* Coblenz-Trier, of which the *Gauleiter* was Gustav Simon. As of the beginning of August 1940, the *Gauleiter* Gustav Simon was appointed by the Nazis as the Head of the Civil Administration of Luxemburg. In 1941, the *Third Reich* annexed it as part of the *Gau Moselland*. About 13,000 Luxemburgers, by then German

citizens, were called up for military service in the *Reich*, and over 2,800 Luxemburgers fell in the war.

Gustav Simon tried to Nazify the country, issuing several ordinances. He introduced the Nazi Penal Code, exception tribunals, as well as an anti-Jewish legislation. Of course, the former workers' syndicates were dissolved and absorbed in the *Arbeitsfront* of Robert Ley. In August of 1940 already, the Luxemburg Frank and the Belgian Frank had been replaced by the *Reichsmark*. The UEBL was stopped, and the banks received German commissars to lead. The Germanisation of Luxemburg that followed proved not really a success. In the spring of 1941, the *Reichsarbeiterdienst* was introduced, proposing work in Germany, and on 30 August 1942 the obligatory military service in the German Army. The annexation of Luxemburg was by then total, though not in the minds of the Luxemburgers.

End 1940 saw the first acts of the Luxemburg secret resistance. Strikes happened. A large general strike in 1942 was repressed in blood. This strike was very courageous, one of the few mass strikes directed against the Germans during the war. The Germans executed 21 strikers and deported hundreds more to the Nazi concentration camps. In all, over 1,100 Luxemburg families were deported to Silesia and Poland for re-education in concentration camps directed by the SS. About 2% of the Luxemburg population died in that sinister period, compared to a mere 1% in Belgium.

Between December 1944 and February 1945, very late in the war, the German Command of the West, OB-West, made of Luxemburg still a target of V3 siege launchers, originally intended to bombard London. These V3 shells were not very accurate. Nevertheless, they caused 10 deaths and 35 people wounded in Luxemburg. The V-3, in German *Vergeltungswaffe 3*, or Retribution Weapon 3, was a large-calibre gun working on the multi-charge principle whereby secondary propellant charges were fired to add velocity to a projectile. Such canons could shoot more than 40 kilometres far.

Finally, the American soldiers would enter Luxemburg on 9 September 1944, and the Grand Duchess returned on 14 April 1945. Her husband, Prince Felix, with her son Jean, had already returned in September of 1944. That same month, the Government returned from exile. The Grand Duchess Charlotte of Luxemburg, Duchess of Nassau, Princess of Bourbon-Parma, died on 9 July 1985. Her reign had lasted from 1919 to 1964. She had abdicated from the throne on 12 November 1964 for her son Jean, who was married to Princess Joséphine-Charlotte, Princess of Belgium and daughter of King Leopold III of Belgium.

Luxemburg received its official University of Luxemburg only in 2003, its Central Bank in 1938.

The country's 3 official languages were *Lëtzeburgisch* or Letzeburgisch, the spoken, vernacular language, with German as the written language, and French as the language for official letters and of the law.

The members of the Vincius Family in Luxemburg knew German and French. They learned to speak Letzeburgisch fairly rapidly. Throughout the war, they remained living unremarked in Luxemburg City and Julian Vincius could exercise his trade as doctor. They kept a low profile.

## Anton Vincius in France

Anton Vincius, the first son of Julian and Charlotte Vincius was already studying at the university of Gembloux in Belgium when the war broke out between the Western European countries in all its sudden violence. Since September 1939, Anton had been following the courses of the Gembloux Agricultural University. Gembloux was a small Belgian town, very provincial in nature, situated not far from the ten times larger Walloon town of Namur. Gembloux lay at about 50 kilometres southeast of Brussels, Namur at only about 15 kilometres east from Gembloux. Brussels, the Belgian capital, Gembloux and Namur lay on one of Belgium's main railway tracks. The towns were also connected by an inner regional road numbered the National Road 4, or more commonly the N4. The railways and the N4 continued from Namur to Luxemburg. All later called Intercity trains that started in Brussels and ran southeast, or even started on the Belgian coast at Oostende and ended in Luxemburg, passed Gembloux and Namur. Anton could not have wished better or faster, straight and easy connections between the town he studied in and the town where his parents, brother and sisters lived. The voyage to Luxemburg took him over two hours, but that trip allowed him to pass the few hours agreeably in a well-heated, fast train wagon in winter. He usually read all the way.

Anton followed his courses in French. He understood the language well enough, but he had to learn the technical terms in French. He needed but a dictionary German-French to complement the French he knew. His mother, Charlotte, had spoken French with her children, so the Vincius sons and daughters had no issue with that language. Anton could also count on the leniency of his main professors. When he didn't know the name of a flower or plant in French, he was allowed to cite the German name. His professors then gave him the French name. They accepted what he explained in the etymology of the names to come to a translation in French. Anton studied well, advanced rapidly, and made friends among students and professors.

The buildings in which he studied were those of a famous abbey in the history of Belgium, an abbey that had existed since about the twelfth century, one of the oldest abbeys of Wallonia. During the French Revolution, all Catholic abbeys in Belgium had been confiscated by the French state. The Gembloux Abbey had no more monks, and its buildings had served as an agricultural university. In the past centuries, the abbey had been innovated much. It did not anymore look like a truly medieval abbey.

The Gembloux Abbey had once been rich. Its main building was now grand, showing the past power of the monks of Gembloux. One entered by a monumental gate and porch, into a large courtyard, in the middle of which lay a wide lawn. The lawn and the abbey stood now in the very centre of the town. In fact, in medieval times, the town had been built around the abbey. So, one had to pass a majestic stone, arched entry, walk past the lawn, which was always a very agreeable small walk in the morning, and then reach the main building and the various halls of the abbey, in which often important political meetings had been held with the monks, known for their wisdom. One entered the university rooms via a large gate in a front built in the truest Palladium style, with stairs, Greek columns that had to inspire respect in anybody who was invited to the abbey, topped by a Greek triangular front. All around the lawn stood three meter high walls in bricks. The abbey had since always added dignity to the town. The



students had started a folklore of holding each year at the beginning of the courses, a procession through the town. They then followed a few streets, sang ribald songs, all clad in the white clothes of lab workers, with the headgear of students of Gembloux. Horses drew a few carts, on which the students danced and sang and shouted, pints of beer in hands. Practically all these students were boys, so no Gembloux girl that happened to be in the streets at that moment, was very safe. Of course, the girls liked being held up by the students and show how beautiful they were. The students generally remained polite and did not touch places forbidden by common politeness. Naturally, after their years of study, many just promoted engineers married Gembloux girls before or after having turned home. Some of the girls already carried babies in their arms.

Many of the Gembloux students were quite rich. Some arrived in cars of their own. Some even came with cars and drivers, with butlers and cooks. These could be Russian or Polish noblemen. Most of the students took lodgings with the inhabitants of the town. Only the very richest bought a house of their own in the middle of town, when such houses were free to buy.

Anton Vincius had not come alone to Gembloux. He had walked with his parents, both of them, from the Gembloux railway station to the university buildings. In front of the entry porch lay a square, which held the monument of the abbey's monk who had contributed most to the reputation of the abbey, one Saint Guibert in the French language. The square had been called after him. A little further, in a corner of that square, the Vincius found a groceries shop, which in fact sold almost anything one might need in a household, and thus was very popular in town. The shop let rooms to students. Here, Anton and his parents hired a room on the second floor. Bathrooms and toilet were on the same floor. Anton did not need much more. He could take his meals in the family's house, father and mother, grandfather and grandmother, and 2 daughters about his age. The girls were beautiful, polite, dignified in their knowledge of belonging to the better bourgeoisie of the town. Especially the younger one, Marie-Ange Dumont, who was the prettiest, eyed Anton from the first moment he came through the door.

Of course, Anton's parents explained who they were and what they were. Anton was half French and half German, spoke both languages and was an intelligent boy. Anton was also part Jewish of descent and half Catholic, but he had been baptised in the Protestant faith. Nobody cared much about religion in Gembloux. People cared for money, though. The town of Gembloux was quite used to receive students of different faiths and provenance. Nobody really bothered about the religion of their guests. Most of the Gembloux inhabitants attended mass on Sunday, married in church and were buried in Catholic cemeteries with Catholic ceremonies, but that was all. There were no religious zealots in town.

Soon, Anton Vincius and Marie-Ange Dumont agreed well together. They could be seen walking together in town. Some people drew up their eyebrows and spoke to the girl's parents, though without suggesting something untoward was happening. The whole town knew within a few days Anton was German, nobody showed any sign of disapproval or rejection. A Gembloux girl marrying a foreigner, whatever that one's religion or skin colour, was the most natural matter on earth. A scandal only came when after a few years of married life, the girl returned to Gembloux and to her parents, holding one child at her hand and another in her arms, and not accompanied by a husband. Sometimes, the husband arrived

later and recuperated his wife, but such a feat happened seldom. Usually, the woman remarried with a decent Gembloux young man, and the first husband was not bothered with.

Marie-Ange could tell Anton why there was an agricultural university in her small town, and not in more obvious large cities of Belgium. Gembloux lay in the flat lands of the centre of the country, a region called Hesbaye among other province names used. The Hesbaye covered parts of both regions of Flanders and of Wallonia. It was extremely fertile land on the western side of the Meuse Stream. Very large farms had been built in these regions, wealthy farms, many as large and as well defended as castles. The Government of France and later of Belgium had wanted to install an agricultural university to give higher education to the farmers' sons. Even more, the Belgian government had also organised several research stations on agriculture, with the aim to obtain higher efficiency of the overall agriculture in the Hesbaye. The professors of this university knew well what farmers did, how they worked, specialised in forests, in grains, in animal husbandry, in agricultural machinery, and so on. They studied insects and how to avoid them growing on plants. The university had an immediate use and was directed at very practical results. It prided also in knowledge of Africa, African plants and methods of cultivation, as Belgium was a land with an enormous colony, the then called Congo.

Soon, Anton Vincius learned to know many people in town. He studied and worked among tens if not hundreds of friends, students like him. He was happy. The people were friendly with him, and he had a nice girlfriend he had quickly decided he would marry.

As of 1939, of course, the talk of the town was the conflict of Austria, Italy and Germany with the other Western European countries. The German Army was a serious threat, war had been declared, even though the people did not suffer from that declaration in 1939 itself. War seemed to remain limited to the northern countries, Norway and Sweden and Denmark.

Could one not come to reason?

Life went on as usual in the winter months, not much really threatening happened, and Anton was once more regarded with the same eyes as before. The Scandinavian lands lay far from Belgium. Many young men had been called to arms, but not one shot had been exchanged on Belgian territory. Was not Belgium a neutral country? Neutral countries stayed out of the war. Anton Vincius also did not much speculate about the war. It would start soon enough, if necessary, he thought. He continued to learn at the university, continued with his courses. Anton's professors too did not speculate much in class. They did not seem to know what would come next. Well, what came next was horrible. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of May, the first German troops passed the borders of Belgium, and everything changed!

Anton became very worried after the beginning of the war in Western Europe. If German troops had passed the frontiers of Belgium and Holland near Liège, he expected the same had happened in Luxemburg. How much time did it take to drive through Luxemburg, east to west, that is to traverse the entire country of Luxemburg and enter into French territories? No more than only a couple of hours on excellent roads, Anton calculated, and only another few hours to traverse the country from north to south! Four hours at the most! For a complete column of well-trained soldiers in half-track armoured vehicles to take Luxemburg, for a few tank divisions to pass the country, why, the German troops could be in Gembloux in a few hours! Luxemburg, with its tiny Army and a few police battalions, would not be able to resist any armoured German division! How would tiny Luxemburg be able to withstand a

determined Army of thousands of soldiers of infantry and hundreds of tanks? Moreover, the next day, Anton could read in the Belgian newspaper the Dumont family read, the *Luftwaffe*, the German military aviation, flattened all resistance in minutes. It was extremely active above Luxemburg and Belgium. What would be the fate of his family, his father a Jew, though with an apatrie passport? Had Luxemburg City been bombed? Anton would receive no news from his parents for several weeks. Telephone connections with Luxemburg had been cut.

Anton could not for long ponder over such questions, for early in the day, as he was still preparing himself to attend his courses at the university, lessons in forest husbandry, he heard the doors of the store below open to what he supposed were clients, much earlier than usual. A discussion began. He went down, to hear what was happening, and saw two *gendarmes*, literally gens d'armes, men with arms, policemen, stand in the living room in full blue uniforms, rifles at shoulder straps, and then going into the kitchen to have a cup of coffee. They and the Dumont parents talked about the war.

When Anton entered the kitchen, the conversation stopped. In the silence that followed, the first *gendarme*, an older, heavy-set, tall man, addressed Anton, asking, 'so, young man, are you Anton Vincius, originating from the country of Germany?'

Anton answered, 'yes, officer, I am. My papers are upstairs, in my room. I study at the university.'

'We will need the papers soon,' the man continued. He had no anger or disrespect in his voice. 'You shall have to come with us. We received orders to detain all German-born foreigners. All German citizens in Belgium are ordered to be assembled in the town prisons. From there, you 'll be sent to special camps. As the war has truly begun, you are considered a danger to our community. We have orders to bring you to the police prison of Gembloux. Now, that being said, we can do that in two ways, young man. Either you follow us without fuss, or you resist us. In that case, we shall have to use force. Mind you, we don't want to do that. I guess you won't make a scandal about it in our peaceful town.'

Marie-Ange immediately insisted, before Anton could answer, 'are you not mistaken, Messieurs? Anton is not a German. Not anymore. He was a German, but he is fatherland-less now! He is against the German aggression too, you know! He lives in Luxemburg with his parents. You are arresting someone who has fled from the Germans! Arresting him seems an error to me. He is fleeing from the Germans, yet you arrest him as a German. Isn't that absurd?'

'I'm truly sorry, Miss,' the taller *gendarme* retorted, interrupting her. 'We know all that. We know the young man. We have spoken to the dean of the university. We have our orders. The dean told us too we were making a mistake, and that can indeed be the case, but we have our orders! I can only repeat we are not handing him over to the Germans, but to the Belgian authorities. The boy will have the occasion to tell them who he is, and why he is on Belgian soil. Our soldiers are fighting against the German Armies. We don't know how long the Belgian soldiers can hold back the Germans. They have far more soldiers than we do! You should all prepare for the German Army to enter Gembloux in a few days to a few weeks. Your friend may even be better off in France. He won't have to fight anybody. He is just detained. Trains are being readied at Namur. We won't harm him. We have orders to bring all foreigners out of Belgium. Believe me, it may be better for him to stay far away from Gembloux for the moment, and ahead of the on-pushing German Army.'

Marie-Ange did not insist further. She lowered her head in acceptance of fate. Her words would be useless. And indeed, Anton was better far from actual fighting.

‘I understand,’ Anton assured. ‘I will not resist. May I gather a few things first, take my papers, coat, and so on?’

The policeman hesitated. He was a man of Gembloux, and all people of Gembloux had learned since tens of years to respect foreigners. He really did not expect resistance. He felt some pity for the young man, who clearly would be no fighter, just a student.

He answered therefore, ‘sure. Take warm things. I think, I heard rumours, you may be sent to somewhere deep into France, a kind of rallying camp. I don’t know when, today or tomorrow, but soon. It would be smart to take things to keep you comfortable on a long trip. Don’t forget shaving gear, soap and so on. Take pullovers, spare underwear and the like. You’ll get something to eat with us, but I have no idea what will happen afterward. Take some dry biscuits, a metallic bottle filled with water, spare clothes, a couple of spare trousers. You are allowed one pack, I would say preferably a backpack, which leaves your hands free. Don’t make it too heavy. We’ll wait a bit. My friend, here, will have to go with you to your room. Don’t try to escape. You will get caught anyway, and that would only aggravate your case. We are at war! If you make matters difficult for us, we are allowed to use arms. We really don’t want to do that, don’t we?’

‘I won’t resist, Sir,’ Anton said smoothly. ‘I know you have to do your duty.’

‘When will he come back?’ Marie-Ange wanted to know. She asked the question suddenly, eyes filled with tears.

The *gendarme* took off his helmet, put it on the table and then sipped from his coffee. He said, ‘I don’t really know, Miss. I am even not sure he shall be sent to France. Just rumours. The rumours say south of France, so it can take quite a while before he returns. Much will depend on how the war proceeds. I’m sorry.’

At that point, Anton turned and went upstairs with the second policeman, a much younger man, who nevertheless held to his rifle. The younger *gendarme* followed him. Anton had become very pale in the meantime. He was impressed. He went to his room, packed feverishly things he could think of for a long voyage, first necessities, not many things. He packed what he had taken and found might come in handy in the mountain backpack he had brought with him to Gembloux. Marie-Ange and her mother had followed him. They plied some clothes better, added a blanket. Marie-Ange pushed at least four packs of biscuits in his pack. They added a water bottle, which could have been used in the previous war, for Anton saw the Russian letters for *Moskva* pushed in the metal below. He also took a metal eating cup. Then, they all went back downstairs. Anton got the time to say goodbye, included a hug for Marie-Ange, which astonished some her father. There was no time for more explanations. Anton had to leave, accompanied by the two *gendarmes*. In fact, he had to walk between them, but no handcuffs were applied. In the streets, the *gendarmes* chatted freely with Anton. The three of them attracted the curiosity of people in the main street of the town. Anton felt humiliated like a caught bandit, a thief, a criminal, being led away between policemen. Gembloux was a small town. Gossip would start. Everybody would soon know a German had been led away by the police!

The *gendarmes* brought Anton to the small, ancient prison of the Police Station of Gembloux. He was put in a cell and the iron door was closed behind him. Nobody came to interrogate him. The police officers gave his papers back. A few policemen came to talk to him. He even knew them by face. He had seen them before, walking in the streets. They rather seemed to want to console him, and excuse themselves for having had to lock him up.

Anton remained all this time outwardly calm, but he could have cried out in despair. He explained to the *gendarmes* he was of Jewish decent, though Christian, so no friend at all of the German police and of the German Army. The Belgian policemen looked at each other, but Anton heard again ‘orders are orders.’ He told them his family had deliberately escaped from Germany to seek more safety. The *gendarmes* knew not more than a name on a list. They had to take him in. Two other prisoners, a German and a Czech boy, sat in cells next to his. With them, the town prison was full!

Around three hours in the night, two policemen arrived at the cells to wake up Anton and the other prisoners. They said they had to bring the prisoners to the railway station of Gembloux. A train would pick them up and bring them to France. They also told the Belgian Army was engaged in heavy fighting at the bastions around Namur. The German Army was approaching Namur. It was high time to go!

At the Gembloux railway station, Anton had but to wait less than half an hour. Then, a long train with many wagons for passengers steamed in. The *gendarmes* put Anton on the train. There was some short explanation with the guardians on board the train, lists had to be checked, and then, after a not more than fifteen minutes halt, the train left Gembloux in the direction of Brussels. All light was dimmed on the train.

Anton said not a word to the other young men who had been put on the train with him. He found a free place on a bunk. The train was not empty of other men, but many bunks were free. He went to sit, placed his head against the wood of a window, and tried to sleep. Sleep came slowly. He indeed dozed in, and the train rolled on and on. Anton later didn’t remember how many times the train stopped, sometimes for longer periods than at Gembloux. He woke almost each time, but his tired eyes could not take in where exactly he was. The train did not pass Brussels, but took on young men like him at each stop.

Somewhere in the north of France, the train stopped again. This halt took much longer. Everybody had to get out and step into another train. The men stepped over the railway tracks, as the trains stood one next to the other in the open field of very many tracks. This train was more filled with young men, probably coming from other Belgian sites. Anton heard speak Dutch now, too. The stop happened not in a regular station of a town, but merely in a wide field of many railway tracks. The Belgian guards pushed the Belgian prisoners on the new train, and then French guards took over. The operation took a long time. Only a few hours later, the train started once more and rolled on. To where? Anton settled on a bunk and slept again. At more stops, newer people had to come onto the train. Many were German-speaking men. Anton did as if he didn’t understand what they were saying. He tried to remain as innocuous as possible, doing exactly as told by the guards and not showing them a bad, angry face.

Nobody on the train asked Anton who he was, and he wouldn’t really have wanted to give any direct answer. He remained rather convinced he would be able to explain himself at the

destination of the train and convince the authorities of the mistake they had made. Why should he be detained? He would rather have fought now against the German soldiers too! He would never have helped the German Army in their violation of another country, let alone the country of his mother. He would have to explain all this, his being on the train was all a mistake! He understood he would have to wait until he had reached his destination, though. Only there could decisions be made.

Anton stayed in the successive trains he was pushed in. Three times past the Belgian border, he had to change trains. At one stop, he recognised a sign with Bordeaux written on it. He had come that far south! The train stopped at odd places, sometimes in the middle of fields. Anton lost count of the hours. He reckoned he had been at least two days on the trains. He tried to read the signs of the villages and towns they passed. He had no map with him, but he had an overview of France in his head. He had always remembered the names of the cities his mother had spoken of, French cities. He had looked at maps of France many times.

The train he was in had rolled past Paris, for he had noticed the Eiffel tower for a few seconds, then it had advanced over Tours and Orléans to Bordeaux. The train stopped there for a long time, then rolled on in a long trip to Montauban and from there to Sainte-Livrade-sur-Lot. He had to get out there for a long stop, even slept in the camp there consisting of old railway carriages. He had to remain a day and a night at Sainte-Livrade, keeping as much as possible to himself. He sought no friends, sulked in a corner always. Another train brought him to Toulouse, then to Perpignan, then to Oelne. From there, a long column of prisoners had to set off on foot to a place called Saint Cyprien. Anton stayed at Oelne only one night. Part of the column was sent on. Another column of prisoners, guarded by armed French soldiers, walked to Argelès-sur-Mer. Anton then surmised he had reached the end of the destination, for he had arrived in the southernmost parts of France, near the Spanish border.

Anton was perfectly right in his assumptions. Argelès and Saint Cyprien were camps set up by the French authorities for the Spanish escapees from the Spanish civil war. Many Spanish combatants had fled from Catalonia into France, to be collected by the French authorities. France had kept the Spanish fighters, mostly Socialists and Communists, assembled in camps of their own, near the Spanish border, near the last French port of Collioure. The Spanish combatants had been interrogated, and then sent to parts of France where they had some chance of finding work and shelter. The camps now stood empty, that is until they were flooded by the Belgian detainees. The wooden barracks got filled once more with men, by Germans and Czechs who had been living in Belgium and France at the outbreak of the war in May 1940. Actually, there were five such camps near the border of Spain, and Anton had seen Saint Cyprien, and had landed now at Argelès, on the Mediterranean shore!

The camp was nothing more than a large, flat terrain, a pasture really, cut off from the outside world by barbed wire on wooden poles, with one large entry gate, which was nothing more than a few wooden planks nailed together in triangles, held together also by barbed wire, and with a barrack for the guards inside, next to the gate. Within the space delimited by the high barbed fence, stood wooden barracks. In winter, these had to be hells on earth, except then very cold hells, for the cold, humid, harsh winds, which blew here often, the sea-winds and the land-winds, brought in the biting cold. The inmates had to sleep on wooden planks and

very simple, thin mattresses of hay and straw, lice-ridden of course, thin, so thin one lay half directly on the wooden planks, half only on something just softer. The mattresses had been used before, probably by the Spanish refugees from their civil war, and refreshed or even washed in a hurry, the lice not killed. The men that were thrown in those barracks hadn't washed for a week or more. They too were lice-ridden, and added now to the thriving population below them. Moreover, so many political prisoners had been sent to Argelès, there were by far not enough bunks to sleep on. The ones who arrived late, which was also the case for Anton, had to sleep on the sandy floors, though got still a mattress.

At Argelès all living conditions were rudimentary! The sanitary provisions were simple, dating from the stone age. After Anton arrived, the weather remained foul for weeks on end. Rains passed the roofs of the barracks. The barracks were damp and hence cold, despite the time of the year. Blankets were scarce. Water ran into the barracks. The mattresses on the sandy ground got soaked. Illnesses soared, such as dysentery, inflamed bowels, irritated joints, lacks of vitamins. In May, when Anton had arrived in the camp, it was peaches season. The prisoners could practically eat peaches as much as they wanted. Granted, most of the peaches had rotten parts, for peaches were delicate fruit, but the peaches of the south of France were succulent, among the finest Anton had ever eaten. But they led directly to dysentery! The men had to empty their bowels on improvised installations, planks above holes in the ground. Many ran to the primitive latrines their hands on their buttocks. They grew weak. Many were sick and moaned on their mattresses. They stayed like that for weeks on end.

The food was meagre. Little meat, only in kinds of soups of a few old vegetables and rice, often with meat and fish thrown together in the stew, prepared by men who had never seen a kitchen before, in closed casseroles, heated for several hours. The stew was always the same, for weeks on a row. The men quickly became slim again, lost fat and then muscle tissue. They grew weaker and duller, and really sick. They had practically nothing to do all day, except here and there to repair barracks. Some played at cards, at self-made wooden cubes for dice, and they chatted. To chat, sitting on the sandy, gentle hills was the best one could do. But one could only tell one's funniest moments so many times until they dulled too. At least, one warmed in the sun. A few tried music on self-made flutes and drums. Occasionally, one could sing. One became bored oneself with one's stories. After weeks, the men just sat, weak, dulled, half sick. A few went crazy. They threw themselves onto the barbed wire and hung there. They got deep cuts, but were happy to see a doctor or a nurse, who were not prisoners, and who could send them to a civil hospital, somewhere in one of the near towns.

Anton Vincius heard from others pieces of news of the war. The German had passed through the Allied Armies in Flanders and the north of France like knives through butter. The war had ended quickly, Belgium and Holland had surrendered early, France only a little later. France had largely been occupied by the German Army. Paris was German!

Argelès lay finally in the unoccupied parts of France, managed by a Regime of French collaborators of the *Third Reich* under the Marshal Pétain. Pétain managed these parts out of the town of Vichy, the new capital of France. Pétain had chosen Vichy as headquarters, because there were so many hotels in this town, which could be used by the new civil servants.

Anton went to the military leaders of the camp, French soldiers, to explain he had been arrested in Belgium by mistake. The camp authorities, lieutenants and a captain of the French Army, laughed at his story. Wasn't his story absurd?

Anton received between two laughs from the camp leader, 'my dear fellow, no man has ever been sent here deliberately. All these men, here, have been sent by mistake! You are far from an exception! We get stories like this all day. Where is the truth? The truth is, you have been sent here for a good reason. You are German, and therefore have been a danger for the Allies. Tell me again your story, so that I can laugh some more! What do you want me to do? I don't have the files of why you were sent here, and don't tell me the Belgian police are no serious guys! They had files on you, surely!'

Anton explained again, protesting. He never told his family was half Jewish in origins. He told his father had been an opposer of the German *Reich*, although he had still family in Berlin and was born in the capital of Germany. He never said his father had fought at Verdun, even though merely as a doctor. He did tell his mother was French, originating from Longwy, and that indeed made the men look up a little, though just a little.

The Armistice between France and triumphant Germany had been signed on 22 June of 1940 at Compiègne. Anton was then still a prisoner in the camp of Argelès. His hopes on being released were quickly stamped into the earth. Nothing changed for him.

In the Vichy Government, all power was in the hands of Maréchal Pétain. His ministers were for Justice Raphaël Alibert, for the Interior the already mentioned Adrien Marquet, and for War Louis Colson. In September, this would change. Adrien Marquet was replaced by Marcel Peyrouton, and War was to be managed by the General Charles Huntziger.

Anton didn't know that in August, the month he used most to bring forward his protests against his detainment, the French Minister of the Interior was still Adrien Marquet. Marquet had ordained that prisoners of the detainment camps could be set free by the *Préfets* without his express permission. The only condition was that the foreigners in the camps had the right papers and the means to return to their country. Anton had been able to hold on to his Luxemburg passport designating him as fatherland-less, though not to his permit to work and stay in Luxemburg, not to his papers allowing him to study in Gembloux, Belgium. Those papers were still in his room in Gembloux! The permission to leave the camps could be given by the *Préfets* of the region, and the persons thus fired had to be accompanied under guard to the place where they could leave the territory of Vichy. Anton had the basic identity paper, but he had no money anymore, so no means to pay for travel, even if that was only to the nearest border in France between the occupied and the non-occupied territories. However many details Anton added concerning his arrest, he had no means and was only half believed, if not at all. Anton even demanded to speak to the services of the *Préfet*, but that was laughed at, too. No army captain would disturb a French *Préfet* for such a matter of no importance! His case and demand, yes, would be sent to the *Préfet*, but only as a proposal on paper, in a file holding his declarations. The camp leaders remained unconvinced by his story and wanted the less possible to be disturbed.



Anton heard that the Armistice of Compiègne held an Article 19, which said all German prisoners of war and all civil German prisoners, included these who had been arrested or had been convicted for acts of collaboration on behalf of the German *Reich*, had without delay to be handed over to the German authorities. Anton had heard of this clause, but he avoided appealing to it, as he did not want to be handed over to the German authorities with his passport of being a fatherland-less man, an apatriote. He wanted absolutely to stay out of the hands of the German troops. Anton also heard that the Belgian Commission for the Prisoners of War had to hear from the German occupying powers, that the Belgian Government did not exist anymore and therefore had no right whatever to decide on anything about the prisoners in France. Germany, of course, had demanded the liberation of all Germans or Belgians arrested for political reasons, in France. These men had to be delivered to the German authorities in France. Anton refused to appeal to these regulations to be able to leave the camp of Argelès, but with all his might he explained his case. Had he been a real collaborator of the German occupiers, he would have been released much earlier already! Was there no absurdity in this situation? He demanded to be released immediately from Argelès. His appeals, given several times, finally did bring the camp leaders to think and some action, although he knew nothing of it, and despaired.

Anton did not want to stay any longer in the concentration camp of Argelès. He was but a student! He pleaded his courses would begin anew in September. He had examinations to pass. He cried out he really didn't understand what he was doing here, in Argelès. The camp was already being emptied. In the end, neither did the camp leader understand anymore well why the youth had been sent to the south of France! Anton had reached the highest point of despair. He had to act! He feared much falling sick in the camp in the coming autumn and winter. He thought in earnest about escaping from the camp. He was sure he could evade by creeping at night to under the barbed wire. He was sure, after many observations, he knew a few places where the barbed wires could be pushed upwards, so that he could wriggle his body on the ground under the wires. Sure, there were lights on most parts of the fence, but there were also parts lying more in the shadows. In all secret, he gathered as many lumps as he could find to protect his hands and back and legs to wriggle himself at a certain place out under the wires. He would have to escape with nothing, no money, no food, no protection whatsoever!

Before he could come to such a desperate move, the camp leader called Anton in. He gave Anton a handwritten paper, yet with the seals and printed headings of the Argelès camp, telling the man called Anton Vincius, could return to Gembloux, Belgium. The letter asked for the cooperation of the French railways to allow the young man to return home. The paper was a sort of safe-conduct over the French territory. It was maybe not a true administrative paper, but it was accompanied by a letter signed by the *Préfet* who had responsibility of the Argelès camp, stating indeed Anton could return home. Anton understood the camp leader had done what he could. The paper mentioned France, not specifically the Vichy Government, but the seals were genuine. The camp leader had finally concluded Anton was totally harmless to any army, and therefore could be released. The man had visibly been convinced the boy would return to his parents and to his studies in Belgium. Anton had never emphasized his parents lived in Luxemburg. Most precious was, he concluded, the appeal given by the camp leader to the French Railways to allow him to travel by train through

France, for nothing. He had no money anymore, certainly no French or German coins to buy anything whatsoever.

‘I can give you no money,’ the camp leader told him smiling, ‘but I’m sure you will be able to find something to eat on the way. The travel should be fairly quick. Take the largest railway stations, not the smaller ones. Go to Perpignan, Toulouse, Bordeaux, Paris, Reims. Stay out of the hands of the Germans. Don’t travel by night. Travel by day, on trains most full. On those, there are less patrols. Less patrols, less trouble! The rest should be fairly easy. I can send you in a truck to Perpignan. Our trucks ride to Perpignan regularly, nothing special about it. From Perpignan on, you’ll be on your own. I wish you good luck!’

The camp leader smiled again. He said, ‘I don’t suppose there is much you have to take from here. A truck waits for you. It will leave in an hour. Our cooks have filled a sack with bread cut to slices, sausages, fruit, a little butter, a bottle of milk, cakes. Water you can find in any railway station. If necessary, beg. Don’t drink water that is spoiled.’

And so, Anton Vincius took his backpack in his barrack, said no word to anybody, and got a ride from the camp of Argelès to Perpignan. The driver brought him to the railway station and wished him luck too. A train was ready to move from Perpignan to Toulouse.

At Toulouse, Anton jumped on a train straight to Bordeaux. There were controls by French policemen on the way. Anton showed them his papers. The guards snorted, but didn’t bother. They gave him back his papers and proceeded on. He sat in a third class wagon, bothered nobody, and they let him.

In Bordeaux, at which town he arrived late in the afternoon, he looked for a train to Paris. He noticed a late evening train, but he discarded this one rapidly. He waited for the first train in the morning. On that train, guards asked to check his papers several times. His papers from Argelès saved him further comments each time.

Anton arrived at Paris and had to walk through the city on foot to the Gare du Nord, the North Station. He had saved some food, not much, for the next, final stretches of his journey. In the station, which was much frequented even in the early night, he saw a few people standing together at a stand where a few men and women were distributing food to the poor. He saw no money was asked. The men and women at the stand, just two this late, were proposing charity to the poorer travellers, or so he thought. Anton hadn’t eaten something warm for two days. He approached the group, stood in the queue, and risked being interrogated. He was too eager to have something else to eat than his bread and butter and rest of milk. No policemen were in view, neither French nor German. When he arrived at the stand, the elderly man who was ladling out soup and stew, looked at him suspiciously. Anton stood in rags, young and with eager eyes.

The man asked, ‘and you, young man, are you a Jew too?’

Anton hesitated. He saw only then most of the people in the queue indeed could look like Jews.

He answered, ‘I am half jewish, sir!’

‘Aha, for you then, half a portion,’ the man joked, and he filled Anton’s plate indeed only half as much as the other men before him in the line had gotten.

The entire queue behind Anton burst out in laughter, and Anton had to do with what he received. Nevertheless, he was thankful. He had a little soup and some stew. He ate that,

standing aside, against a pillar, hiding himself as much as possible from passers-by. It was not much food, but it tasted deliciously. Many eyes followed him. Anton was a polite young man. He brought back his iron plate and cutlery. Several female heads turned to him, with pity, and also because he was now a handsome young man, despite his poor clothing.

Anton walked back to the part of the station where international trains took off. He sought an international train that passed by Namur. He found none. One train, soon, was bound to Brussels, with a stop at the Belgian town of Mons. He remained in doubt a few seconds. Such trains, which rolled over the border with Belgium, could be dangerous! There might be increased German controls on those trains. He was tired, weak and desperate, however. He did find a train for Brussels with stop at Mons in Belgium. He ran to that quay, where the train departed. He ran and had to jump on board. The train took off. Anton had lost only two hours in Paris! Two controls before the train reached the Belgian border made him tense and each time quite afraid. One control was by French police, who obviously wanted to believe his French letter. The train guard looked to the following traveller. Twice, German patrols passed and looked at his papers. Anton had to translate parts and explained. He explained he was studying in Belgium when he had been brought to France by mistake. He told his identity papers had been stolen from under him, earlier on. Twice, the soldiers looked sharply at him, into innocent eyes. He had to explain the stupid error the Belgian authorities had made in sending him, a German boy of sixteen, to France. The German guards too seemed to believe his story. He exaggerated his Berlin accent. Twice, the German patrols gave him back the Argelès papers, maybe glad to have heard some genuine German, and let him.

Anton thus arrived at Mons. He got off the train there. He didn't want to ride on to Brussels. He considered that too dangerous. He found a train to Liège, over Namur. The train took off. Between Mons and Charleroi, another control passed the once more sleeping boy Anton. It was evening, darkness had fallen. Anton presented his papers. There, his luck ran out!

The guards did not really believe his story. Anton gave as arguments they could see he was neither a soldier, nor a spy of sorts. He explained he came from very far. The two controllers had too few brains to understand. They did not want him to continue on this train. He would have to stay on until Charleroi. There, he would be handed over to the police, who could decide over what to do with him. The men kept his papers. Anton could have cried out what fools the men were, but he refused to give himself over to anger, so close to where he wanted to go. The guards told him they would get him off the train at Charleroi.

The guards did not have much time, though. The train had to roll on! They would have to hand him over to the Belgian police quickly, or to any German authorities in the Charleroi station. So late in the evening? Anton decided to remain polite and be patient.

At Charleroi, the two guards came back to Anton before the train stopped. The two guards stood on the quay. One man held Anton at the shoulder, his papers in hand, while the other went to call a Belgian policeman, if one could be found. The men had an issue, there. The man who held him had also to check on the passengers who got off the train and on others getting on the train. His attention was not entirely on Anton. This was the moment Anton chose to act. In one swift gesture, he drew his papers out of the man's hand, and in the same movement, he tore himself loose and ran. He ran down the stairs, into the station building.

The guard wanted to follow him, but that man had responsibilities for the train and the passengers. He could not just leave the quay, with the train doors all open and unguarded. After two, three steps, he had to stop. He cried the soul out of him, and then whistled, but Anton was already far. Anton first ran to another quay, walked slowly on there, and then walked to the stairs there, farther away from where the guard still stood. Anton guessed the other guard was busy looking for assistance. He went down stairs farther on, looked around, avoided everybody from the train from Mons, and fled through the open doors of the station of Charleroi. There, on the street, he also did not hesitate. He ran on in the contrary direction from where his train had come, hoping he was not wrong in believing the roads to Gembloux would start from that direction.

Anton ran on. He knew he had to find the direction of Fleurus, a suburb of Charleroi, which led directly to Gembloux. Gembloux would be at about 20 to 30 kilometres from Charleroi station. He could walk for the hours it needed to get to Gembloux, for trains would now be too risky for him. How long would he have to walk? After his run he felt very tired. He would not make more than 3 or 5 kilometres on foot, about a walk of 4 to 6 hours at most, he reckoned. But arrive he would! Not far from the Charleroi station, along the road he walked, he came to a crossroads and noticed a plate indicating the directions of Namur and Fleurus. Fleurus was where he had to go to. He took that road.

Anton was lucky. He had found the correct road, the one leading north from Charleroi. He had now a direct road to Gembloux. It was a national road, very easy to follow. Nevertheless, he missed the right road twice, had to backtrack and get on the right way. He walked for hours on this final stretch, but he recognised the names of the villages near Gembloux. He could not miss anymore. That certainty made him suddenly very tired. He found a small wood along the road, crept into it and stretched out on the ground behind a thick tree-trunk. He was so tired by then, he fell asleep almost immediately, despite the cold of the night. He woke from the biting cold in the early morning. He found little protection in the small wood he had seen in the light of the silvery moon. He felt lucky that it didn't rain. He drank his last water, threw away the empty sack that had accompanied him from Argelès, stood, and walked on in the first shimmers of the new day. He expected any moment to be stopped by a police car, but nothing of the sort happened. It must have been six or seven o'clock in the morning when he recognised the first houses of Gembloux. By then he was not really walking anymore, merely stumbling on, but he was sure to be home soon. He knew there was blood in his shoes, but he went on, filled and strengthened by hope. That gave him the last courage to walk on.

Anton finally arrived in the very centre of Gembloux. He went to the house of the Dumont Family, the grocery shop. He wasn't sure he still had a room there, as he had been away for about 4 months, and he wasn't sure his parents had continued to pay for his room. He rang the bell of the house in which was his room. The door opened. Marie-Ange stood in the opening. She screamed into the corridor, and flew into his arms.

The Dumont family didn't allow Anton to his room to sleep and rest, though he asked for that. No, his parents hadn't continued paying for his room, but the room was still free. Marie-Ange shouted it didn't matter the room had not been paid for. She wanted the room back for Anton! But Anton stank, and lice crawled all over his body. His feet had to be cared for.

Marie-Ange's mother and grandmother therefore brought a zinc bath to Anton's room. They heated water. They pushed Anton naked into the tub and scrubbed him clean. They washed his hair. The water had to be changed three times, for each time still, insects floated in the tub. Only when he was totally clean of bugs, did they wash him again and allowed him into his bed. They had not yet let that room to another student, though they had the intention to do so, as Anton hadn't returned. Anton slept the rest of the day, naked in his bed. In the evening, he woke from ravening hunger. He stood up, dressed in clean clothes that lay still in his cupboard, and descended the stairways to go downstairs and beg for food.

Anton Vincius got his food. Much food. He talked then, Marie-Ange at his side. She had taken possession of him and held his arm even while he ate. The Dumont Family told him he could stay in his room and take up his studies again. He would have to inscribe soon for the courses. Anton stayed in Gembloux. He contacted his parents and received the visit of his parents and his brother. He could continue his studies in Gembloux. In the weeks thereafter, no policemen came to bother him. He graduated from his year and in the following years received his diploma of agricultural engineer. During the entire war, he stayed at Gembloux.

After the war, Anton Vincius would marry Marie-Ange Dumont and he stayed living with her near Gembloux. He got a well-paid job near this town. He had two daughters by her, and built himself a house, years later. He also easily received his full Belgian citizenship after the war. Thus, part of the Vincius Family began their Belgian Odyssey. Forgotten was Germany, Pommerania and Prussia, Poland and Lithuania for this branch! Western Europe had entirely changed of constellation of lands and power in the first months of the war.

### The Battle for England, the War in the Air

After the defeat of the French Armies, of Belgium and the Netherlands, of Denmark and Norway, after the victories in Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland, nothing, no other army of Europe seemed capable of stopping the German Armies. The British Expeditionary Forces had to flee ignominiously over the Channel, in little hour, from Dunkirk. The armies of all these countries had suffered severe losses in material and equipment. The German Army had all the European harbours of the Atlantic Ocean in its possession, with the exception of those of Spain and Portugal. The German submarines could now use these ports to attack and destroy the merchant fleet of Great Britain, as well as the British Military Home Fleet. Moreover, the German aeroplanes, the bombers of the *Reich* and its fighter airplanes, could reach practically any airport and harbour of the English coasts below Scotland. What was left to protect Great Britain was its fleet and its air force. A stretch of water of 30 kilometres only at the shortest distance from the French coasts separated the Swastika-wielding armies from England. The British had their colonial empire, the British Commonwealth. So, they had a constant need to guard and fight over vast distances. Hence, their emphasis on air and naval power. It would be exactly these military strong forces the Germans now had to defeat. Great Britain, on the other hand, wanted to avoid a grinding war on land. The British and their Army, Navy and Air Force, were crucial to the Allied forces. Great Britain was now practically alone in the war against Germany. The United States of America did not seem to

have much affinity with European politics. For the first months of the war, Hitler's intentions towards Great Britain vacillated between aggression and seeking reconciliation. Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop was all in favour of a German invasion of Great Britain.

The Duke and Duchess of Windsor, the former King Edward VIII, were residing in Portugal at the time. They avoided the German plot of having them being kidnapped by the Germans, by acceding to Churchill's suggestion that the duke should go to the Bahamas as Governor-General.

Hitler should not dream too far! In the summer of 1940, the German Navy's Admiral Raeder had only 1 heavy and 2 light cruisers with 4 destroyers under his command. This was quite inadequate for an invasion of England!

On 3 July, British ships moreover attacked the French naval base of Mers-el-Kébir near Oran, damaging a number of warships and killing 1,250 French sailors in order to stop the French Navy falling into German hands. Great Britain also, was still more powerful on the seas. The German Navy, the *Kriegsmarine*, did not possess one aircraft carrier! The Allies had 7 aircraft carriers, Germany none. The Allies had 22 heavy cruisers, Germany only 2, and Britain brought 61 light cruisers on the seas, for the Germans but 6. For destroyers and torpedoboats, the Allies had 255, Germany but 34. The *Kriegsmarine* did have 50 submarines on the ready. On 3 September 1940, the US President Franklin Roosevelt leased 50 destroyers more to the British Navy. How then to attack a fortress island?

On 14 July, Hitler offered peace to Great Britain in the *Reichstag*. Churchill and his Government immediately rejected the offer. Hitler then ordered preparations to be made for the invasion of Britain. First, Great Britain's aerial defences, the Royal Air Force, had to be destroyed.

On 1 August, Hitler gave the order for the launching of air strikes against Britain. German bombing raids had already started on 5 and 6 June 1940. Heavier strikes began as from 10 July, and became very intense after 18 August 1940. The main thrust of the attacks was directed against British air fields. Early September, heavy bombing raids on England started. On 7 September, 350 German bombers attacked the London docks in a daylight raid, causing massive damage. From that 7 September to 5 October 1940, the *Luftwaffe* launched no less than 35 large-scale air raids, of which 18 of them over London. But in the period of from 7 to 15 September 1940, 298 German aircraft had been shot down, for only 120 British ones. In one of those raids, on 15 September, 200 German bombers attacked London. 158 bombers reached the city, when 300 Hurricanes and Spitfires engaged them. The British shot down 35 bombers and 26 fighters, damaging many more.

The *Luftwaffe* could throw in the battle far more airplanes than the Royal Air Force. On the eve of the German attacks in the air, the British had about 300 fewer fighter aircraft than the Germans. The German Field-Marshal Kesselring had as aim, as head of the German air forces, though under Field-Marshal Göring, the second man in the Reich, to bring Great Britain to its knees and force it, like France, to ask for an armistice.

Another German Air Force Commander was Field Marshal Hugo Sperrle, the former leader of the Condor Legion in Spain. In record time, the British brought 1,380 fighter pilots in a state of operational readiness against 870 German pilots. The British fighter planes, Hurricanes and Spitfires, two of the most advanced and fast fighter planes in the world, would oppose the German Messerschmits. By 1 October 1940, 253 air raids had happened

over Great Britain with bombers and fighters flying at high altitudes. About 146 Spitfires and Hurricanes were lost. But the Germans lost 365 aircraft. For example, in November still, the *Luftwaffe* raided Coventry with 450 bombers. The Germans destroyed the city centre and also the proud, beautiful medieval cathedral. 380 civilians were killed and 865 people were injured. British Intelligence had failed to anticipate the raid.

The Battle for Britain lasted from about 10 July to 10 October of 1940. Actually, it began in June 1940 and lasted well into June 1941. From May 1941 on, the German raids were scaled down, as 600 German bombers had been shot out of the skies. At the end, Germany suffered unsustainable losses. The invasion of the Soviet Union by the Germans ended further efforts to bomb Great Britain into submission. Germany lost 1,600 aircraft and about 3,000 pilots and crews over Britain, on top of the 1,400 airplanes lost in the Battle for France. It had to start *Operation Barbarossa*, the invasion of the Soviet Union, with 200 fewer bombers than it had possessed at the beginning of the May 1940 war over France. By late 1940, the Germans were losing more airplanes per month than the British, and building fewer new ones.

The Junker Ju88 airplanes formed the mainstay of the German bomber force. They were slow, and too small to carry a really effective payload to destroy large cities. They lacked manoeuvrability and defensive capacity. The Heinkel 111 and the Dornier 17 bombers were relatively small, and antiquated in many respects. The Germans had neglected building heavy bombers! So, the German bomber force was simply inadequate to achieve its task. Their losses were unsustainable. The German bombers and dive-bombers, the Junkers 87, the Junkers 88, the Heinkels 111, the Dorniers 215 and the Dorniers 17, the excellent Junkers 88 with 2 engines, could also not defend themselves well enough. They had only 3 machineguns and armoury not sufficiently thick against the 8 machine guns and the guns of the British fighter airplanes. They also had no impressive bomb loads!

The Royal Air Force, the RAF, had at its head Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding, a true tactical genius of the war in the air. He sent his Spitfire fighters against the German fighter planes, and his slower Hurricanes against the German bombers. He held this tactic steady on during the Battle for Britain. The German airplanes never arrived in time to catch the British fighters on the ground, as the British had introduced radar, and they intercepted the German radio messages to get early warning of the German raids. They then simply ordered their fighter planes to wait for the enemy. They attacked the German bombers and fighters, and shot down large numbers of the proud *Luftwaffe*.

The Messerschmitt Me109 fighters were better than the British airplanes at over 6 km height, but they had to protect the German bombers at lower altitudes, where the Spitfires and the Hurricanes were more manoeuvrable. This was also true for the Me110, a heavier fighter.

Throughout the air battle, Great Britain exceeded aircraft production by a 2 to 1 margin of 2,354 airplanes to 975 new planes built by Germany. In the German bombing, 44,652 British subjects were killed and 52,370 wounded. The *Luftwaffe* lost over 900 airplanes, including at least 443 fighters, all shot down between 8 and 31 August of 1940. The British lost about the same number of airplanes, shot down from 6 August to 2 September 1940.

This was yet less than 10% of the Axis casualties in the later Stalingrad campaign alone. During *Operation Barbarossa*, the invasion of the Soviet Union by the Germans, more than 50,000 civilians died from German bombers over Leningrad (Saint Petersburg) and Moscow.

The German Air Ministry had probably the largest office building in Europe. It had an ultra-modern building in Berlin, occupying an entire block of the Wilhelm Strasse, around the corner from the Gestapo headquarters in the Prinz Albrecht Strasse. The Head of the Air Ministry was Hermann Göring.

By 6 September 1940, 738 Hurricanes and Spitfires were still operational. By early September, the British had more than twice as many pilots ready to fly than the *Luftwaffe*. German aircraft production lagged behind schemes. By the second half of 1940, the British were producing twice as many fighters as the Germans.

The Nazi rearmament of Germany, mainly effectuated between 1934 and 1939, however, had nearly bankrupted the *Third Reich*. And it had not given the Nazis parity in heavy bombers and battleships with its enemies, mainly Great Britain.

In sheer numbers, and on paper, the German fighters too remained inferior to the British planes such as the Spitfire. These last were faster, better armed and flown by pilots more experienced and better trained for duels in the air. The Spitfires and the Hurricanes outclassed the Messerschmits 109 and 111. Thanks to a new invention, RADAR, for radio detection and ranging, a system for detecting the direction, range and presence of the airplanes by sending out pulses of high frequency electromagnetic waves, which the airplanes reflected, the RAF could not be surprised anymore by air attacks, not by day and not by night! The British Fighter Command was always able in the next months to secure its dominance in the skies. In the first phase of the war in the air, the *Luftwaffe* lost about 70 airplanes in the one day only of the 8<sup>th</sup> of August! The British Air Force had learned quickly how to answer the German attacks of bombers and fighters. The Commander-in-Chief of the Fighter Command was Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of July 1940, Hitler held a speech in which he appealed to the common sense of Great Britain to accept the German victory on the mainland. The aim of the German Nazis remained the revision of the Treaty of Versailles, he claimed. Hitler proposed a Peace treaty, based on the acceptance of the German victory. The answer to the proposal was given in a speech of Lord Halifax on the London radio, stating Great Britain would fight to the end. The *Third Reich* thus had to continue the war in western Europe. New Europe under Nazi dominance would not be realised so soon.

The first objective of the Battle of Britain for the German air attacks therefore was to annihilate the Royal Air Force on the ground, on its airbases. In the first wave of German attacks, the Nazis lost 487 airplanes in 6 days. Two days later, they lost 153 bombers more, of which 128 were downed by the British fighters, and 25 by anti-air canons. The RAF lost only 22 airplanes, and only 10 pilots had been killed. In one week longer, until the 5<sup>th</sup> of September, the German *Luftwaffe* still bombed the south of England. The *Führer* had promised his people to be in London on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August. The date had to be delayed!



As of the 7<sup>th</sup> of September, the Germans began to apply tactics of terror bombing on the civilians of the English cities. The German forces would continue their *Blitzkrieg* with their *Luftwaffe*. The English called this period of constant air attacks therefore simply the *Blitz*.

The *Blitz* was a new method of creating mass terror, almost entirely aimed at the civil population. Its main aim was to force Great Britain to seek peace and in doing so, to surrender. The *Blitz* started as of the 7<sup>th</sup> of September 1940. Of course, the *Blitz* enthralled the depressed German people with its early successes. Germany steamrolled its opponents for some time, the time of surprise.

Waves after waves of bombers accompanied by fighter airplanes flew over England in packs. About 350 German bombers passed the Channel, flew over the estuary of the Thames and bombed the docks of London. In such one raid alone, the Germans lost 103 airplanes. Raids happened the next days too. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of September, the *Luftwaffe* lost 94 airplanes. On the 15<sup>th</sup>, the Germans returned over England with 500 bomber and fighters, and in the afternoon a similar attack happened. The *Luftwaffe* lost 185 airplanes in that day, whereas the Royal Air Force lost only 25 fighter planes and 11 pilots. At such German losses, longer periods had to be introduced between German raids! Twelve days later, the Germans tried a night attack by 800 bombers. The British pilots downed over 130 of these bombers. Later attacks by the air to reduce the British fighter squadrons failed.

By the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 1940, after 2 months of air attacks, the *Luftwaffe* lost the Battle for England in the air. The British Royal Air Force had finally succeeded in exhausting the *Luftwaffe*!

Sparse raids by the *Luftwaffe* did continue until the end of spring 1941. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of November, the *Luftwaffe* sent an air raid to Coventry. The German planes destroyed the centre of the city and the proud, ancient Gothic cathedral in a ball of fire. The raid caused over a thousand people of the civil population of Coventry to die. After this raid, the Germans invented the verb *coventrisieren* for such devastating attacks on British towns. From the 21<sup>st</sup> to the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December, two particular violent air raids still thundered over Liverpool and Manchester. German bombers fell from the skies. Bombs still fell on London in the night of the 29<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> of December, causing multiple fires. Other such bombings happened on from 8 to 9 March, from 16 to 17 April 1941 and from 10 to 11 May 1941. Thanks to radar, each time, swarms of British fighters waited upon them and shot many of the enemy airplanes from the skies. The raids became sparser, then, and all of a sudden stopped.

These were some of the last raids. They had become too expensive for the Germans. The number of people killed in such raids were 7,000 in September and over 10,000 people heavily wounded. In November, over 5,000 civilians were killed, about 8,000 wounded. In February 1941, however, 860 civilians were killed and over 2,000 wounded. The numbers for April were 6,500 people killed and 5,000 wounded. From the 8<sup>th</sup> of August 1940 until the 31<sup>st</sup> of October, the German *Luftwaffe* lost about 2400 airplanes, over England or over the Channel.

During the 6 months of the *Blitz* over Great Britain, the *Luftwaffe*, the best strategic bombing force in the world from late 1939 to mid-1940 dropped 30,000 tons of bombs on the British Islands. Later, in the half year from June to November 1940, Allied bombers would already drop 20 times that tonnage of destruction on Germany!

Over the first period, the RAF lost about 730 fighters and 735 pilots killed. Among the Allied fighter pilots died many Polish pilots, and also French, Dutch and Belgian pilots, Czech pilots, Norwegian and Danish pilots, all flying for the RAF. Each time the German bombers arrived over the Channel, the British Hurricanes and Spitfires were waiting for them. The RAF saved Great Britain in the end. Britain's Prime Minister Winston Churchill could later ascertain, 'never in the field of human conflict has so much been owed to so few!'

The consequences of the early *Blitzkrieg* were often vastly exaggerated by the German Nazi leaders. The Germans had not really shown military superiority in the air, or that only for a very short time. The *Luftwaffe* was led by a group of energetic leaders, such as Hermann Göring, Erhard Milch and Ernst Udet, but how stable and intelligent leaders were they? The Messerschmitt Bf109 was not markedly a better fighter plane than the British Supermarine Spitfire or even the Hurricane.

In September 1940, Hitler and Franco, the Spanish Caudillo, met. No concrete results came of the meeting. Hitler also met Pétain. This meeting too ended without any side having promised anything important. There were meetings with Italian leaders. Having started as Hitler's example, Mussolini was beginning to become Hitler's follower.

The French tanks Char B and Somua S35 were better armed and had better armour than the Germans' Mark I, Mark II and Mark III counterparts. Only the German Mark IV tanks were comparable to the more modern French tanks. Czechoslovakia could deliver fine Skoda tanks, built to French designs! The Lightning-fast attacks of the *Luftwaffe* never proved long-term Germany's sustained capability to dominate over the longer term. The war would be long, and a war of attrition and exhaustion would be fought! Great Britain did not give up, contrary to Hitler's expectations. Was that also not how Germany had lost the First World War? Albion could be tenacious. The German *Blitzkrieg* never crossed the North Sea Channel.

Churchill's main belief, beyond the fight for freedom and democracy, was that Britain had to preserve the greatness of the British Empire. The meaning of the war was to prepare the way for a better future, a belief also widespread and driving the British armed forces. In November of 1942, during the war, the Liberal William Beveridge wrote the framework for a system of social security that would offer all British citizens forms of state welfare from the cradle to the grave. Sir Oswald Mosley, the leader of the Fascists in Great Britain, together with other prominent Fascists, were interned in England.

Ireland was known until 1937 as the Irish Free State. It remained neutral in the war, just as Switzerland, Sweden, Spain and Portugal. Turkey also remained neutral in the beginning, but declared war on Germany on 23 February of 1945. Although Ireland remained neutral, 42,000 Irish citizens volunteered to serve in the war with Great Britain and 200,000 Irishmen crossed the Irish Sea to work for the British war economy.

## The War in Eastern Europe

In Rumania, the coup of General Antonescu and the abdication of King Carol had allowed the establishment of a new order. A Rumanian delegation, presided by the President of the Council, the Prime Minister Gigurtu, travelled to Rome, travelled to Rome and Berlin to discuss the new situation in Europe. Gigurtu was taken to Berchtesgaden to meet the Führer. Dr. Tisso, the President of the Slovak State followed him a few days later. Tisso came, accompanied by Count Telecki, the Slovak President of the Council of Ministers. Hitler equally received Count Csaky, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, accompanied by the President of the Council of Ministers of his Slovak country. Von Ribbentrop for Germany and Count Ciano for the Italian Government, took part in this meeting. The subjects discussed were on how Germany, Hungary, Italy and Rumania, were ready to and could collaborate in the organisation of the new order. Of course, Hitler, in view of the victories of the German Army, could dictate his visions of the new world on the leaders of these countries. Those visions were of a long-lasting peace under Hitlerian, German domination.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1940, von Ribbentrop and Ciano agreed in Vienna on a rectification of the Yugoslavian frontier, to the profit of Hungary. Hungary received Transylvania, which had become Rumanian after the war of 1914-1918. And on the 7<sup>th</sup> September of 1940, the Treaty of Craiova handed over the Dobrudja of Rumania to Bulgaria. Another agreement went about Bessarabia. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1940, the Soviet Union sent to the Rumanian Government a note whereby Moscow demanded Bessarabia and also eastern and northern Bukovina. After negotiations, the 2<sup>nd</sup> July, the demand was accepted. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August, was thus created the Federated Republic of Moldavia, which united Bessarabia and Moldavia in one Soviet State.

After further negotiations between Germany, Bulgaria, Hungary, Rumania, Slovakia, Italy and the Soviet Union, these countries concluded on the 29<sup>th</sup> of September of 1940 in a conference to replace former European and international Danube commissions by a new Danubian Conference. The dissolution of the former commissions was made public on the 25<sup>th</sup> of October 1940. Thus, the Treaty of Versailles and its annexed treaties could be declared obsolete. They had ceased to exist for the Fascist countries.

In the meantime, the Soviet Union had already sent an ultimatum to Lithuania, demanding the authorisation for Soviet troops to pass the Lithuanian territory. The formation of a new government accompanied the demand. This was realised on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June of 1940. Lithuania entered the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics, the USSR, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August 1940. Latvia did the same on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August, Estonia on the 6<sup>th</sup>. This could have been received with some worries in Germany, as the Soviet armed forces could now be posted quite closer to the German frontier. These troops could have threatened Eastern Prussia. Moreover, the 3 nations, now Soviet Republics, held a German population of some importance! The movements of these countries had, however, already been foreseen in the secret clauses of the German-Russian non-aggression pact of the 23<sup>rd</sup> August of 1939. It was the payment offered by Hitler for the non-intervention of Soviet troops during the German invasion of Poland.

In July 1940, Rumania left the Organisation of the United Nations. On the 23<sup>th</sup> of September, Rumania entered the *Tripartite Pact* concluded between Germany, Italy and Japan. On the 28<sup>th</sup>, Rumania had left the *Balkan Entente*. Hungary on the 23<sup>th</sup> of November, Slovakia on the 24<sup>th</sup> of November, adhered to the *Tripartite Pact*. Austria and Czechia were already practically incorporated in the *Third Reich*. The year 1940 had brought the total victory in western Europe for Germany, except for with Great Britain. But that country stood now alone and isolated on its island.

### *The military Air Power of the Allies and of the Axis Forces*

The Axis and the Allies produced 800,000 transport and fighter air planes. The Allies built 3 times more airplanes than the Axis troops. In all, about 300,000 airplanes were lost in combats or in accidents. About 350,000 pilots and crews died. Nearly 2 million European and Asian civilians perished from strategic bombing raids, half of them women and children. The two deadliest technological breakthroughs of the war were napalm and atomic bombs, both air weapons. The payload in bombs, the range and spread of fighters and bombers tripled between 1935 and 1940 alone.

A marked change in air power was the advent of the American B29 Superfortress. It came late in 1944, at the last years of the war. It flew at 5.5 miles above the earth, so almost immune from artillery fire and also flying higher than most enemy fighters could. The main issue was that at such heights, bombing accuracy radically diminished, and also the payload capacity, the speed, and human and mechanical performance. By the end of the war, aircraft carriers, more than battleships, were recognised as the Navy's most lethal attack means.

At the invasion of Poland, Germany attacked with only Mark I and Mark II tanks, light-weight armoured vehicles. But they enjoyed close air support and that combination proved deadly. By September 1939, Germany had the best organised and trained strategic bombing force. They had only 2-engine bombers, escorted by fighter planes. The *Luftwaffe* never obtained heavy bombers similar to the American B17 and later the B24 or the Avro-Lancaster British heavy bombers. The German failure to master heavy bomber production was a tactical as well as a technological error. The Germans also had the flawed idea that the diving capabilities of their medium bombers could substitute for high-altitude strategic bombing. Later, in Germany, the huge investment as of 1943 for jet engines and the *Vergeltungswaffe*, the V1 cruise missile and the V2 ballistic missile, made it almost impossible to adequately fund a new heavy bomber program. The Germans built lighter and smaller airplanes. At the end of the war, these were often hastily and more shoddily manufactured under heavy Allied bombing. Germany had no aircraft carriers, for extremely expensive to build. Nevertheless, during the invasion of the Netherlands, Belgium, and France, Germany gained air superiority within days to effectively support the German armoured divisions.

During the war in France, French fighter planes outfought the *Luftwaffe* in almost all categories of fighter performance, though largely because the German airplanes were absorbed with ground support of the advancing Army. The French airplanes were The Curtis P36 Hawk, the Dewoitine D520, and British Hurricanes. The *Luftwaffe* sent its planes up far

more frequently per day, using them in ground support more effectively than the French. France's defeat was more due to faulty command, sloppy organisation, and low morale of the troops.

On 14 May 1940, The German Air Force bombed Rotterdam with 110 Heinkel 2-engine bombers. The city was in flames, and 1,000 Dutch citizens were killed. Nevertheless, the Germans lost 1,400 aircraft to French and British fighters in the air and to anti-aircraft guns on the ground.

The defence of Great Britain against German bombing got organised. Over the city of London hung balloons. German planes were taken in searchlights and from the ground shot down with sophisticated anti-air guns.

As of mid-1941, the British Air Marshal Arthur Harris was in command of the British bombing program on Germany. The British could begin bombing Germany in earnest in early 1942, with total dominance, though then almost exclusively at night.

During a British raid on Köln in May 30 to 31 of 1942, about 100,000 civilians fled the city. The British losses amounted to somewhat over 40 bombers. In early 1943, the British could use superb 4-engine Lancaster bombers. In March 1943 took place a raid on Essen by 442 British bombers. British losses were small, and the industrial heart of Germany was destroyed. July 1943 saw *Operation Gomorrah*, a week-long bombardment with incendiary bombs on Hamburg. The raid was executed by night-time Lancaster bombers and by daytime American B17 planes. In all, 40,000 German civilians died and thousands more were displaced from a burnt-out city.

The use of the gargantuan B29 American bombers, the world's most sophisticated bomber, had not much evolved beyond British-style night time bombing. The B29 was specifically designed for high-altitude, daylight precision bombing. But by 1945, they had become huge incarnations of the British Lancasters, and were used as such over Germany. The Soviets kept ignoring the strategic use of massive bombing.

By mid-1943, the air war was going poorly for the Allies. Bomber losses climbed, whereas the German munitions production still continued. The Germans had organised their defence against air raids. They too had night fighter airplanes, sophisticated and powerful searchlights, Flak batteries, improved radar grids, and they transferred some fighter pilots from the Russian front to home, there flying on later models such as the Focke-Wulff 190 and the Messerschmitt Bf109.

On 17 August 1943, took place the costliest and most infamous long-range precision raid of the Royal Air Force on the Schweinfurt-Regensburg Messerschmitt Bf109 aircraft works. It disrupted half of the Messerschmitt production at both plants.

But in the *Black Week* of 9 to 14 October 1943, 148 B17 Allied bombers were shot down by the Germans over Schweinfurt. More than 600 American crewmen were killed or made prisoners. Allied losses on average during such bombings were 28 bombers lost on every incursion in Germany.

On 1 August of 1943 happened a disastrous air raid for the Allies. The raid *Operation Tidal Wave* was executed by B24 Liberator air planes based in Libya against the Rumanian oil fields and refineries of Ploesti. The Rumanians had put in place excellent anti-aircraft

defences. In all, 53 out of 178 B24 bombers were lost and 55 B24s got damaged. 660 crewmen were killed, missing, or made prisoners. Only 33 of the 178 bombers returned to base without damage.

Still, by the summer of 1944, The British and American pilots were clearly winning the war in the air. They sent then fewer bombers per raid to Germany, escorted by more fighter planes. The German fighter airplanes lost half their strength each month, actually nullifying their production of fighter planes. In the first 5 months of 1944, the Luftwaffe lost the equivalent of its entire strength in pilots<sup>8</sup> In the last 9 months of the war, the Allies enjoyed complete air supremacy over Germany. They destroyed about 60% of the largest German cities. The British and American air forces flew on Thunderbolts, Mustangs and Spitfires, equipped with drop tanks of extra fuel they could dump after use, to reach far-away objectives in Germany.

In the Mediterranean, the Axis Powers never obtained sustained air superiority, and never at all the total supremacy in the skies. Already by November 1942, the Allies performed their *Operation Torch* landings in Morocco and Algeria. By the spring of 1943, the Allies had 2,000 operational fighters and bombers in North Africa.

On 15 November of 1941, for Germany, Field Marshal Kesselring had been transferred from the Soviet Union to Italy with the air power of his *Luftflotte 2*. He re-established parity and even air superiority over Malta.

Targets in Southern Germany could be reached from out of Allied airfields in Africa and the Mediterranean. The Allies specifically bombed the Rumanian oilfields. In November 1943, 1,000 4-engine American bombers operated out of North Africa, and out of Sicily and Italy re-conquered by then. They operated the day and night bombing campaigns of the *Mediterranean Allied Air Forces* of MAAF. They helped bring about the demise of Axis power in North Africa and Italy. By May 1943, 230,000 German and Italian soldiers had surrendered, ending the war in North Africa. In 1944 and 1945, the MAAF completely controlled the skies over Italy. They could bring 5,000 strategic aircraft over Italy, obliging the German forces to travel by night exclusively. This also came as a surprise after the still limited use of airplanes in the First World War.

Over the war period of from 1940 to 1945, in Europe, 160,000 British and American bomber crews were killed, wounded or captured. The USA lost 40,000 dead airmen, and 6,000 destroyed bombers. The bombing would have led to the eventual collapse of Germany, had the war gone on beyond 1945.

At the start of the war, Great Britain could bring 6 to 7 aircraft carriers in operation, and it had 6 large fleet carriers under construction. Their aircraft helped damage the Italian fleet in the Mediterranean. The attacks on the Italian bases of 11-12 November 1940 at Taranto and at 28 March of 1941 at Cape Matapan were British naval victories. On 27 May 1941, British Swordfish biplane torpedo bombers sank the German battleship *Bismarck* and by end 1942, the Italian fleet had been made largely impotent in the war. The same happened to German surface ships in early 1943.

In general, *fleet carriers* were of from 18,000 to 35,000 tons of water displacement, and they could load 80 to 100 aircraft. *Light carriers* of from 10,000 to 15,000 tons took about 50 aircraft on board. The *Escort or Jeep carriers* had about 10,000 tons in water displacement and they carried 15 to 25 airplanes.

Carriers were the main ships in battles of naval air war. The main battles happened in the Pacific Ocean: the Battle of the Coral Sea, of Midway, the eastern Solomons, Santa Cruz, the Philippine Sea, Leyte Gulf, and more. Japan had 10 aircraft carriers when the war broke out, more than the British and Americans. The USA had only 4 carriers to begin the war in the Pacific: the USS Hornet, Enterprise, Lexington and the Saratoga. The Americans lost 11 fleet carrier in 4 years of war, but they sank 20 Japanese carriers in all. The newest USA Essex class carriers with 90 aircraft, 33 knots of speed and over 27,000 tons in water displacement, were superior to any other carrier in the world. The USA built over 150 light and escort carriers in the course of the war. They were also far more adept at repair and maintenance of their carriers.

USA aircraft in the seas were Hellcat fighter planes, updated Dauntless and Helldiver bombers, and Avenger torpedo planes. These were mostly superior to their Japanese counterparts. Japan's peak production year was 1944. In all, it produced over 28,000 military airplanes! In 1944, the USA sent 96,000 new airplanes over Europe and the Pacific Ocean! By the end of 1944, the US carrier fleet and their support bases alone had received 80,000 airplanes. This was more than Japan could produce for all of its military branches during the entire war. The USA, moreover, in 1941, occupied the first rank in oil production, whereas Japan was only 22<sup>nd</sup> in rank. By mid to late 1943, the USA had reached complete air superiority in the Pacific Ocean, and after 1942 already, not one US carrier was lost at sea. In both war theatres, Europe and the Pacific, the Allies had by mid-1944 largely neutralised all sources of Axis Germany-Italy-Japan air power, achieving air supremacy in the world.

The deadliest air weapon of the Second World War was the huge American Boeing B29 Superfortress. The first prototype of this bomber entered the war on 1 September 1942. It was an enormous bomber of 65,000 kg maximum loaded weight. Its wingspan was about 52.50 m, twice that of most German bombers. It had four engines for a top speed of over 580 km/h at a payload of 10 tons. Its action radius in round-trip was between about 4,000 km and 9,000 km. The B29 was built to fly above 9 km high, practically invulnerable to Flak guns and enemy aircraft. At the end of the war, the USA had lost about 400 of these planes, the majority due to accidents and mechanical failures. Its flight time was about 16 hours or even longer. Altogether, over 3,000 B29 crewmen were killed or went missing.

And yet, the Japanese industry remained largely untouched by serious air raids until early 1945. By late February 1945, Tokyo lived and worked still virtually undisturbed by serious air raids. The USA needed the B29 as an innovative, very long-range heavy bomber for the great distances in the Pacific Ocean. The B29 only entered service by May-June of 1944. The Soviet Union received 4 such B29 airplanes. They were re-engineered as the Tupolev Tu4, the Soviet Union's first successful long-range heavy bomber. These Tupolev bombers were built from 1947 to 1952, after World War II, and deployed by the Soviet Union as nuclear bombers well into the years 1960.

The US Army Chief of Staff was General George C. Marshal and the head of the Air Force in the Pacific General Curtis LeMay. LeMay used the B29s in an untypical way, to fly low to spare fuel, at night, with payloads of 10 tons or more of bombs. On 9-10 March of 1945, such planes bombed Tokyo with napalm bombs. It was the most destructive air raid and 24h period in military history, as more than 100,000 civilians died, with as many wounded or missing. About 16 square miles of the city were reduced to ashes. In the next 5 months, LeMay destroyed more than half of the centres of the 66 largest Japanese cities. It took the genius of LeMay to re-invent the B29s into crude low-level fire-bombers, merely exploiting its long range, load and speed. The B29s caused over 500,000 civilian deaths and the production of Japanese weapons and fuels came to a near standstill as a result. The Americans had to apply area bombing, as the weather over Japan and the jet stream made precision bombing far more difficult over Japan. In the summer of 1945, only 4 major Japanese cities remained largely undamaged: Kyoto, Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Sapporo.

Another invention of the war in the air were the German rockets, the V1 and the V2. The V1, the *Vergeltungswaffe I*, was a cruise missile. It could carry about 950 kg of explosives. Actually, it was a self-propelled flying bomb! Its speed was not high, subsonic, a mere 650 km/h with a range of about 250 km. But 20 V1 rockets carried 19,000 kg of high explosives. The V1 and the V2 could be built and deployed relatively cheaply, and they were a formidable terror weapon for the civilian population.

The main drawback of the V1 was their primitive guidance system. It was governed by a gyroscope, a manometer and odometer, roughly calibrated by considerations of distance, direction, fuel consumption and weight. Nevertheless, the V1 killed over 6,000 British civilians and injured about 18,000 more. As they were deployed relatively late in the war, the British called the period the *Baby Blitz*! The V1 threat to Britain ended only when sufficient European territory had been re-conquered to render the short-ranger weapon ineffective.

At their highest rate, almost 100 V1 missiles were sent to strike at London per day. Well over 2,400 V1s struck London. After the Allied bombing of Normandy, the Germans aimed 2,500 V1s at Antwerp in Belgium.

The V2 was a true ballistic missile. It was too poor a weapon in terms of costs necessary to deliver explosives across the Channel waters. Only about 5,000 to 6,000 V2s were built by Germany and between 2,500 and 3,200 actually launched. The V2 hit its aim at speeds of about 3,000 km/h, way above the speed of sound, so that one didn't hear it arrive. About 520 V2s hit London, killing 2,500 civilians and injuring thousands more. Only 4 or 5 large Allied bombing raids of 500 airplanes carrying about 6,000 kg of bombs each, delivered as much explosives as all of the V2s launched together. But the misplacement of diverting scarce resources into the V2 programme proved a disaster of large proportions for the *Wehrmacht*.

Another new use of airplanes was the *Kamikaze* of Japan. *Kamikaze* means divine winds, called after the name of a typhoon that had destroyed a Mongol-Chinese fleet in 1281 bound to invade Japan. They were simple airplanes, directed by suicide pilots. Less than 20% of the airplanes that took off in this way reached their intended targets. The Japanese attacking pilots were capable of reaching tactical and strategic aims, inflicting considerable damage to the US Naval Fleet. But 10% of the planes were forced to turn back because of mechanical problems. They had a range of over 1,500 km. They were heavy, weaponed with high



explosives inside or with torpedoes under their fuselage. And more than 50% were shot down or crashed before reaching their targets.

The *Kamikaze* struck 474 Allied warships in the Pacific. They killed 7,000 Australian, British and American sailors, at the cost of 3,860 pilots and air crew men. After October 1944, *Kamikazes* accounted for 50% of all US Navy losses. Their success rate in sinking ships and killing sailors was ten times higher than that of traditional Japanese naval bombers. Their cost was low, as the airplanes were usually Mitsubishi A6M Zero fighters.

*Kamikaze* attacks only stopped when the airfields on the Japanese islands were destroyed and when Japan had almost no fuel anymore, as well as no more spare parts. The *Kamikaze* found their greatest success during the US invasion of Okinawa, when 17 US warships were sunk and 5,000 sailors killed by their attacks. Suicide bombings were effective, but they reflected a loss of morale in the Japanese Army, the desperation of the armed forces and the realisation of a war irrevocably lost already.

Of the fighter planes built in World War II, the most successful were the German Messerschmitt Bf109 of which 33,000 were built, the German Fokke-Wulf Fw190 with 20,000 built, the American Lockheed P38 Lightning of which 10,000 were built, the Republic P47 Thunderbolt with 15,500 built, the North American P51 Mustang with 15,000 built. Refitted with Rolls-Royce Merlin engines, this could be called the best fighter plane of the war. In the Pacific were deployed for the USA the Grumman F4F Wildcat with 7,800 built, the Grumman F6F Wildcat with 12,000 built, and the Vought F4U Corsair with 12,500 built.

By 1942, the British systematically bombed German war industry. The USA bombed Japanese factories from only late 1944 on.

Allied aircraft production was always secure. By 1944, the Germans and the Japanese produced about 70,000 airplanes a year, but the Allies over twice that number! The British Supermarine Spitfire, the Russian Yakovlev Yak9, the North American P51 Mustang and the US Republic P47 Thunderbolt were aircraft relatively comparable in combat.

The P51 Mustang was a low-cost plane, all aluminium, with drop tanks for a round-trip range of 3,200 km at maximum speed of over 690 km/h at 4 km high.

As transport airplanes, the US American Douglas C47 Skytrain, called the Dakota by the RAF, of which 10,000 were built, were reliable, rugged and mass-produced. The *Luftwaffe* used the Junker Ju52, which was slower and with less payload. No more than about 5,000 of these were built.

At the beginning of the war in the Pacific Ocean, the Japanese used the Mitsubishi Zero. The Zero had a relatively static design. They were actually obsolete by 1943. At the end of the war, the Germans produced the Messerschmitt Me262 Swallow. The Swallow was jet-powered, though relatively unreliable and scarce. Only 1,400 such German fighters were built. They needed long runways and their jet engines had a short lifespan.

By the end of the war, US fighter pilots had 3 times more pre-combat solo flights than their Axis enemies' pilots. They had 9 months of training! The US fighter pilots shot down their German counterparts in air-to-air combat at a 3 to 1 aggregate ratio. When one side built 3 times as many aircraft as the other, and by war's end had trained more than 10 times as many pilots, then victory in the air was nearly assured for that other side. With it, came victory on the ground as well!

## Naval Warfare

The most lethal battles at sea never caused as many deaths as those on land. Warships were primarily designed to damage other ships, never really engineered for total stability, or to better the chances of cargoes safely reaching port. The duty of a fleet was to sink and disable expensive merchant ships and enemy warships, to kill and drown seamen, destroy the enemy's investment, neutralise the enemy's ability to move soldiers by sea, and to import resources of all kinds. Once fleets had neutralised their enemy counterparts, their goals remained largely to stop imports to enemy lands and to blockade the coasts to enhance land operations.

Adolf Hitler was never a navy-man. Germany had but a very small, though well-built fleet of surface ships and a relatively large fleet of submarines. It relied on the Italian Navy and its battleships. Rival German admirals were Erich Raeder and Karl Doenitz. Admiral Doenitz' dream remained to build a fleet of 300 submarines, while scrapping all plans to build battleships and cruisers. Hitler was aware that what was left of his surface fleet, compared to British air and naval power was mostly worthless at end 1942.

In 1942, Japan entered the war with a larger surface war fleet than the USA and Great Britain. It started the war with a number of technological and material advantages of experienced naval forces, effective nocturnal gunnery, excellent destroyers, fine knowledge of the Pacific, superb submarines and the world's most lethal torpedoes.

Japan had 6 aircraft carriers to the USA's 3, and 4 light carriers to none in the waters of the USA. It had 10 to 2 battleships, 38 to 16 cruisers, and 112 destroyers to 40 by the USA. By late 1942, only one sole American fleet carrier, the damaged Enterprise, roamed in the Pacific waters against 8 Japanese carriers. Japan could move 5 times as many aircraft on the seas. The Japanese torpedoes were about 25 km/h faster than their USA counterparts, had 3 times longer range, and much more power of explosives.

By late 1943, however, the USA had won naval superiority and it ceased losing warships! It had won in 1942 strategically important sea battles, at the Coral Sea and near Midway, that probably did not bring them naval superiority, but brought them closer to parity with the Japanese Navy. In January 1945, the figures had reversed: 14 USA fleet carriers to 2 for Japan, 66 light and escort carriers for the USA to just 2 for Japan, 23 active battleships to 5 for Japan, 45 cruisers to 16, and especially 296 American destroyers to 40 Japanese! In fact, the Japanese had 3 enemies in the Pacific: a surviving British fleet, expanded by 1944, the remnants of the pre-war US Navy, also rapidly expanding, and the new American Pacific Fleet, eventually larger than all the surviving Navies of the world combined.

The Japanese admirals such as Chuichi Nagumo of Pearl Harbor, Takeo Takagi of the Battle in the Coral Sea, Vice-Admiral Gumichi Mikawa at Savo island, and Takeo Kurita of the Leyte Gulf sea-battle, had the fatal habit of curtailing successful operations at critical moments of near victory, in fear of losing their most finite and irreplaceable naval assets. The USA admirals, men such as Chester Nimitz, Raymond Spruance, William Halsey, and Charles Lockwood were in their late 50s or early 60s, and quite superior in knowledge, fighting spirit, and out-of-the-box thinking, compared to the Japanese admiralty.

Italy had its *Regia Marina*, its Royal Navy. It never built a carrier force; it relied on its air bases in southern Italy, Sicily and North Africa. Its navy consisted of 6 battleships, led by the *Littorio* and the *Vittorio Veneto*, of 19 heavy and light cruisers, 59 destroyers and 119 submarines. That made it the largest naval force in the Mediterranean. The Italian Navy had no modern radar, little night-fighting capabilities, and no oil stocks. It could not cut off the British Armies from their oil supplies in the Middle East. Italy entered the war on 10 June 1940 and on 11 December 1941, Mussolini declared war on the United States of America, with only incomplete and very vague ideas about the reach of American naval power. The Italian navy proved inadequate in night fighting ability, in communications and intelligence, in training, in morale, in officer experience, in fuel and ammunition supplied. It played no great or much helpful role to the Germans in the war in the Mediterranean.

Great Britain had at the beginning of the war the largest surface fleet in the world, with 12 battleships, 7 carriers, 56 heavy and light cruisers and 180 destroyers. The British assumed correctly that with this naval superiority, the German Army could never succeed in invading their islands. Germany would even not be able to starve Great Britain into submission. By 1943, almost all British strategic maritime aims in the war had been achieved. The cost had been high: 50,000 dead sailors, 5 battleships and heavy cruisers sunk, 8 fleet and light carriers sunk, 38 lighter cruisers, 153 destroyers and 74 submarines lost and sunk. Naval successes, however, might explain why Great Britain could fight the war longer than any other power in the war, and yet suffer the smallest number of casualties among all of the 6 major warring nations. The Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy could not guarantee Great Britain winning the war, but they could guarantee the country was not to be defeated.

The USA achieved naval parity with the Japanese fleet in the Pacific Ocean, and in the end it could surpass its enemy. It kept superiority over the Italian and German fleets. The strategy of the USA was to keep Great Britain viable by ensuring the Atlantic Ocean remained open to merchant and military shipping. It was to achieve naval superiority in the Mediterranean to ensure landings in Sicily, Italy and other Axis-occupied territories. At the beginning of the war, it had to hold the Japanese forces at bay for a year or more, until American ship production was ready to start the destruction of the Japanese fleet and allow landings on the Japanese-held Pacific Islands. Japan possessed by far the more formidable fleet and posed the greater threat to American-held territories. Yet, Japan was always considered of less important an opponent than Germany!

By 1943, the USA reached greater naval superiority in the Pacific Ocean. Its 17 newer Essex class carriers had evolved from the *Lexington* and the *Saratoga* experience. It then had the ability to push back the concentric circles of the greater so-called *Asia Co-prosperity Sphere* built by Japan. The US carriers held about 3,000 crewmen! But the new Iowa-class battleships demanded about as many sailors! And anything a battleship could do, such as blowing up enemy surface ships, bomb shore positions, a carrier could do better and almost as cheaply!

The USA did not fight a single major surface sea-battle with Germany or Italy. It also never lost a battleship after Pearl Harbor, or a fleet carrier after 1942. With the help of the USA, Great Britain defeated the German U-boats. The main weapon or system for that aim was convoying, as in the previous World War. The Allied landings in North Africa, Sicily and Normandy were thus secured.

The American submarine admiral was Vice Admiral Charles A. Lockwood. His submarines destroyed almost the entire Japanese merchant fleet. The American submarines operated nearly autonomously in hunting down the enemy merchant convoys. The US *Gato* and *Balao* submarines were the finest in the world.

The USA built Iowa-class battleships as the fastest and best designed for the war. The USA used these mostly as floating artillery platforms. The USA had the new Baltimore-class heavy cruisers of over 14,000 tons, with 9 guns of over 8 inch and 12.5 inch guns. As light cruisers, they had the Cleveland class ships of 12,000 tons with 12.6 and 12.5 inch guns. These were used for island assaults, or assaults in Europe. The guns had ranges of quite more than 30 km!

The Soviet Union first relied on its Red Army. The Soviet Navy never competed with the country's ground forces for resources. The Soviet union had no carriers, and only 3 aged battleships at the beginning of the war, later even less.

Soviet Russia focused on defence. It was self-sufficient in oil, food and ores. It had the smallest surface fleet of the 6 major combatant countries. Nevertheless, it entered the war on 10 June 1940 with the largest number of submarines. No major battles happened between the German and the Russian northern fleets. Also, the Japanese remained loyal to the terms of their non-aggression pact with the Soviets. As a result, almost half of the *US Lend-Lease* war material could be shipped safely by the USA to the port of Vladivostok. The Soviet Union did borrow 250 smaller ships from the USA, just to hold Sakhalin Island in the Pacific and a few Japanese islands in the Kuril Archipelago.

In general, no naval expert foresaw the predominant role that aircraft carriers were almost immediately to play in the war between the Allies and Japan. The maximum range of the main batteries of battleships were about 20 to 30 km, in salvos every 35 to 40 seconds. A carrier could launch 3 or 4 strikes of 30 to 40 bombers and fighters a day at an enemy more than 320 km away! Battleships lacked the naval aviation's range, and they were vulnerable to counterattacks. Luckily for the USA, the US carriers *Lexington*, *Enterprise* and *Saratoga* were out at sea when Pearl Harbor was attacked. Naval aircraft in attack could strafe, dive-bomb for precision and sent aerial torpedo strikes. The 4 largest battleships of the Axis allied countries, the *Bismarck* (sunk in May 1941), *Musashi*, *Tirpitz* and the *Yamato*, were all sunk or severely damaged by naval aircraft. With World War II, the battleships were at an evolutionary end. On the other side, submarines sank with their torpedoes about 17 aircraft carriers in the war.

The German *Kriegsmarine* suffered great losses on the seas. 781 U-boats, submarines, were lost on the 1,000 built and 33,000 men were lost out of 40,000 U-boat crewmen. Allied losses on merchant ships amounted to about 72,000 men. The American submarines were superior to the German ones. They had superior radar and were better suited for the conditions of the Pacific than were the German U-boats for the Atlantic. But the real reason for the superiority was that the Allied sailors conducted anti-submarine operations far more effectively than the Japanese and the Germans.

Destroyers too were used in the war. They had from 1200 to 1500 tons of displacement, 4 to 6 canons, speeds of over 30 knots and showed 10 to 12 torpedo tubes. They served first as scouts to radio back the enemy positions. They were valuable in patrolling enemy shorelines. They could sink merchant ships and deter attacks from fast enemy torpedo boats. They could

use depth charges against submarines. They were also not subject to the initial limitations of class tonnage in various naval agreements, up to the later 1930s London Naval Limitation Treaty. Later destroyers had radar and sonar, better torpedoes, more anti-aircraft canons, multiple depth-charge throwers. They had thin metal skins, so armour-piercing shells could go right through hulls without exploding! They were very versatile ships. Destroyers proved the most economical investment in terms of cost to build and in personnel, versus the benefits they could bring.

In the Atlantic Ocean, German U-boats destroyed 14 million tons of Allied ships for their 781 submarines lost and 33,000 submarine men. The British Navy tried to blockade Germany and its territories in occupied Europe, and thus to starve the Axis armies. The British Navy had never imagined that within a year after the start of the war, the German *Kriegsmarine* would be able to control practically all the coasts of continental Europe, as the German Army had taken and occupied almost all the ports on the European coastline.

Germany and Japan produced innovative new naval technologies: sophisticated torpedoes, nocturnal optics, mines, snorkel and complex cryptography.

Great Britain started the war with more anti-submarine ships, and about 180 more destroyers, than the Germans had submarines! Germany began the war with a rather insignificant fleet of submarines, many of which were smaller and obsolete Type II coastal ships. Their newer type VII series never fit well for the Atlantic and many of the German magnetic torpedoes proved faulty. The British had learnt from World War I. They immediately began escorting the convoys coming from North America. Great Britain received 50 World War I destroyers from the USA. It was, however, Great Britain too that had the technological edge with its ASDIC systems, of the *Anti-Submarine Detection Investigation Committee*, to locate submarines under water.

In 1941, the number of Allied ships sunk in the Atlantic soared to about 40 ships destroyed per month. The production of U-boats by Germany had rapidly augmented to about 16 per month in 1941. Germany finally had produced the newer Type VIIC U-boats in 1945, with 568 of them commissioned for the war. Those had faster speeds, longer ranges, more torpedoes, and they were easily manoeuvrable and nimble. They were outclassed, however, by the American Gato, Balao and Tench class submarines. Compared with those, they had far fewer torpedoes on board, were smaller, had lesser range, were more uncomfortable and slower. German Atlantic bases were at Bordeaux, La Rochelle, Lorient and Saint-Nazaire. The Germans built too few radar-equipped Fokke-Wulf FW200 Condor airplanes to scour the mid-Atlantic in search of enemy ships. Those provided valuable intelligence to the German submarines. Nevertheless, fear of a German invasion made in 1940 most of the British ships to stay close to their bases in Southern England.

Of strategic importance was the decoding of the German Enigma cipher machine by the British. Early 1942, the Germans introduced a 4<sup>th</sup> wheel and greater complexity to the Enigma. For many months, the British did not succeed in deciphering their messages. On the other hand, the Germans crashed the BAMS, the British and Allied Merchant Ship code! For several months in 1942, the German submarine commanders knew better where the Allied convoys were heading.

Admiral Ernest King, the USA Chief of Naval Operations, did not immediately deploy American warships merely to escort convoys bound for Great Britain. The German U-boats could thus sink very many American merchant ships. The German *Operation Paukenschlag*, or Drumbeat, sank over 600 transport ships, 3 million tons of shipping. The Germans lost only about 20 U-boats in their raids. Germany had over 200 long-range Type IX submarines. These were slower, and less agile. They dived slower too, but they had 6 torpedo tubes and more powerful engines.

In 1943, Admiral King released more convoy escorts, and new long-range B24 Liberators for air reconnaissance. These means sank many German U-boats. The greatest enemy of the German U-boats were the large number of USA destroyers, corvettes, and more armed merchant ships.

As of October 1942, the British once more cracked the newer German naval codes. By the end of the year, they could even read the communications of Admiral Doenitz. Germany rather worked on long-term technological breakthroughs, such as snorkels, and hydrogen-powered propulsion. The Allies worked on smaller, incremental advances, such as multiple firing depth-charge throwers, new airborne searchlights, small escort carriers, and improved radar and sonar. The Battle for the Atlantic Ocean finally ended by autumn 1943, when too great losses were incurred to the German *Kriegsmarine* than it could sustain. In 1944 and 1945, the Transatlantic Route to Britain was almost risk-free.

In the Mediterranean, the critical points were the entry and exit of the Suez Canal, and the passage past Gibraltar, as well as the Island of Malta bases. Egypt held key British supply bases. The Royal British Navy had reached superiority here, protected by the RAF air squadrons, which could operate from Alexandria and Cyprus. These bases were not always very secure. For instance, Italian frogmen attacked two British battleships in Alexandria with success. The British controlled the Mediterranean. The USA had little presence in the Mediterranean, until late 1942. Although the British might have ruled over the Mediterranean, there were more Italian surface ships and more German U-boats here than British vessels. Against these odds, Great Britain maintained at all time Mediterranean passages to its beleaguered soldiers on Malta and in Egypt. The British showed superior operational skills.

Great Britain dared to take risks in its operations. Italy hoarded its navy, and lost. The objectives of the British were to ensure reliable supply routes to their soldiers in North Africa, to diminish Axis sea power enough to ensure amphibious landings in Northern Africa and Southern Europe, and to re-establish safer routes from Great Britain through the Suez Canal to the Indian Ocean and to the Pacific. The British Admiral was Andrew Cunningham.

On 11-12 November of 1940, carrier-based British aircraft torpedoed the Italian fleet in their homeport of Tarranto. Two Italian battleships were seriously damaged, and one was sunk. This meant a great loss of confidence in the Italian fleet, as the British airplanes attacked and had not hesitated using torpedoes in a shallow-water harbour.

On 27-29 March of 1941, 4 months later than Taranto, took place the *Battle of Cape Matapan*, off the Greek Peloponnesus. Three Italian cruisers were sunk and 2 destroyers, with minimal British losses.

Not always could the British forces claim great victories over the German forces, though!

In May 1941, the German *Luftwaffe* sunk 2 British light cruisers, and 6 destroyers with minimal own losses. This happened near Crete.

End 1942, in the *Battle for Malta*, the Germans sunk 2 British carriers, a battleship, over 10 cruisers, 40 destroyers and 40 submarines.

The war in the Pacific drew away British naval assets to Birma and to the protection of India. Operation Barbarossa, the German attack against the Soviet Union, diminished the German interest in the Mediterranean. By mid-1943, the British and American fleets could land their soldiers anywhere, anytime on the Mediterranean shores, wherever they chose to do so. Of the about 60 German U-submarines that operated in the Mediterranean, only 1 survived the war! The most important strategic bases in the sea remained British. Actually, the naval war in the Mediterranean ended almost 2 years before the collapse of Germany and Italy! The British and American fleets had achieved naval superiority in 2 years, and total superiority in 3 years.

## Part II. The Second Phase. 1940-1943



## The Second Phase of the War. October 1940 to May 1943

### The War in the Mediterranean

The victory won by the RAF in the Battle for England held aflame the hope for liberty of the western European population. Furthermore, rumours of the impossible invasion of the German forces into Great Britain, completely abandoned, fed the hope. But Great Britain remained alone to uphold democracy against fascism, opposing to a Germany that ruled from Calais in France to the Soviet borders. Nevertheless, the *Reich* remained weak on the seas, opposed by the British Navy. And behind Great Britain stood the United States of America, the USA.

Without the Mediterranean, the British Empire could not easily coordinate its global commerce and communications with its Commonwealth nations. So, North Africa, Italy and Greece would have to be early battlegrounds, as would be Crete, Malta and Sicily. For the German strategists now, the battle with these two nations would have to wait until Germany had also defeated the USSR, the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, the Soviet Union, the theoretical, ideological realisation of Hitler's dream of the *Drang nach Osten*, already formulated in his book of *Mein Kampf*.

Hitler speculated the conservative British political forces would lend him a free hand to conquer the east. Nothing was less true! Hitler wanted to realise his dream of more lands for the German people now. Time was an issue. An alliance of Great Britain with the Soviet Union had to be avoided. Hitler realised quite well a union of Great Britain with the USA behind it, plus Soviet Russia, would mean a world war on two fronts at the same time, impossible to win.

By 1939, France and Great Britain had neared Germany's annual defence outlays. They had invested from 21% to 23% of their Gross National Product or GNP in rearmament. By 1940, the combined defence spending of the two Allies exceeded the spending on rearmament of Germany.

The USA still only spent 1% of its GNP in defence in 1939, and 2% in 1940. The fronts of Europe were at safe distances from the USA, costly to reach, and very dangerous to supply. By the end of 1944, the USA was allocating well over 40% of its GNP to the war! It spent 20% more of its much larger budget on military forces than Germany. By mid-1943, the USA had addressed most of its liabilities. It had well-led tactical forces, strategic bombers, aircraft carriers, submarines, and its ground forces could superbly fight against their enemies. It ended the war with about 12 million men in arms. Yet, it suffered the fewest combat casualties of about 416,000 soldiers. It built the greatest number of aircraft, launched the largest tonnage of ships, built very efficient medical services, and yet produced in 1945 a greater GNP than the 4 warring nations combined. For instance, its yearly war production goals were then 20,000 anti-aircraft guns, 45,000 tanks and armoured vehicles, and 60,000 aircraft! The Allies, mainly Great Britain, the USA and the Soviet Union, had little ideological affinity. Yet, they fought as partners in righteous revenge. The Axis forces were kindred Fascists, but they were waging an aggressive war against all other peoples, often at cross-purposes, aiming at aggrandisement.

The attempts of Germany to form a peace treaty with Great Britain came to nothing very soon. Winston Churchill mainly, stopped this. Hitler therefore concluded the *Tripartite Pact* with Italy and Japan. These three countries would mutually support each other by every political, military and economic means, when one of them would be attacked by a power that had not yet entered the war. A few weeks later, Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria adhered to the coalition of the *Tripartite Pact*, by then also called the *Steel Pact*.

Hitler then demanded of the USSR guarantees of neutrality in the form of provisioning of Germany and a control of Germany over some territories. Moscow rejected these proposals. The decision of Soviet Russia caused a change in Hitler's views. He abandoned the idea of defeating Great Britain first, for the war against the Soviet Union first. He did order the continuance of the submarine war against Great Britain, but he would first submit the Soviet Union.

Hitler doubted not a second his German armies could realise this. By doing so, he recognised the German weakness versus Great Britain!

However, Hitler had to neglect the power of Great Britain to continue to grow his arms resources and to defeat Great Britain's allies elsewhere in the world. Germany had to prepare and thus to wait until 1941, to attack Russia. These delays could also be used by the Soviet Union for the preparation of the defence of its country against the invasion by Germany, the invasion they should be awaiting and could have known to come, even though their leader, Stalin, could not believe such a development. Hitler made a very great error of judgement then, as he subsequently would make so many other errors. The capabilities of the High Command of the German Army, OKW, the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, had been brought so high in his esteem so soon, he could not envisage anymore losing other assaults on countries.

In September 1940, the Italian Army invaded Egypt. But the Italian Command, thinking the British forces so weak they could be defeated easily, proved a great error. The British troops gave Marshal Graziani a humiliating defeat, so that the German leadership had to send General Erwin Rommel to Africa to clean up the mess. At that time, the Italians felt the power of the German *Reich* as if it was also theirs. The Italians had developed a vast plan to dominate the Mediterranean. Its Army considered the time come, with Great Britain too weak and too assieged to resist, to conquer more lands around the Mediterranean. The Italian Command's ambition was by the successive occupation of Somalia, Kenya, the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, as well as Greece in Europe, to chase the British troops from the Suez Canal. This was a plan of successive conquests, although the distances of most of these countries from the European continent were high. By the plan, the Italians lost time, allowing Great Britain to prepare for the war also in North Africa.

Marshal Graziani, the Commander-in-Chief of the Italian forces, Vice-Roy of Ethiopia, took up his post in Libya on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1940. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of September, his Army of Cyrenaica invaded Egypt and took Sidi-Barrani, where it lingered for over 3 months.

The Italian troops in East Africa had moved much faster. From the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> of August 1940, they conquered British Somalia, took control of the Gulf of Aden and thus threatened Great Britain on that side. They advanced much slower in Kenya and in the Sudan. The British troops there resisted better.

When the Italians drew up against Egypt, the front line ran over the fortified places of Kassala, Gallaba, Ghezan and Kournouk east, and Moyale on the south, not far from the Abyssinian frontier. The British defended also and still the environs of Khartoum. All these places remained in the hands of the British.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of October 1940, Italy sent an ultimatum to Greece. It demanded a number of harbours and towns to be handed over to the Italian Army. Greece refused. Thereupon, an Italian Army of 200,000 soldiers invaded Albania to march on Greece. The British fleet would lose its Greek harbours.

Mussolini had not warned Hitler in advance. Hitler was furious, for Greece was difficult terrain for an invasion, the weather was atrocious, and the operation had been ill prepared. The armoured forces of the Italians were utterly inadequate to overwhelm the Greek defences. Hitler understood his German troops would have to save Italy out of the quagmire.

The first Italian offensive brought Mussolini's soldiers no farther than near the towns of Florina, Janina, Konitza and then over Kalibaki and the Stream Kalamas into the region of Epirus between the Canal of Corfu and the Pindus, in direction of Preveza. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of November, General Soddu received command over the Italian troops, after a crisis in the Italian High Command. Early December, General Ugo Cavallero took over the General Staff from Marshal Badoglio. By then, on 14 November 1940, the Greek Army had launched a counter-offensive, supported by 5 squadrons of British airplanes. The Italian troops had to withdraw and the Greek soldiers reconquered the strategically important town of Konitza. The Greek Army advanced and fought near Porto-Edda, near Argyrocastra in the east, and moved along Lake Ochrida to move to Elbasan and Tirana in a surrounding pinch on the Italian forces in Albania. The Italians had been pushed back into Albania! But the Italian losses in this adventure had been 39,000 soldiers killed, 50,000 wounded, 12,000 suffering from frostbite, and 52,000 invalidated for other and various reasons.

The Greek resistance augmented considerably the morale of the free armies versus the troops of the Italian enemies of Greece. By its example, Yugoslavia announced its support for the western Allies, for Great Britain, allowing some of the subsequent campaigns of the British General Wavell. It delayed the Russian campaign of Germany by two months! In total, the Greek Army won six months, destroying in the end the Mediterranean plan of the Italian General Staff. As a result of the disastrous campaign, the British Army could begin its own offensive in Libya. Moreover, the Spanish Dictator General Franco hesitated, and finally refused to join Germany and Italy in the Battle for the Mediterranean.

Great Britain supported Greece. Its fleet in the Mediterranean sailed under the command of Admiral Andrew Cunningham. Its ships lay in the harbours of Gibraltar and Alexandria. Malta too remained a safe British base, though vulnerable because of the proximity of Sicily and its Axis airfields. Cunningham, though with a fleet inferior in firepower, sought direct confrontation with the Italian ships. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of July, the British ships took aim on the Italian battleship *Cesare* and forced it to flee. A little later, in another skirmish on the sea, the British sunk the Italian *Bartolomeo Colleoni*, another battleship damaged by four counter-torpedoboats and by the British cruiser *Sydney*. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of September, five Italian cruisers preferred to withdraw against 2 British cruisers escorting an important convoy of provisioning ships coming from Gibraltar.

By the end of August, the British Navy brought the aircraft carrier *Gibraltar* and two cruisers past the waters of Sicily to the fleet of Alexandria, having advanced to this port. The largest part of the Italian fleet remained on anchor at the harbour of Tarentum. As the Italian Navy had then concentrated their main fleet in one place, Admiral Cunningham decided to strike. At Tarentum, the Italian Navy held 3 battleships of the *Cavour Class*, one of the *Duilio Class*, two of the 35,000 tons *Littorio Class* and 3 cruisers. Squadrons of airplanes took off from the British aircraft carrier *Illustrious*, navigating at 170 kilometres from Tarentum. In a 3 hour lasting attack, this air force launched torpedoes against the Italian ships. The raid was a huge success. A battleship of the *Cavour Class* and one of the *Duilio Class* were hit, as well as 2 cruisers. As a result, the Italian fleet didn't dare anymore leave their harbours for the open sea. The British Navy could thus provision Greece unhindered. Moreover, the Italian Navy found itself immobilised and crippled at a crucial moment of the Italian campaign in Africa. The British fleet remained the master of the Mediterranean!

In North Africa, the Italian 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Armies, nearly 250,000 soldiers in 14 divisions, combined to move from Libya against General Archibald Wavell's Middle-eastern command of 40,000 British soldiers in Egypt. In the south, 250,000 Italian occupation soldiers in east Africa remained in place, but still undefeated. Another enemy Axis Army of roughly the same size, was advancing from the west, expecting German reinforcements to arrive any time.

The Italians had already won a brief war against the British forces in Somaliland the month before, so the Italians were likely to defeat equally the British in Egypt. The Italian units had no updated armoured vehicles, however, comparable to the British tanks. In North Africa, the Italian air force had 300 bombers and fighters, but they were plagued by fuel shortages and shortages of spare parts. The sole competent Italian commander was then Air Marshal Italo Balbo, the Commander-in-Chief for North Africa. Friendly fire shot his airplane down over Tobruk on 28 June, 1940. Balbo perished in the crash. The supreme command came then under Marshal Rodolfo Graziani. Graziani was hesitant, and a mediocre leader. He waited for weeks before invading Egypt in mid-September.

## The Battle for Libya with the Italian Armies

Since September 1940, Marshal Graziani and his troops had remained at Sidi Barrani. The Italian forces had hunkered down, waiting for supplies from Tobruk. Mussolini had sought with his war in Libya, in Africa, some compensation for his disaster on the Greek fronts. The Italians built a road of 130 kilometres long between the Libyan front and Sidi Barrani, solving their issues of provisioning with water, in view of their invasion further into Egypt. The Italians had to pass through the Libyan desert. The aim of the army of Graziani was to attack the fortress of Mersa Matruk. This would open the doors of the British defences and cut the British communications with the lands of the eastern Mediterranean and with Asia Minor. The Italian headquarters thought the British Army merely on the defensive, now. But the British stroke first! In July, the British Army had only 10,000 soldiers in Egypt, whereas the Italians had brought 200,000 men! The British airplanes and ships were inferior in numbers to the Italian ones. But in November 1940, the situation had changed!

The RAF had received more airplanes and more men. The British Government had even sent the only armoured division Great Britain had at her disposal. The British fleet once more dominated the seas. The British began by harassing the front guard of the Italian Army. They patrolled in the Libyan desert with their armoured cars and followed the movements of the Italian troops, transmitting the enemy positions by radio to their base. These British-led troops soon received the nickname of *Desert Rats*. In this way, General Wavell knew very well the weakness of the Italian armaments. The tanks and armoured British cars were far superior to the Italian weapons. It took the British forces 3 months to re-supply and to go on the offensive!

General Wavell launched an offensive on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 1940. The plan, *Operation Compass*, had been well prepared. Wavell attacked Sidi Barrani frontally by troops, having advanced from Mersa-Matruk. He attacked on the flanks the forts of Sidi Barrani. The British succeeded in destroying the armoured Italian troops massed at Sidi-Barrani in view of their assault on Egypt, in the direction of Suez.

The battle started in the night of the 7<sup>th</sup> of December. The tanks of Great Britain rolled over 170 kilometres of desert and took in their positions. The next night, the RAF attacked the Italian aerodromes, destroying the Italian air force on the ground. The British Navy heavily bombed Sidi Barrani and Maktila, so that their enemy had to abandon its bases.

The next day, the British troops, the 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division, followed by a regiment of infantry, advanced on Nibelwa. The Italians had been completely surprised. They defended their positions only for a short time and surrendered when their leader was killed. The Italian garrisons of Bin Rabia and Bir Sofefi did not have the time to intervene. South of Nibelwa, an armoured British brigade cut the road of Sidi Barrani to Buq-Buq. Other forces took the Italian camps of Tummar on the east and on the west. As a result, all the flanks of the Italian Army had been taken! Sidi Barrani lay practically surrounded. The bombardment of Sidi Barani by the British Navy continued unabatedly.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of December, the British Army launched an attack directly on Sidi Barrani. Heavy fighting ensued, including a large artillery duel. The British infantry could pierce through and overwhelm the outer defences of the town. Thousands of Italian soldiers and their provisions were captured. Maktila was taken the same evening. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of December, the British troops crushed the Italian forces west of Buq-Buq and made 14,000 prisoners. The British Army could pursue the rests of the Italian Army.

General Graziani had brought reinforcements from Bardia and from the Maddalena fortress in the fortified triangle of Sollum to Halfaya and to the Fort of Capuzzo. This was a mountainous region, very difficult to attack. The RAF could withhold the Italian airplanes from attacking the British forces. Although the Italian Army still had many more soldiers and an advantageous position, they could not hold their lines. As of the 15<sup>th</sup> of December, they withdrew beyond the passes of Halfaya, constantly bombed by the British Air Force and by British artillery. The next day, the British troops could take Sollum and Fort Capuzzo.

The British Army had only needed a week to throw the powerful Italian Army, with which Graziani had hoped to reach the Suez Canal, out of Egypt. The British Army had made more than 40,000 prisoners, and won enormous stocks of munitions, tanks and trucks. The Italians

had fled so rapidly, they left behind and intact the airfield of Fort Capuzzo with all its installations.

In another 3 months after the waiting period at Sidi Barani, the British columns destroyed the Italian 10<sup>th</sup> Army, taking from 110,000 to 140,000 prisoners, along with all the Italian supplies of vehicles, canons and airplanes.

General Wavell could have stopped then, and built new defences on the frontier. Instead, he moved on and attacked the Italian Army of Libya. This would not be an easy campaign, as Bardia, Tobruk and Benghazi were powerful obstacles.

Especially Bardia, on the flanks of the mountains of the west coast of the Gulf of Sollum, had natural defences and had been heavily fortified by the Italians. Wavell arrived at Bardia on the 18<sup>th</sup> of December 1940. He had the defences and the city bombed for two weeks, and cut all communications with the west. The troops of Wavell then assaulted the defences as of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January 1941. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of January, the defences were destroyed, and with them 40,000 more Italian soldiers made prisoners! The Italian General Bergonzali had been able to flee.

General Wavell then continued his conquest of the last harbours of Lybia in Axis hands, so that the Italians would not be able to send reinforcements, more troops, to Libya. He launched his troops on to Tobruk, 120 kilometres west of Bardia. The assault was given, and Tobruk fell after a furious battle. Tobruk passed hands on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January 1941. Again, the Italian Army lost 15,000 prisoners. A week later fell Derna. Then, along the coast, the Australian forces advanced on Benghazi and took the city, which surrendered without any battle, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February.

The Italian troops of Benghazi had to retreat. The British armoured division came from Tobruk over Mekli and Fort Msus. They menaced to encircle the last troops of Graziani. The Italian forces fled to Tripoli. The British advanced more quickly yet! On the 5<sup>th</sup> of February, around noon, they struck on the Italian columns at Beda-Fomin and completed their disaster by dispersing. The British rounded up yet more than 20,000 prisoners.

The British soldiers thus passed Tobruk, which changed 4 times hands in 18 months. Tobruk in Lybia fell to the British on 22 January of 1941. On 5 January 1941, the Italians were defeated at Bardia. The British then had pushed them on to Benghazi, where they arrived in February of 1941. The British advanced then to El Agheila. There were then still 100,000 Italian soldiers in Libya.

The defeat of Benghazi could be called the end of the Libyan campaign of Wavell. In 72 days, he and his armed forces had defeated and put to an end an army of almost 300,000 soldiers. He had made over 130,000 prisoners, gained immense provisions, placed the Union jack at El Agheila on the frontier of Tripoli, advanced more than 1,000 kilometres, and conquered entire Cyrenaica. The victory of General Wavell was one of the high feats of the Second World War. Wavell had obliterated an enemy more than 10 times stronger than his own forces. He had saved the Suez Canal. Wavell won the first Battle for Africa, a triumph as great as the one of the RAF in the Battle for England.

The British needed after Benghazi to stop the resupply at Tripoli of the surviving Libyan Army of Italy. But Winston Churchill ordered the pursuit of the Italians to be stopped, in order to transfer British veteran troops to Greece for the Allied *Operation Lustre*.

So, 60,000 British troops were sent from Alexandria to Piraeus, Athens's harbour, in Greece. In Greece, about 20,000 British soldiers were needlessly lost. The Balkans anyway fell to the Axis armies.

Nevertheless, the destruction of more than half of the Italian forces in North Africa reminded the world of the courage of the often over-stretched British military. For the next year-and-a-half, the British and the Axis forces in North Africa alternated in chasing each other, until the pursuers' lines lengthened and supplies became issues, giving the pursued the opportunity to commit the same error. North Africa had largely become a stalemate for the Allied and Axis troops.

Two unforeseen events came to trouble the situation. One was the arrival of a huge force of US soldiers in North Africa in November 1942, and the other the growing German issue at Stalingrad, which drew reinforcements to the Eastern European front, troops that might have been sent to reinforce the Axis troops in Libya and Egypt.

Nevertheless, to rescue the Italians in North Africa, Hitler sent to Tripoli in Libya Lieutenant General Erwin Rommel. Hitler had briefed Rommel on the task of rescuing the situation in North Africa for the Axis forces. Rommel had been born in 1891, of middle-class origins. He had been highly decorated in the First World War and had published a book on infantry tactics. He had been the head of a tank division that had forced its way through the Ardennes and that had taken part in the war with France in 1940. Rommel was egocentric, an unrelenting division commander, brilliant during the fall of France.

On 2 February 1941, Rommel arrived at Tripoli with 2 German divisions of his new Afrika Korps. His mission was to coordinate the Italian-German defences, to stop the British advance in Cyrenaica and save what was left of the Italian Expeditionary Force in Africa. Cyrenaica was the coastal region of Eastern Libya. To realise that aim, he had only one German *Panzer Division* and 2 Italian Divisions. He succeeded in pushing back a British Force weakened by the redeployment of many of its soldiers to defend Greece.

## The Conquest of East Africa.

It was essential for the British Empire to hold Egypt. The link with its Asian territories was the canal of Suez! Britain had to hold the maritime links with its colonies and allies in Asia. The Mediterranean had been closed at Sicily. After Libya, the British troops had therefore to secure the harbours of East Africa.

The Commander-in-Chief of the Italian Army in East Africa was the Duke of Aosta. He had an army of about 300,000 soldiers and could easily have curbed the meagre British contingents in the Sudan and in Kenya. However, he never moved in offensives further to the inland of Africa.

In November of 1940, the British General Platt, commander of the British forces in the Sudan, had received some reinforcements. Nevertheless, he had four or five times less armed

men at his disposal than the Duke of Aosta. He already went on the offensive in November, but gained little success. In December, after the success of Sidi Barrani, General Wavell sent him a part of his reserves, the 4<sup>th</sup> Indian Division, a company of tanks, and a battery of artillery. This changed the situation entirely! The Italian forces had lost their good faith in the outcome of the war. The Italian officers remained on the defensive. The aim of the Duke of Aosta was more to draw British troops to him to relieve some at the front against Graziani. Instead of launching an offensive, he withdrew from the line Kassala-Mestemura to move to the line Keren-Biscia-Aicota.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 1941, the British troops entered Erythrea. On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, they destroyed enemy forces at Aicota and Keren. The 1<sup>st</sup> of February, they took the Fort of Agordat and the day after the Fort of Barentir.

The Italian soldiers returned to Keren, in the mountains, which could only be attacked from the front. The *Battle for Keren* was therefore long and bloody. The British troops received the help of two French battalions arriving from Tchad. These men advanced together very slowly, for more than 5 weeks. The final assault, given on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March, lasted for 11 days. The fortress fell on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March. The British forces lost about 5,000 men dead, the Italians even more.

After Keren, General Platt could defeat the rest of the powerful army of Eritrea. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of March, Platt took Asmara, Massaua on the Red Sea on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April, and so he could win the coast, which had menaced the vital route to India and the other British colonies in the east. US President Roosevelt allowed again American ships to bring precious cargos of arms and munitions to the British forces of Egypt and around.

At the same time, the other British General Alan Cunningham started an offensive from out of Kenya. His troops conquered the south of Abyssinia. He could enter the old capital of Addis-Abeba after a record march of his forces over 3,000 kilometres in less than 3 months. He took off from Bura on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January 1941, chased the Italians from Somalia, took Kismayu on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February, Jebib on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, and Mogadishu on the 25<sup>th</sup>. He advanced about 75 kilometres a day and reached Jijiga on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March, Hassar on the 27<sup>th</sup>, Driedaouna on the 29<sup>th</sup>, and finally Addis-Abeba on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April.

A British 3<sup>rd</sup> column had left the Sudan on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January with 2 Ethiopian battalions, reaching Addis Abeba on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May. These troops brought back the Emperor Haile Selassie, who could return to his capital after a long exile of 5 years. He would be the first sovereign to be put back on the throne by an allied victory.

The Duke of Aosta surrendered his army at Amba-Alagi 15 days later. The capture of the fortress of Gondar on the 17<sup>th</sup> of November 1941 was the last feat of the war in East Africa and of the campaign of Allied, mainly British troops in Africa of the years 1940-1941. The victories of the Generals Wavell, Platt and Cunningham boosted the morale of the Allied armies. They affected heavily the morale of the Italian population and darkened the prestige of Mussolini. The German High Command was bound to react.



## The German Offensives in the Mediterranean Countries

The Mediterranean was the fief of Italy! Hitler convoked Mussolini at Berchtesgaden to have the Duce follow his orders. The administration of Italy, its police, army and economy passed under Nazi control.

By the end of January 1942, the German *Luftwaffe*, the *Wehrmacht* and the *Gestapo* installed their forces in Italy. The Germans then took over the leadership of the war against Great Britain in the Mediterranean. The German counter-offensive began with the incessant bombing of the Isle of Malta. This action would permit the German and Italian convoys to transport the *Afrika Korps* to near Tripoli. Soon, Malta was of no military use anymore to the British armies, but the island remained in Allied, British hands.

Malta was only about 100 square miles in size, yet 250,000 people lived in 1940 on the island. On 10 June 1940, Mussolini's air forces attacked the island. At that time, other islands in the Mediterranean such as Crete, Sicily, Corsica, and Sardinia were held by Axis troops. Malta was a strategic, regular British aircraft port, re-supplied by British carriers. Great Britain ensured that the *Luftwaffe* never quite achieved aerial supremacy over the island. The Axis Forces also never landed troops on the island. From June 1940 to December of that year, the Italians tried an air siege of Malta. That effort failed. The successful airborne conquest of Crete from 20 May to 1 June 1941 proved so costly to the Germans, with about 7,000 casualties, that Hitler remained ever reluctant to stage a Mediterranean parachutist assault on Malta. The German Navy lacked aircraft carriers and even major surface ships in the Mediterranean. They were not eager to send their U-boats near Gibraltar. And around August 1944, German U-boat activity had almost entirely ceased. Malta warships and airplanes took a heavy toll on Axis convoys. By late 1942, about 1/4<sup>th</sup> of all Axis supplies to North Africa had to pass by Malta! To achieve their supremacy near the island, the British held 2 carriers near, 1 battleship, 2 cruisers, 19 destroyers and almost 40 submarines!

The German plan was to conquer once again the roads to Suez by Cyrenaica, to operate in Syria and in Iraq, to control the Balkan lands and to dominate on the sea. The British hegemony in the Mediterranean had to be broken, the oilfields of Mossul to be taken, and Turkey was to be led to adhere to the Axis. This was needed to encircle the Soviet Union by the south, in the perspective of forcing a link with the Japanese forces pushing in from the Far East.

Great Britain tried to win time. Hitler couldn't lose time. President Roosevelt had been re-elected in the USA on the 30<sup>th</sup> of December of 1940. He was an enemy of the German dictator, an enemy of all potential dictators! In March of 1940, he had the Lend-Lease law be voted in the US Parliament, allowing the sending of war material to any country the President considered vital for the security of the USA. That left Germany one chance only: to take on Russia first, and then turn to Great Britain and the USA. Hitler and his generals thought the USSR the weaker enemy.

Two Balkan countries had so far not allowed German soldiers in their territories: Greece and Yugoslavia.

Yugoslavia was practically surrounded by Fascist countries. The Government of Prince Paul had therefore made overtures to the Axis countries already before the war. Hitler convoked to Berchtesgaden both the Yugoslavian ministers and Prince Paul. These did not oppose the views of the German Führer. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 1941, Germany addressed an ultimatum to Belgrade. On the 25<sup>th</sup>, Prince Paul brought to Vienna the agreement for Yugoslavia to enter the Axis entente. The Yugoslavian people were basically democratic, however. They manifested their opposition to Prince Paul's politics. On The 27<sup>th</sup> of March, broke out a revolution in the country. Prince Paul was chased from power, his Government ministers were arrested. King Peter II of Yugoslavia, despite his very young age, took over power in the land and charged General Simovitch to form a new government. The Soviet Union immediately lent its support to this government and concluded with Yugoslavia a non-aggression and friendship pact to avoid the extension of the war in the Balkans.

At about the same time, Greece had refused to hand over Salonica and Patras to the Axis forces. The Greek Army had won fine successes lately in Albania. They were at a point where they could be able to occupy Vallona.

Hitler was furious at the two refusals. The 6<sup>th</sup> of April 1941, he launched a new *Blitzkrieg* against the two countries in the Balkans. The British had to be chased from the Balkans! The campaign had to be short, for Hitler needed all his troops for his invasion of the Soviet Union.

### The German Campaign in Libya

The German offensive in Africa started from the region of Tripoli on the 24<sup>th</sup> March of 1941. The commander of the *Afrika Korps* was General Erwin Rommel, a specialist of the *Blitzkrieg*, one of the victorious generals of Dunkirk. Rommel had obtained strong armoured and motorised troops.

The British troops were then not up to the new German forces. Several of its units had been sent to Erythrea. All the available reserves, in total 6 divisions, had received orders to move to Greece. These last divisions, however, were critically necessary to hold the British positions in Cyrenaica, whereas they were by far not enough to stop the German onslaught in Greece. Great Britain had given assurances to Greece to come to her support. These promises had to be fulfilled, would not Churchill loose face right at the moment he was trying to unite all still free people against the Nazi tyranny. There seemed some grandeur in deliberately accepting two defeats for the sole respect of one's principles! Finally, Great Britain had to show it fought on, despite the overwhelming superiority of the *Luftwaffe* and the armoured divisions of the *Wehrmacht*.

Rommel sent his troops far into Cyrenaica. The British soldiers resisted everywhere, as best as they could. Rommel took Benghazi on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April, Sollum on the 13<sup>th</sup>. He could not take Tobruk. For many months, Tobruk remained a threat in his flank. He had to stop at Halfaya, where two British divisions brought back from Abyssinia stopped him. Rommel had almost reached the Egyptian border. He had thus completely turned around the North African War. He had been brilliant in tactics, once more. He had split his small force in two, one part

following the coast and the other cut across the desert, the movements causing panic among the British.

Rommel had thrown the English back to Egypt, even before the much-awaited April arrival of his 15<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division. His Italian troops had no anti-tank weapons and their artillery was obsolete and badly trained. Rommel mainly relied on his light 5<sup>th</sup> Division and his Italian cohorts. Nevertheless, he had accomplished what could be seen almost as a miracle. But the aim of the Axis High Command had only been to save the wrecked Italian Army, not to open an entirely new offensive on the eve of the start of *Operation Barbarossa* in the Soviet Union!

The German troops were victorious once again in the Mediterranean theatre, but for another event, which showed the superiority of the British Navy in the region. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of March 1941, in the Battle of Cap Matapan, the British Navy fell upon the Italian fleet. The British sunk 3 Italian cruisers of 10,000 tons, the *Pola*, the *Zara* and the *Fiume*, and they damaged the battleship *Vittorio Veneto* of 35,000 tons. This sea-battle prevented further naval support to Rommel, which caused problems of provisioning to his army. The British losses amounted to 1 airplane shot down!

Despite the supremacy of the British fleet, the German submarines ravaged the Allied merchant fleet. Each month, over 100,000 tons of ships were sunk in the Atlantic Ocean due to the actions of the German submarines! Every and each cargo was of prime importance for the besieged English Isles. Germany also and anew intensified its bombing on the south of England.

Germany attacked Yugoslavia and Greece on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April 1941. The *Blitzkrieg* in the Balkans was on. The world had once more to be convinced of the overwhelming might of the *Wehrmacht*. The dominance of the German Army had to deter the Soviet Union from entering the war in the Balkans. Yugoslavia did not even have the time to mobilise! In the west, Italian troops attacked it, Hungarian troops in the north, and German and Bulgarian forces in the south-east. The Yugoslavian Army tried to retreat to Albania and Greece, but the German troops penetrated in Macedonia in the south. The German forces marched down the valley of the Driva, to Vardar, and occupied Skoplje to cut the only railway connection between Belgrade and the Aegean. Yugoslavia was thus cut off from help on all sides. Its armies on the Save, the Tisza and the Danube almost instantly surrendered. Belgrade was declared an open town, but had been totally destroyed by the German *Luftwaffe*. Yugoslavia capitulated on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April 1941.

Germany cut Yugoslavia into several pieces. Slovenia was given to Italy, Macedonia to Bulgaria, the Banat to Hungary. Croatia received its Fascist independence and the rest of the lands remained occupied by the German forces. King Peter II had been able to flee to the Allies. The resistance then organised in Yugoslavia, first under the command of General Mikhailovich, later under Marshal Josip Broz called Tito. The partisan guerrilla war that ensued proved very expensive in men for the *Third Reich*. Several German divisions had to be kept for the entire war in Yugoslavia.

Greece too had not been able to stop the German invasion. The *Wehrmacht* marched and advanced around the fortified Metaxas Line, leaving those defences to its right, to move to Salonica. Salonica was taken already on the 10th of April. The Greek troops of Albania and

of the Epirus were at risk of being surrounded, so they retreated southwards. A British Expeditionary Force covered the retreat. Then, the British too had to move south. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of April, the German armoured divisions took Athens and later, still south, the Peloponnesos. The BEF had to flee and re-embarked from Greece on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May, after having destroyed their war material. King George of Greece embarked with them for exile in London.

The British fleet had used the Greek harbours to control the Italian Navy. The British ships could not be guarded by the Royal Air Force now, for the ships were too far from Egypt, the only land in the environs still free from Axis troops. The Germans were preparing for their invasion of the Near East. They massively used their air force to bomb any Allied land power in their way.

The real offensive started on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 1941. After a series of bombings, the invasion began on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May at La Cancé, taken by thousands of parachutists, where the German ships could then disembark their heavy war material: tanks, artillery, trucks, and so on. The British troops could not stop the offensive. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 1941, they re-embarked from the area under violent bombing by the *Luftwaffe*. The losses of the British in war material in this campaign amounted to very high: 4 cruisers and 6 torpedoboats were sunk by the Germans. The British Army lost 17,000 soldiers made prisoners. Only 18,000 British soldiers could be evacuated. Nevertheless, the German troops lost 430 airplanes. The German troops invaded one after the other of the Greek islands. The Aegean was henceforth closed to the British. Realising the plans of the *Third Reich*, the British forces turned to the Middle-East.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 1941, Rashid Ali, the Prime Minister of Iraq, an ally of Germany and an ally of the ex-High Mufti of Jerusalem, who was very anti-Jewish, fomented a coup to change the government of Bagdad. In fact, Irak had signed a treaty of cooperation with Great Britain. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May, Rashid Ali captured with his troops the British airfields in Irak. Immediately, the British tank squadrons left Palestine and the Persian Gulf to roll on Bagdad. These forces re-captured the British airfields in Irak. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of May, they took Bagdad, so that Rashid Ali had to flee from the region.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of May 1941, about 30 German airplanes provided the pro-Fascist forces of Iraq with all kinds of war material. This material was to be used to create a basis of actions directed against the British domination of Irak. The more so, since the Vichy Admiral Darlan had allowed the French airfields in the Near-east to be used by the *Luftwaffe*. The regime of Vichy-France denied the facts, but in the meantime, it helped preparing the Syrian ports for a possible German invasion.

The British forces decided to strike first! The British Navy cruised along the coasts of Syria. Free-French and British troops entered Syria on the 8<sup>th</sup> of June 1941. The invasion of British and Gaullist troops in the Near East ended the ambitions of the Germans in the region. By then too, Germany had launched its vast operation against the Soviet Union.

### Anton Vincius in Gembloux

During the hardest times of the war, Anton Vincius remained living in Gembloux. Not once did he return to Luxemburg to visit his family. Of course, his family came to him, either by

car or by railway, although travelling by rail became increasingly dangerous. His father wanted him out of Luxemburg, where he concluded his son would be more in danger of being picked up and imprisoned in a Polish camp than in Belgium. Anton practically lived in hiding. He studied at the Agriculture University of Gembloux, and directed all of his attention to these studies, which procured him a kind of alternative world in which he could live and ignore to some degree the suffering that happened in the real life of the times.

Anton did give some thought on whether he should one way or another join the war. The people who felt some responsibility for him, his parents and the Dumont family in whose midst he lived, dissuaded him in the strongest terms from doing so. He also had no idea how to join the fighting troops, which in the first years of the war seemed to him only to be the foreign armies in Great Britain. He should have fled to Great Britain, but he had no contact with groups of the Belgian resistance that might have helped him to reach the islands. He had no Belgian passport. He was of German descent, and would have been looked at more than suspiciously by any group of the resistance, as well as by British troops. His Luxemburg papers marked him as a fatherland-less youth. Any German patrol catching him with such papers would have interrogated him about what those papers meant, and who he really was. Most of all, he lacked money! No, Anton had to sit out the war, hoping on the victory of the Allies! He was convinced from early on Germany would not be able to win any war against the rest of the world. So much became clear rather soon, he realised. He was torn, of course, between the loyalty burned in his head and heart towards his country and to the city he was born in on the one side, and on the other side his knowledge of the horrors done by the *Third Reich* to most of the world. However much he tried to understand how Germany had come to follow the worst ideas of the man Adolph Hitler, he couldn't apprehend how his people had chosen the course of this dictator. That recognition split his mind, and threw him into depths of despair at times. All economic data assembled proved to Anton that however smart Germany was, she could only lose the war, not win it, just as Germany had lost the First World War.

Anton felt very lonely in Gembloux. He had only friends among the students. He knew nobody else in town, though the Dumont Family often told during dinners about what had happened to almost half of the people in town, who they knew by name and surname. The people of Gembloux really felt as a community, something Anton had never experienced before. He could bring up some sympathy for the people in town, though never really belonged to the community. The only contacts he nurtured with the Belgian population were by the Dumont Family, the people he rented a room from. His own parents didn't travel often, as his father also had a Luxemburg passport designing him as a fatherland-less man allowed to work as a doctor in the country. Only his mother once every while travelled from Luxemburg to Gembloux, mostly for bringing him money, usually in the form of coins and bars of gold, which Anton himself had to exchange for Belgian Francs and German *Reichsmarks*. He usually did that in the local bank, accompanied by Father Dumont, who when necessary vouched for Anton with the bank director Dumont knew quite well. Most of that money went to the Dumont Family anyhow, to pay for his room and meals. He had not enough money left to think of buying new clothes or to buy more food in town. Nevertheless, he never complained.

Anton studied eagerly. He was a good student. He took notes conscientiously, studied in the few books he could ask his mother to bring him from Luxemburg. These books generally were in German, selected for him by his father. Some books edited in French he could borrow from the Polish Circle of students of Gembloux. The issue he had with the German books was that he could find in them the names of plants, animals, insects, instruments and tractors in German only. Luckily, his professors, notably a professor who would somewhat later become the war dean of the university, accepted he gave occasionally only the name in German during his exams. What remained of his money, Anton spent on books in French, of which finally he could only buy few, for too expensive, and for paper and pencils. The Dumont feasted his anniversary, and usually he obtained a French book he had been looking for as a present. For the rest, he had few things of his own.

Anton had to keep a very low profile at the university too. He didn't want too many people have a look at his papers, and certainly not the German patrols or authorities. Only very rarely did he go to theatre or cinema presentations, and only very rarely could he join a group of other students to drink beers or go out to dinners with them. Whereas Gembloux was known to receive wealthy and even very wealthy students from other countries, sons of wealthy landowners of Russia and Poland and even Prussia, he was amongst the poorest. He thought himself lucky to have found a modest room with the Dumont Family. They didn't look too closely at what they gave him for food, for instance. He got never hungry in the war. Of course, the Dumonts saw openly enough the Vincius boy had an eye on their daughter and she on him, so he was practically considered family. They must have concluded a serious young man, intelligent, perhaps a bit naïve still, a man of honour with a sense of dignity, a young man of fine manners, was a good catch for their daughter, even if he were a German.

Anton Vincius practically lived with Marie-Ange Dumont in all aspects but as a truly married man. She could have been a beauty. Marie-Ange was fine enough, gentle, intelligent too, though she had little education, oriented mainly to the managing of a large shop, never fleeing from work. She and her mother held the shop, were the heart and motor, as the father merely occupied himself with the paperwork, the accounts, the contracts with the sellers. He could and should have been a teacher, or even a professor, was very interested in the history of his town, as he was an active member of the local association for arts and history of the university town, which remained doing research throughout the war. Marie-Ange's father was a man easy to live with, almost always of good mood, friendly with his daughters and with Anton. He regarded Anton already as a member of his family. He asked Anton regularly whether he had enough money to live on. He knew how precarious the situation of some students could be. Anton appreciated that, but he was too proud to ever ask any money from his future father-in-law.

Anton and Marie-Ange stuck together as much as they could, as of the beginning of the war, the deportation of Anton to France and his happy return. After Anton's arrival in Gembloux, they lived almost like a married couple, though Marie-Ange's mother did not want her daughter to sleep in Anton's room before Marie-Ange was married. Nevertheless, Anton and Marie-Ange had ample occasions to be alone in the house. The two young people stuck to the rules. They would only marry after the war, have their own two daughters then. They were in love, and developed their sense of belonging together, through love and hard times, as

couples rarely experience fully. They lived out the war rather happily, poor, doting on love and tenderness.

They eagerly read the newspapers bought by father Dumont. They talked a lot about the war, and understood rather soon Germany would not win in the end. Their only great fright came when the British bombers wanted to drop their loads of explosives on the railway station of Gembloux, entirely missing their target, and destroying only a few houses of the town though not the station after all. They never fled the Dumont house, never had to fear the very small garrison of German soldiers in Gembloux.

Anton avoided the feasts of the Gembloux students. He avoided alcohol and confidences with other students on his earlier life in Berlin. He never claimed his life in Berlin and descending from Jewish forefathers. In fact, most people of Gembloux who knew him, wondered why he had not joined the *Third Reich's* Army, but when he stayed in their midst, they ascribed this to the love he had for Marie-Ange, and they accepted him in their community. They saw he did not hurt a fly.

After the war, Anton did not recall having had to show his papers to German guards in Gembloux. He never left town either, and had avoided entirely travelling. He survived, and escaped depression due to the fine, loving care of his future wife, who proved maybe stronger in character than he. For that support, Anton would remain grateful and faithful until his death.

## Operation Barbarossa

### The Preparations for the Invasion of Russia

So far, Hitler and the German Nazis had obtained very fast successes everywhere, except on Great Britain. The invasion of Great Britain having failed, Hitler returned to his inexorable *Drang nach Osten*, advance to the east. End July 1940, in a meeting of leaders of the armed forces, Hitler told it was time to plan the invasion of the Soviet Union.

Hitler estimated the invasion of Russia would be child's play in comparison to the invasion of France. If France had been defeated in record time, why not Russia? Hitler considered the Soviet Union a weak adversary. The Red Army had been decimated by Stalin's purges. It had proven itself hopelessly incompetent in its campaign against Finland. The Slavs anyway were subhumans, who would be unable to offer hard resistance to a superior race. The Russians were an inferior people and Bolshevism had made the Russians even weaker.

Yet, Stalin was an antisemitic man! He had dismissed his Foreign Minister Litvinov in 1939, because, among other reasons, Litvinov was Jewish. Hitler also considered the Russian Army was now practically leaderless because of the internal purges. Yet, on 12 November 1940, Molotov had arrived at Berlin to discuss co-operation. The Russians had much to offer to the Germans! On 10 January 1941, the Soviet Union still signed a new trade agreement with Germany. It had doubled the quantity of grain exports from the Ukraine to the *Third Reich*, so essential for Hitler's further conduct of the war. Hitler must have thought it was easier to take without payment than to buy!

The Red Army was roughly of comparable size to the German *Wehrmacht*, but they were far inferior in quality. The Red Army had nearly 3 times as many artillery pieces and tanks as Germany! It had a strong numerical superiority in the air, twice as many fighter aircraft as the Germans and their allies. But many of these machines were already obsolescent. New tanks and new artillery pieces were not being built.

Hitler ordered new arms production to focus on tanks. In the period of the summer of 1940 to the summer of 1941, the number of *Panzer* divisions of the German Army doubled. This was accompanied by a corresponding increase in half-track vehicles. This all was to provide the means for a now classic war of lightning movement, though even Hitler must have noticed the enormous distances in the Soviet Union. Production of machine-guns and field artillery also augmented. In the first half of 1941, the Germans improved railway and other communications in Poland, and supplies were stockpiled in the border areas of Poland with Russia.

Stalin hurriedly launched a policy of trying to appease the Germans by stepping up deliveries of Asian rubber and other strategic supplies. Hitler's Regime, he considered, was the product of German monopoly capitalism, soon to disappear. According to the theories of Marx and Engels. If he made available now everything the German businesses wanted, there would be no immediate reason to invade Russia. That would leave him the time to upgrade his Red Army. At that time, the Soviet Union supplied 3/4<sup>th</sup> of Germany's needs of phosphates for its agriculture, 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of its imported asbestos, about 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of its needed Chrome ores, half of its



Manganese needs, and 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of Germany's imported oil! Stalin did not believe the Red Army would be ready to deal with the German Army until 1942, perhaps even 1943. He had no plans of attack, and no plans for defence against the Germans. Stalin would not listen to intelligence reports stating the German Army would attack around 22 June 1941.

In the USA, the American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was fighting his political campaigns for the cause against Fascism. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of April 1941, the USA decided to install airbases on Greenland to better protect the naval patrols of the American fleet, 1,000 kilometres farther from the US coasts. Gradually, the USA became more and more involved in the World War. The president expanded American aero-naval patrols in the Atlantic Ocean, as well as on the Azores and on Cape Verde. He formulated the idea of the liberty of the seas and announced the American forces would protect their merchant ships. The German leaders understood it was only a matter of time before the USA would enter the war, as the country had done in 1917.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of May 1941, a Messerschmitt Me110 fighter plane from the Messerschmitt works at Augsburg, landed in Scotland 5 hours later. Rudolf Hess, who seemingly had fled from Germany, came down in a parachute near Glasgow. Hess was the second man in command after Hitler, the head of the Nazi Party! Hess had come, so he told, with a message to the Duke of Hamilton, in the name of the German Government to propose a peace treaty to Great Britain. The British authorities kept Hess imprisoned at various locations. Hess proposed Great Britain to retain her empire, though it had to hand over the former German colonies in Africa. Churchill, the arch-enemy of Germany, had to resign, and for all this, Germany would get a free hand to dominate on the mainland of Europe. The British Government reacted with simplicity, and interned Hess as a prisoner of war. On 11 May 1941, Hitler ascribed in a radio message Hess's flight to the Deputy Leader's mental derangement. Hitler abolished the post of Deputy Leader, and renamed Hess's office the Party Chancellery, to be led by Martin Bormann. On 13 May, Hitler repeated that Hess was mentally ill. Hess had betrayed him and deceived him.

Hitler's plan was to starve out the Russian Slav population by 30 million people. He had a *Hunger Plan*. In a hundred years' time, the Slav population living off the land would have been replaced by German peasants. Hitler's *Hunger Plan* had been developed by Herbert Backe, the State Secretary in the Agricultural Ministry, working with the *Reich* Agricultural Minister Richard Walther Darré. Darré was the leading Nazi ideologue for the peasantry. The plan had been agreed upon with General Georg Thomas, leading the Arms Procurement Office in the Central Administration of the armed forces. The Army would have to live off the resources found in the conquered lands in the east, even though millions of the indigenous people would starve if what was taken off the country did not go anymore to the civilians. This all stood also in the so-called *General Plan for the East*, which Himmler had commissioned from the *Reich Office* of the *Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of the German Race* on 21 June 1941. The first version of this plan was given by Professor Konrad Meyer, the academic expert in the office. He had specialised in colonial settlement policies. The plan had been finalised in May of 1942, approved by Hitler, and formally adopted by the *Reich Security Head Office* in July 1942.

The plan proposed to remove 80% to 85% of the Polish population, 64% of the Ukrainian, and 75% of the Belarussian population, expelling them ever further east, or allowing them to perish from disease and malnutrition. It envisaged the forcible uprooting of at least 31 million people from their homes. It would be a murderous, violent process of dispossession! Other estimates brought the number at 45 million people. Polish territories already incorporated in Germany, such as the *General Government*, Latvia, Estonia, the greater part of East-Central Europe, would become completely German within 2 years. The space vacated by the Slavs would be occupied by 10 million Germans. The borders of Germany would be extended 1,000 kilometres to the east. A third of the settlers would be SS officers. The cost would be about 40 billion *Reichsmarks*, revised by Himmler to 67 billion marks, 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of Germany's Gross Domestic Product in 1941.

It was a plan with a staggering ambition! It encompassed the ethnic deportation, resettlement population transfer, Germanisation, cultural genocide, and the reduction of the Slav population by expropriation, starvation and disease.

The coming war would be a struggle of two world-views against one another, the Bolshevik one and the Fascist German one. It would be a war of annihilation. Hitler particularly demanded the annihilation of the Bolshevik commissars and the Communist intelligentsia. Therefore, on 19 May 1941, guidelines were issued to the soldiers for the invasion. The rules demanded ruthless and energetic action against Bolshevik agitators, irregulars, saboteurs and the total elimination of all active and passive resistance. This was also a license for sadistic violence against the Jews. On 6 June 1941, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, head of the Combined Armed Forces Supreme Command, issued an order that all political commissars in the Red Army, the originators of barbaric, Asiatic methods of fighting, were to be shot immediately on capture.

None of the German generals raised any open objection to Hitler's orders. Slavs and Jews were to be repressed in the most brutal manner. The measures knew few opposers. Against it were Field Marshal Fedor von Bock, and Lieutenant-Colonel Henning von Treschow. They instructed their officers to ignore the order of Hitler, as incompatible with international law and dangerous to discipline. Yet, these officers were not only officers in the Army, but also leaders in the racial struggle against Jewish Bolshevism. Army Quartermaster-General was Horst Wagner. He and Reinhard Heydrich gave the SS power to act on their own initiative to carry out the orders on the elimination of the Bolshevik Commissars.

Four SS Security Task Forces, designated as A, B, C and D, each with from 600 to 1,000 men were assembled to follow the army into Russia in 4 zones north to south. In areas well behind the front line and under civilian control, battalions of SS soldiers were to provide for security. These were Police Units of 232 battalions with 420 officers, and 11,640 men. They were subject to ideological training by the SS. The men were all in their thirties, older than the average soldier. They were former *Free Corps* soldiers and long-term policemen, drawn from the right-wing 'Order Police' formed in the Weimar Republic to deal with civil unrest, and Nazi brownshirts or ethnic-German self-protection militiamen from Poland. All volunteers were screened by the SS and especially selected for service in the Soviet Union, all of the lower middle class. In May of 1941, they were sent in training at the Border Police School in Pretzsh near Leipzig. This was ideological training to reinforce their prejudices against Slavs

and Jews. On 2 July 1941, these Task Forces and the Police Battalions that would follow the Army Assault troops, were told to execute all Communist functionaries, people's commissars, Jews in party or state positions, other radical elements such as saboteurs, propagandists, snipers, assassins, agitators, etc, in fact Communist intelligence and the Jewish elite. The Jews were indeed the largest single national group in key parts of the Soviet elite, including the secret police. They identified with the supranational, secular ideology of Bolshevism.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of June, Germany signed a pact of non-aggression and friendship with Turkey. This closed off Turkey to be used by Great Britain as an entry point to the Balkan and the Caucasus war theatres.

In the meantime, however, the Soviet Government had upgraded its war material, to the example of the German forces. It had produced tanks and armoured cars in its factories behind the Ural, developed its air force, and it had thought about the means to stop a German *Blitzkrieg* on its lands. The German *Luftwaffe* had no ability to substantially diminish the Russian military production, as the Russian factories lay out of reach of the German bombers. As of 1942, the Soviet industry could supply thousands of excellent T34 tanks to the front. By the winter of 1941, much of the Russian original air force had ceased to exist. The invading German Army had destroyed no less than 20,000 Soviet airplanes in 1941 alone. The Soviet Union would lose almost 90,000 combat aircraft on the Eastern Front, but its industry produced 150,000 airplanes behind the Ural and it received 18,000 *Lend-Lease Program* models from Great Britain and the USA. By late 1942, Soviet fighter planes such as the Yakovlev, Lavochkin, Ilyushin fighters and fighter-bombers appeared on the battlefields by the thousands.

Hitler may have hoped the German invasion of the Soviet Union could count on the sympathy of the European countries that were anti-Communist. But the same day as Hitler started the invasion of Russia, Churchill announced Great Britain would support the Soviet Union with all possible aid. Three weeks later, in London, the British and Soviet Governments signed a British-Russian Agreement on mutual assistance in the war. The Soviet Union and Great Britain would not separately negotiate for peace, only negotiate by common agreement. President Roosevelt too condemned the German aggression. In the Balkan Lands too, the hope on the end of the Fascist regimes mounted. The European resistance movements took courage and multiplied their anti-German war actions.

## The German Invasion of the Soviet Union

Without warning or ultimatum, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 1941, at 03h00 in the morning, the Axis armies invaded the Soviet Union. The date was symbolic, as it was the same date of 1812 Napoleon Bonaparte had invaded Tzarist Russia! Hitler wanted to enter Moscow by the 19<sup>th</sup> of September, and thus show Germany's forces were now more powerful than the former French Imperial Army. Head of OKW, the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, was then, as of June 1940, General Wilhelm Keitel. He was not a very competent leader.

On that day, an artillery barrage started along the more than 1,000 miles border from the Baltic Sea to the Black sea.

The invasion into the Soviet Union was executed by 4 million Axis soldiers! These went into the offensive with 3,600 tanks, 600,000 motor vehicles, 700,000 field guns and other artillery, with 2,700 aircraft, over half the *Luftwaffe*. Bombings were executed by 500 bombers, 270 dive-bombers and 480 fighter airplanes to wreak destruction on Soviet military airfields. It was the largest invading force ever assembled in the whole of human history to that date.

The plan was to cut the Soviet Union in 3 parts by vast tank sweeps that would encircle and destroy the Western Russian armies before they could flee and regroup in the defence of Moscow and Leningrad.

The military aim was to trap and destroy the Soviet armies in a massive series of encircling movements, pinning them back against the lines of the rivers Dniepr and Dvina, 500 kilometres from their invasion point. On the first day already, German air strikes against 66 Soviet airfields destroyed more than 1,200 Soviet aircraft. Within the week, the German Air Force had damaged over 4,000 Soviet airplanes beyond repair. The *Luftwaffe* also executed bombing of the Russian cities. The command of the sky was secured for the Germans.

June 22 of 1941 marked the beginning of the most horrific killing in the history of armed conflicts. It started a 4-year period that made nearly 25,000 casualties a day! The war in the Soviet Union had to be a war of annihilation, a war of boundless inhumanity. Soviet Commissars, for instance, were to be liquidated on capture, without trial, and killed in extreme barbarism. During the attacks on the Soviet Army, the destruction of human life was enormous from the start. Then, the 3 main German Army Groups pushed forward with their tanks, supported by dive-bombers, followed by fast-moving infantry. They smashed through the Red Army defences, inflicting huge losses on the ill-prepared Soviet troops.

Closely behind the invasion troops followed 4 large task forces, the *Einsatzgruppen*, of men from the German Security Police. These had as objective to eradicate all subversive elements, mainly the Jews living in the country. The *Einsatzgruppen* assembled in the Castle of Pretzsh on the River Elbe. There, they received their orders to kill the enemies of the *Reich* during Operation Barbarossa. They had already operated in Poland as of September 1939. They got their orders from Himmler, and under him from Heydrich, and of the Director of Personnel Bruno Streckenbach. They depended from the RSHA, the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* led by Heydrich. *Einsatzgruppe A* was led by Franz Walter Stahlecker, B by Arthur Nebe, C by Dr. Otto Rasch and D by Otto Ohlendorff. Stahlecker was the most murderous, but he was already killed in March of 1942. Stahlecker said of himself he had killed with his group about 250,000 Jews. The *Einsatzgruppen* sent out *Sonderkommandos*. For instance, the SS *Obersturmführer* Joachim Hamann, with his *Rollkommando* executed 70,000 Lithuanian Jews between July and October 1941.

By the end of the second week in July, the Germans had taken 600,000 prisoners, captured more than 3,000 Soviet artillery pieces and 6,000 tanks had been taken or abandoned by the Soviet troops. 89 out of 164 divisions of the Red Army had been put out of action. The German military forces took Smolensk, and pushed on to Moscow.

Army Group North seized Latvia, Lithuania, much of Estonia, and advanced on Leningrad. Army Group South advanced towards Kiev, and overran the Ukraine. German and Rumanian troops entered Bessarabia. Finnish troops, aided by German units, cut off the port of Murmansk and made for Leningrad from the north. The German troops advanced up to 50 kilometres a day! The Red Army collapsed in chaos along the front. Its communications were severed, transports broke own, and equipment and spare parts ran out quickly.

Hitler thought the rapid progress across the Soviet Union which had about 180 million citizens, would probably destroy Bolshevism. That was what he sought, after all. He wanted the Soviet Union to be turned into a German-controlled set of feudal states. Germany would then build a wall of permanently positioned *Wehrmacht* soldiers at the dividing line between Europe and Asia, at the Ural Mountains. He wanted Russia to starve to death and take the territory for the German population. In June of 1941, the Chief of the German General Central Staff, was General Franz Halder. One of the chief architects of *Operation Barbarossa* was General Erich Marcks.

Hitler actually misread Stalinism as an incompetent, globalist Communist movement, rather than as a fanatical nationalist, tsarist-like imperial project. Germany failed to take as well Moscow as Leningrad by late 1941, or to destroy the Red Army and the Russian munitions industry. When Germany failed in those enterprises, it had lost the war against the Soviet Union.

There were two large phases in *Operation Barbarossa*.

In the brief, first interlude, the initial German offensive of 22 June, 1941, the offensive stalled on all fronts by mid-December 1941. Then, in the second phase, the offensive was resumed in the spring of 1942, ending in the terrible *Battle for Kursk* in July-August 1943, leaving outnumbered German troops in large numbers on a 1,600 km from Leningrad to the Caucasus. The Germans in that period were inadequately supplied, and suffering from Partisan attacks to their rear. The Germans had to suffer a second cycle of stubborn and sustained offensive operations against them, during which yet occurred occasional German counterattacks.

The Russians slowly recovered from 1942 to 1943. By 1943, the Red Army was at least twice as large as the German *Wehrmacht*. It was approaching Eastern Europe, throwing back the German invaders. By early 1945, lastly, most of the territories of the eastern European Allies of Germany were either under Soviet occupation, or their Governments were joining the Red Army. The Germans faced a war of attrition far from home, amid a hostile population, and with an enemy facing them that had manpower reserves double those of Germany itself.

The Axis troops attacked in June 1941 with 200 German divisions, joined somewhat later by Slovakian and Hungarian divisions. The assault was given on a 2,400 kilometres long front, from the Stream Niemen in the north to the Carpathian Mountains in the south. Soon joined too the Finnish Army in the north and the Rumanian Army in the south. Sweden had allowed to pass its territories for the German troops to reach the Arctic, the most northerly zones. The first front was that between Memel on the Baltic and Przemyśl in the south. Three armies participated in this invasion. Most of the *Wehrmacht* elite supported the *Operation Barbarossa*, assuming it would be tough, but simply the continuation of the easy successes seen in Western Europe. Had not France fallen in 6 weeks? The Soviet Union might fall in

less than a month! The German military and Hitler thought they could demolish the Soviet Slavs quicker than the French.

They did not know that between 1939 and the start of *Operation Barbarossa*, the Soviet Union had been able to produce 80,000 mortars and canons, 17,000 aircrafts, and most importantly 7,500 tanks, including 2,000 T34s and KV1s. And Russia was a potential food and fuel exporter, not so Germany! The Soviet Union could field more army divisions than all of the Axis powers combined! It fielded the war's largest land army. It had eschewed naval warfare and systematic bombing of its enemy towns and industry.

Japan in 1941, without a German invitation to join the invasion, would not come to the aid of *Operation Barbarossa* with a simultaneous attack from over the Manchurian border. The Soviet Union would not have a two-front war, as the Germans had. Stalin equally never opened a front against Japan, due to his reluctance to fight a conflict against two enemies at the same time.

The left flank of the Axis armies thus began in East Prussia and had Leningrad, the former St Petersburg, as objective. The centre forces had come from the Polish frontiers, east of Warsaw, to advance in the direction of Moscow. The right wing moved from the south of Poland, advancing with 2 Army Groups in the direction of Kiev. The principal objective of the 3 armies was Moscow.

The main weight of the offensive lay in the centre. This army produced the fiercest battles. Here too, the Soviet forces defended the main routes to Moscow. Four German columns rode as fast as they could straight on, in order to surround early on the Russian defence. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 1941, the German troops took Grodno. On the 24<sup>th</sup> fell Brest-Litowsk. On the 27<sup>th</sup>, the German armoured divisions had arrived at Minsk and could take there the large road to Moscow. The other German columns advanced at the same speed. They surrounded 2 Soviet armies in the vast woods of Bialystok. The Soviet soldiers fought hard to break out of the circle of steel around them. The Soviet troops had to surrender.

A similar situation developed east of Minsk, where other Soviet troops were obliged to surrender. The large battle there took place in the triangle of Minsk-Borisov-Bobruysk. East of Minsk flowed the Rivers Dniepr and the Duna in parallel, to open one to the south, the other to the north. The corridor between the 2 rivers was called *the Door to Smolensk*. It was of strategic importance for the defence of Moscow. Only the Berezina lay at the access to it. The Russian troops lay entrenched at the Berezina, firmly decided to defend it. The German tactics of attack once more proved too strong and too fast for any army. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July, the German troops passed the Berezina! The road to Moscow lay open to them. In 10 days, the German troops had arrived at the *Door of Smolensk*! They had advanced more than 400 kilometres and rolled on at 600 kilometres from Moscow. The Russian troops were dislocated all along the front. They retreated to White Russia and to the Ukraine, then to Moscow. The *Luftwaffe* tried even more to disorganise and to paralyse the forces of the Red Army by destroying railways, communication centres, all transport and warehouses, as well as the Soviet factories. The Soviets had hurried in their reserves to the first front line, hoping to plug the holes already formed by entire divisions of Red Army soldiers being made prisoners by the thousands. Entire Russian divisions had fallen almost intact in the hands of the German *Wehrmacht*.

The radio communications of the Soviets were coded in a basic manner. Their medical facilities were inadequate. Their military planning was basic: just attack head-on. An orderly retreat was impossible, as the troops were not disciplined, given to panic. Desertion rates were high. After the first German bombings, the Soviet formations collapsed, and spread wildly in the forests. The soldiers had no maps.

The German armies come from East Prussia had as objective the conquest of the Baltic harbours. This was to hamper the Soviet fleet and so allowing rapid provisioning of the own, German troops in the regions. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of June already, Kaunas and Vilna, the two historical capitals of Lithuania were German! The Nazi armoured divisions passed the River Duna. The Germans won a tank battle north of Kaunas. Then, the plains of Latvia were open to the Germans. They reached the Latvian-Russian frontier and took shortly thereafter the harbour of Riga. The German troops pushed on along the railway lines of Dünaburg to Pskov and to Leningrad. The advance of the Finnish Army in Carelia was slower. Here, the Fascist troops aimed at the vast harbour of Murmansk, by which the Allies could eventually provision the Soviet Union via the railways of Murmansk to Moscow, east of Lake Ladoga.

In the south, the German Army advanced in 7 columns. The most eastern of those pushed in from south of Brest-Litowsk, north of the Pripet Marshes. Three other columns assaulted from near Lublin, turned around the Pripet Marshes and rolled on in the direction of Jitomir and Kiev. Three further columns started at around Przemysl, Yasi and Galatz, now moved to Odessa and the Crimea.

All the German troops saw rapid results. Towns like Korvel, Lusk and Dubnow fell soon. As expected, a violent battle developed at the strong, fortified city of Lemberg or Lwów, the entry to the western Ukraine. By the time Lemberg fell, the Hungarian troops had advanced over the Carpathian Mountains and taken Stanislavow. Yet more southwards, the Rumanian troops had moved to and passed the River Pruth. They threatened the Soviet troops massed on this river and on the Dniestr. The encirclement of these army groups had to be avoided. The Red Army drew back.

Stalin realised the Soviet Union was losing its armies. He decided for drastic tactics of the 'burnt earth'. When drawing backwards, the Soviet troops destroyed the land by setting fire to everything they left behind. Factories, warehouses, livestock, harvests, and foodstuffs were burnt. The invader would not be able to live off the land! It had to wait for provisioning from far behind its lines, at great cost of effort. Scavenging troops could easily be attacked by few men. Stalin also gave the order to start a guerrilla war on the enemy's rear-guards. The war turned into skirmishes of partisans within the German blocks. Many acts of destruction followed, perpetuated behind the front. Railway tracks blew up, airfields were attacked by small groups of men who disappeared as soon as something had been devastated. Trains were derailed, isolated groups of German divisions simply disappeared.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of July 1941, Rumanian-German troops under the Rumanian General Antonescu reached the Lower Dniestr. Galicia, Bukovina, Bessarabia had been conquered by the Axis troops. Cernarti was occupied on the 10<sup>th</sup> of July. The German front lay along the line Ostrov-Berezina-Chepetovka-Dniestr. The Germans found themselves soon close to the Stalin Line of defences, which ran from Lake Perpius to Odessa. The Nazis could announce their armies had made hundreds of thousands of prisoners, destroyed more than 7,600

Russian tanks, more than 4,400 canons and over 6,200 airplanes. The Russian losses were impressive, indeed.

The only tactics open to the Soviet armies at that moment were defensive. The scorched earth and the slow, progressive retreat of their soldiers in such a way as to avoid large encirclements, so that reinforcements and provisioning to the Red Army at critical points could continue at all moments, was all that could be done. It was hoped this would use up the German forces in the long end.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of July, the German Axis powers had advanced to 200 kilometres east of Minsk. They had reached the Stalin Line. The defences were not as impressive as at the French Maginot Line, but they consisted of many concrete bunkers, which made good use of any natural defence. The German troops pushed on at great speed. They attacked weaker points, rode around heavy defences and attacked elsewhere. They broke through at several places and rode on, for instance past the Dniestr, over and beyond Moldavia. They had to exploit the effect of surprise of their assault and of the speed with which it was executed. The same happened in the centre and north of the German offensive. Polotsk, Vitebsk, Orsha and Moghilev were sites on the Stalin Line, on which the Soviet troops thought to hold back the German columns and couldn't. The Germans pushed on, passed the Duna on two sides of Polotsk, and took Vitebsk on the 11<sup>th</sup> of July. Vitebsk was an important communications centre of roads and of the Russian railway system. It was a town with a very important Jewish population. Smolensk lay in the far. The line of the Dniepr between Orsha and Moghilev fell in German hands. The German columns marched on to Smolensk.

More in the north, the *Wehrmacht* advanced to the east of Lake Perpius in the direction of Leningrad. In Carelia, the Finnish Army advanced 60 kilometres in the same direction.

Around that time, Great Britain and the Soviet Union signed their treaty of mutual assistance. They engaged themselves not to sign separate peace treaties. The Soviet Red Army continued to fight on all fronts, and seemed not to lose courage. Nevertheless, the German armoured divisions that had taken Vitebsk and Orsha rode on to Smolensk, seemingly the last barrier before Moscow!

The Russian general commanding the troops in that sector for the Soviet Army was General Timoshenko. He realised fully the strategic importance of Smolensk. He concentrated large masses of soldiers and war material to defend the town. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of July, the General Staff of the German *Wehrmacht* announced the taking of Smolensk. The proclamation was a little premature! The columns of the German Army might have pushed into the city, but they had been as fast thrown back. A terrible battle ensued in the plains between Polotsk-Vitebsk-Nevel-Smolensk-Moghilev, in which the Soviet troops found themselves being surrounded and prone to annihilation. The battle raged for more than 4 weeks. The German *Wehrmacht* won also this contest of powers! On the 5<sup>th</sup> of August, the German troops broke through the Russian reinforcements. The German Army could announce having made 310,000 Russian prisoners, taken 3,200 tanks and having destroyed or captured more than 1,000 airplanes. The road to Moscow lay open! The German Army had reached by the 17<sup>th</sup> of July the town of Viazma.



On the 14<sup>th</sup> of August, the Red Army could announce its troops had had to leave Smolensk. The Soviet soldiers had held the town a month longer than the German officers had calculated when their first tanks had arrived in front of the city.

In the northern sector, the Germans passed the River Duna, took Dünaburg and Riga, passed through Latvia and Estonia. These victories took only a few days, for the regions were not strongly defended. The German troops reached the outskirts of Tallin on the 8<sup>th</sup> of August. The German plan undeniably was from there to push on to Leningrad, to grab all the Baltic harbours, and to destroy the Red Army forces of the north. General Voroshilov commanded these last in the triangle Pskov-Narva-Novgorod. Ostrov, Pskov and Porkhov fell by mid-July, opening also that territory to the German troops. The Soviet soldiers remained in an area between Lake Perpius and the Narva in the west, Lake Ilmen and the Valdai mountains in the east. The Soviet divisions moved to the Narva River, defending all the time as strongly as they could. The ultimate aim here of the German armies was clearly the large city of Leningrad.

In the southern sector, the Soviets lost Berdichev and Jitomir, principal defence points of the Stalin Line in front of Kiev. The defence system of the Red Army was crumbling! By the end of July, the German troops stood at 200 kilometres of Kiev, threatening Odessa.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of July, the Rumanian troops had taken the harbour of Akerman. Then, they had cleared the right banks of the Dniestr and conquered entire Bessarabia.

In the Ukraine, however, as now also in the other sectors, the German soldiers advanced less slowly. The Battle for Smolensk had cost many soldiers and much war material. The *Wehrmacht* seemed to be in need of rest before a new leap forward.

The first phase of the massive German assault had delivered in all about 895,000 Red Army prisoners, over 13,100 tanks, over 10,300 canons and 9,000 airplanes. And yet, these impressive results of the first phase of the operation had not delivered the political results hoped for in Berlin and Berchtesgaden!

After two months of continuous battles, the German officers realised they needed a third offensive! Their air force launched raids on Moscow, Odessa and other very important centres of the USSR.

The third German land offensive started at the beginning of August 1941. The attacks were launched especially in the north and in the south. The centre had advanced too far. It had created a bulge in the direction of Moscow. This advance might have become vulnerable on the flanks. The alignment with the 2 sides had to be made, permitting more support of the central thrust.

A large effort of the German Army went into the Ukraine. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of August, the front before Kiev was broken by the German troops at Bialaga-Zherkov. A long and bloody battle was fought at Ouman. It ended to the advantage of the Germans. These battles opened the Ukraine to the German troops. It was impossible to take the immense city of Kiev from the front. The Germans therefore moved as fast as they could over the immense plains of the Ukraine to occupy the territories west of the River Dniepr. This trust isolated Odessa. The German soldiers took the industrial complex of Krivoï-Rogg on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August, east of Kiev. On its northern flank, this movement was protected by the Dniepr, over which the German armies could attack Kiev from behind.

After the Battle of Ouman, the advance of the German troops in the direction of the Black Sea and Dniepropetrovsk too was impressive. It happened along the eastern banks of the Bug. The troops consisting of Italian and Hungarian units, as well as German troops, arrived at the harbour of Nikolaïevsk, thus isolating the large naval base of Odessa.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of August, the German troops occupied Kherson and Otkakov and the territories lying west of the large land there of the Dniepr. Only the lanes situated between Cherkassy and the marches of Pripet, west of Kiev, remained in Soviet hands. Moreover, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of August, the German army of the centre had taken the town of Gomel, a large communication centre northeast of Kiev.

In the north, meanwhile, the German soldiers advanced on the two sides of Lake Perpius in the direction of Narva. More to the east, they had taken Kingisepp and Novgorod, north of Lake Ilmen. On the more northern side still, northeast of Lake Ladoga, in Carelia, the Russian positions had been annihilated. Leningrad was threatened from the south and from the north. The Russian High Command understandably judged the loss of its second capital Leningrad more important than the loss of Kiev. The pressure of the Germans on the capital of Peter the Great had to be alleviated. Leningrad had to be more strongly defended! Stalin gave the order to hold Leningrad at all cost. Marshal Voroshilov used all men, women and children to block all accesses to the city, the accesses which could be used by the German troops to enter the city.

At that time, General Timoshenko was preparing a large offensive against the invading troops.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of August 1941, the German troops won an important success when they succeeded in taking Veliki-Zuki, a large railway centre on the lines of Leningrad-Odessa and Moscow-Riga. The day before, the Soviet troops had to abandon Dniepropetrovsk, after having exploded a world-famous barrage on the Dniepr. They took Berislav southward. The next day, Reval, the capital of Estonia fell. This gave the Germans the control over the Gulf of Finland, where the Russian fleet had sought refuge, and at which end lay Leningrad. The Fins announced the capture of Vyborg, the centre of the Soviet resistance in Carelia. Lastly, the Germans cut at several places the railway line Moscow-Leningrad, vital for the provisioning of Leningrad.

The German Army had no interest in keeping hundreds of thousands of Soviet prisoners alive. Tens of thousands of Soviets were taken to concentration camps in Germany and killed there by firing squads. No pardon was given to Red Army soldiers who gave themselves up in the first weeks of the campaign.

The German armies did not treat the Soviet soldiers taken prisoner as human beings. Prisoners soon after their surrender looked like walking skeletons. The prisoners had to walk to improvised camps. Field Marshal Walter von Reichenau ordered his guards to shoot all prisoners who collapsed. Other prisoners-of-war were transported in open railway cars to the camps. In November 1941, 1,000 of 5,000 prisoners in a train transport from Army Group Centre froze to death. Between 25 to 70% of the prisoners died en route from lack of food. No preparations had been made for dealing with such huge numbers of prisoners, hence no food, no medication. German guards used inmates as target practice. The prisoners were lice-ridden, typhus reigned. The Soviets walked in summer uniforms in the bitter cold. Cases of

Cannibalism happened. Over 300,000 Red Army prisoners had died by the end of 1941. Most had been left to starve.

By the end of October 1941, the German authorities began to realise Soviet prisoners could be used as forced labour. Measures were taken to provide proper, though still barely adequate food, clothing and shelter for them. In January 1942, a large number of them were still living in dugouts. These conditions deteriorated again in 1943. Over the whole course of the war, German forces took about 5.7 million Soviet prisoners. Official German records mention 3,900,000 died by the time the war was over (58%). The actual number was probably higher. In comparison, the Soviet troops took about 2 million German prisoners, mostly in the later stages of the war. About 356,700 did not survive. The death rate among the German prisoners was about 18%. The percentage of British, French, and other soldiers in German captivity had equally below 20% of casualties.

The deaths in Soviet camps were understandable, as massive destructions had been caused by the war, and bad harvests followed in the post-war period. The German deaths happened due to the dire situation of the Soviet Union at that time, rather than by any particular spirit of revenge towards the Germans. No evidence exists that German prisoners were treated differently from other prisoners in Soviet camps, though subjected to programmes of political re-education.

Red Army prisoners in German hands, on the other hand, perished as direct consequences of Nazi racial doctrines, shared by the overwhelming majority of the German officer corps. Few German officers protested against the maltreatment of Soviet POWs. One who did, was Field Marshal Fedor von Bock, leading Army Group Centre. Hitler insisted on the fact that Soviet prisoners of war were not to be treated as ordinary soldiers, but as racial and ideological enemies.

German prisoners, Soviets, were eventually liberated and returned to the Soviet Union. They were well over 1.5 million men. But Stalin equated surrender with treason! After Stalin's death, Marshal Georgi Zhukov tried to end the discrimination against former POWs, but they were not formally rehabilitated until 1994.

At 03h30 of 22 June 1941, the Chief of the Red Army General Staff, Georgi Zhukov, telephoned Stalin in his dacha. Stalin refused to believe a full-scale invasion was under way. Later in the morning, the German ambassador Count Friedrich Werner von der Schulenburg met Foreign Minister Molotov in the Kremlin to hand over the declaration of war. Stalin recognised he had been duped by Hitler. End June, Stalin returned to his dacha, saying, 'Everything is lost. I give up. Lenin founded the state, and I've fucked it up.' Stalin did not address the Soviet people, not even talked to his subordinates, not even answered the phone. In the first weeks, the Germans fought stunning military victories indeed.

On 23 June 1941, Hitler travelled to his field headquarters at Rastenburg in East Prussia. This consisted of a number of bunkers and huts, camouflaged from the air. It had dining facilities, and conference rooms, an airstrip and a railway line. Hitler called it the 'Wolf's Lair'.

On 8 July 1941, Hitler could tell Goebbels the war in the east was in the main already won. Franz Halder noted the Red Army appeared to have no more reserves to throw into the battle. On 16 July 1941, Hitler held a meeting to make arrangements for the governance of the

conquered territories. He put in nominal charge of the occupied territories Alfred Rosenberg, the Nazi Party's chief ideologue, a man of Baltic origins. Hitler, however, removed the Army, as well as Himmler's SS and Göring's *Four Year Plan* organisation from Rosenberg. He insisted on ruthless subjugation, deportation or murder of millions of inhabitants in the occupied areas, rather than their co-optation into a new Nazi general order. Erich Koch, the Regional Leader of East Prussia, was to lead the Reich Commissariat of the Ukraine, with a brief to be as hard and brutal as possible. The Head of the Baltic States and the General Commissar of Belarus, Heinrich Lose and Wilhelm Kube, were too weak and corrupt, so that in the end they were widely disregarded, as Rosenberg himself. Even more in Poland, the SS was allowed more or less to do what it wanted.

The war was sold to the German people as the decisive phase in the war against Jewish Bolshevism. As a preventive measure, it had been designed to forestall a Soviet assault on Germany.

In Moscow, Stalin set up a Defence Committee, with Stalin himself as chairman. He spoke to the Soviet people over the radio. He acted as a patriotic leader. His message was a patriotic appeal. People heard of the bitter realities of the German occupation.

When the city of Kursk fell, the Germans arrested all the healthy male inhabitants, put them into open, barbed-wire enclosures without food and water, and put them to work. They were guarded in their camps by German soldiers wielding rubber truncheons.

Other cities were deliberately starved of supplies by the German troops, who requisitioned the bulk of the foodstuffs for themselves. The population of Kiev immediately fell to half, from 600,000 people to 300,000. Looting by German troops was widespread. The German soldiers' behaviour quickly alienated even people who had initially welcomed the Germans as liberators from Stalin's tyranny. Huge quantities of supplies were stolen. Women, in despair, turned to prostitution. In some areas, the incidence of venereal diseases among German soldiers reached a rate of 10%. There were 200 official army brothels for the soldiers in the east. Such measures did little to alleviate the situation.

The German armies applied an active reprisal policy. German Army units raided Ukrainian, Belarussian and Russian villages, burning the houses and shooting the inhabitants for even the smallest supposed act of sabotage.

Senior Army officers were generally contemptuous of the civilian population of Russia. The inhabitants of the country seemed bestial, Asiatic, dull and fatalistic, or cunning and without honour. The Germans saw dirt and tremendous poverty everywhere. German troops burned villages to the ground and shot civilians by the thousands.

By the end of the year, however, the Germans began to feel and suffer from escalating partisan resistance and a dramatic recovery of the fighting effectiveness of the Red Army. By the end of 1941, the Soviet groundwork had been laid for a more effective response to the German invasion.

As one of these measures in Russia, 14 million reservists were created by the universal conscription law of 1938. More than 5 million reservists were now quickly mobilised within a few weeks. Most of the new divisions had nothing more than rifles to fight with, as this was a relocation of huge proportions. Factories were dismantled and transported to safety east of the Ural Mountains. The organisation of all this was held by a special Relocation Council.

The organisation took huge proportions, but the work was done. For instance, 8,000 freight cars were employed on the removal of metallurgical facilities, to the newly industrial centre of Magnitogorsk in the Urals. From July to November 1941, 1,360 arms and ammunition factories were transferred eastwards, using 1.5 million railway wagons. What could not be taken was sabotaged or destroyed. Stalin had ordered the scorched-earth policy. But the Red Army had to fight the war in the winter of 1941 to 1942 largely with existing equipment.

From September 1941 on, more than 390,000 ethnic Germans in the Ukraine were forcibly deported eastwards. For instance, 50,000 ethnic Germans were removed from the Lower Volga area. By the end of 1941, up to more than 1,200,000 ethnic Germans had been deported to Siberia and other remote areas. About 175,000 died as a result of police brutality, starvation or disease. Many of these men spoke even no German! Up to half a million Chechens and other Caucasian minorities were removed for allegedly having collaborated with the Germans.

As the German forces advanced, the Soviet Secret Police systematically murdered all the political prisoners in the jails that stood in the path of the German troops. For example, at the prison of Luck, up to 4,000 German prisoners were machine-gunned. In the Western Ukraine and in Western Belarus, 100,000 prisoners were shot, bayoneted, or killed by hand-grenades thrown in the cells.

Then, finally, the Soviet Army began to resist. The German military leaders quickly realised that the war was not going to end in a few weeks after all. Army Groups Centre had managed to encircle huge numbers of Soviet soldiers, but north and south the Red Army had merely been driven back. The German advance slowed down. The Red Army brought in new reserves, and started to mount successful counter-attacks on a local basis. Before the end of July, Field Marshal Fedor von Bock was forced to deal with repeated counter-attacks.

On 10 July 1941, Soviet counter-attacks happened around Smolensk, on the road from Minsk to Moscow. They were launched by the Soviet Generals Zhukov and Timoshenko to disrupt the advance of General Heinz Guderian's *Panzer* Group towards Moscow. Guderian became seriously worried of the development of *Operation Barbarossa*. The Soviet resistance failed, but it slowed down the Germans and inflicted heavy losses of men and equipment to Guderian's forces. The Russians had become suddenly unexpectedly tough!

End July 1941, the Germans had lost more than 65,000 soldiers. The Russians had gathered huge reserve units east of the Dniepr, from which fresh troops were constantly being moved to the front. The Soviet Union was the *Third Reich*'s first serious opponent with sheer inexhaustible resources. The Soviet Union had vast economic, organisational and transport reserves. The Germans had reckoned at the outset of the war with about 200 Russian divisions. Now they were already counting 360 enemy divisions! The new Soviet units were often poorly led, badly armed and equipped in the German sense, but there they were! The German troops were suffering heavy losses, as by end July, 10% of the German invasion force was dead, wounded or missing. The Red Army could draw on vast reserves, whereas the German forces had already used up most of their manpower available and they had few fresh troops to throw into the fray.

In late July, Guderian took control of the land between the Duna and the Dniepr, but he had to leave gaps in his defences. The Red Army launched a series of counter-attacks that gave von Bock serious cause of concern about the slowly declining fighting value of his soldiers. He had to notice issues in his logistics of supplies. The Russian roads were full of potholes, which led to degrading truck transport. Railways with another, a broader gauge, was difficult for the rolling stock of the Germans, and the Russians had removed all the Soviet locomotives and wagons. They had destroyed or sabotaged tracks, bridges and viaducts. German Jeep and truck production was still relatively low. The Germans began to suffer from shortage of fuel. The Germans had to rely heavily on horses: 625,000 of them had been brought on the Eastern Front. The horses died in their thousands from exhaustion, lack of fodder, and tremendous exertions. The German *Luftwaffe* too was near exhaustion. Only 1,000 airplanes were still in operation. The *Luftwaffe* had too few bombers to inflict significant damage to Soviet war production. The expanse of Russia was too vast! Stuka dive bombers were extremely vulnerable to attacks from Russian fighter planes. The Dornier 17 and the Junkers 88 lacked the range to be effective against Soviet installations.

The German casualties until then rose to over 213,000 soldiers. The rest was exhausted. On 30 July 1941, the German Army Supreme Command ordered the advance to pause and regroup. Little more than a month after it had all begun, the German invasion began to lose its momentum. By the autumn of 1941, the German advance could not resume on the 3 fronts together. They had to make a choice and limit their targets. These became in the north to advance on Leningrad, in the centre on Moscow, and in the south to Kiev.

## The Siege of Leningrad

On 21 August 1941, Hitler ordered the generals to divert forces from Army Group Centre to strengthen the attack in the south, to Kiev and the Crimea, to deprive the Soviets of a possible base for air attacks on the Rumanian oilfields.

The generals did not like the shift of focus, but the diversion of forces to the south did not stop Guderian in the centre. Guderian repelled a massive counter-offensive launched in late August to early September, and he captured a further 665,000 prisoners, 884 tanks and more than 3,000 artillery pieces. It was at that moment almost mid-September 1941. In less than six weeks would start the Russian winter. The autumn rains would introduce the bad season. The *Luftwaffe* attacked Leningrad massively, the city, as well as the fortified place of Kronstadt. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of September, the German troops arrived at the exterior fortifications of the former Russian capital. On the 9<sup>th</sup>, The German troops passed the Nerva and took the ancient fortress of Schlüsselburg. More than 4 million civilians and soldiers were prisoners of the surrounded city. Leningrad had accumulated provisions to live on, but the city seemed doomed.

The siege of Leningrad began on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September 1941. Four million Russians, under the leadership of General Voroshilov, worked together at the resistance of the second town of the Soviet Union. The *Führer* had given the orders to capture the city at any cost. The German armies launched assault after assault.

Since the beginning of September, General Timoshenko had thrown several armoured divisions in the direction of Smolensk. Bloody combats happened south-east of the city. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of September, the Soviet troops reconquered Yelma and the German soldiers suffered heavy losses. As a result, the *Wehrmacht* was forced to release somewhat the pressure their troops exerted in the northern theatre of operations. The German High Command had to send on the front of Smolensk troops that could have been used on the Nerva to help the assaults on Leningrad. In the south too, fierce battles were taking place. The German Army continued to advance in the direction of Briansk and on the Black Sea. Though encircled, the port of Odessa resisted still the assaults of the German-led Axis troops.

After the weeks of attacks and painstaking advances, the German troops seemed to get immobilised. The Soviets had adapted their tactics to the modern ways of attacking of the German troops. Hitler insisted to end the war in the east by bringing the Soviet armies to their knees. So, in view of the ferocious resistance at Leningrad, the German High Command decided to give priority to the southern front in Russia. Marshal Boudieny led the Soviet troops in the south. He had apparently not demonstrated the same tactical qualities as Timoshenko had. He had merely moved his army in the retreat.

The German *Wehrmacht* envisaged once more one of their encircling manoeuvres, for which they were famous by now. They held the right banks of the Dniepr, at hundreds of kilometres east of Kiev. The northern and southern German forces had to join and strangle Kiev! Such a movement had already happened, but General Boudieny had been able to stop the attack. He knew very well the defences of Kiev would be difficult to take. His troops made frequent incursions on the right banks of the stream to try to disorganise the Germans, and to prevent these from building bridges over the water.

The Germans were trying to pass the Dniepr at Kremenchug, over a front of 120 kilometres. Despite the fierce resistance of the Soviet troops, the German soldiers led by von Rundstedt advanced to Mirgorod, an important centre for the railway provisioning of Kiev with the oil necessary to the defenders of Kiev. Simultaneously, the troops of General von Bock had passed the River Desna and moved south, to cut off the railway line Kiev-Kursk, the last open line that could be used to provision the city.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of September, the German columns effectuated their junction at 200 kilometres of Kiev, surrounding the right flank of General Boudieny's forces. Boudieny had been surprised by the speed of the German movement. The German troops rolled into Kiev. After a period of heroic defence, the German troops could take the city. The fall of the religious capital of the Ukraine came hard for the Russian troops! It meant several elite divisions were made prisoners, and the loss of much war material weighed heavy in the balance of forces.

In the north, however, Colonel-General Busch won a fine victory south of lake Ilmen. He could occupy the island of Oesel in the Baltic. But in the south, where the Dniepr was several kilometres wide, the Axis troops had still succeeded in traversing the river! They eliminated all Russian opposition on the left bank, and advanced at full speed to the Sea of Azov, through the steppes, without any opposition. They reached the Sea of Azov, having cut the Crimea from the rest of Russia. Poltava had been taken the same day as Kiev. At 200 kilometres from these lay Kharkov. The rich industrial basin of Donetsk lay practically open to the German troops. Yet further lay the Volga and Stalingrad! The encirclement of Kiev,

meanwhile, was complete and tight! When finally, Kiev fell to the Germans, General von Rundstedt could announce the capture of 655,000 prisoners!

In the German centre, the troops started to suffer as much as the Russians. The Soviet General Timoshenko held his positions and even counter-attacked! Farther on, the Soviets could barr the advance of the German troops before Kharkov and Zaporozja. In the extreme south, the Red Army had escaped inside the Crimea. The port of Sevastopol was crucial to the Soviets. It was the only base of the Red Fleet in the Black Sea and hence controlled that sea! The harbour lay at the tip of the Crimean peninsula, protected by the Soviet Black Sea Fleet. Sevastopol was strongly defended, with fortifications of artillery and bunkers. The Soviet Coastal Army led by Major General Ivan Petrov held about 100,000 Soviet troops in the fortifications!

The Crimea was also a thorn in the side of the Germans, holding them up to progress beyond Melitopol without the risk of feeling the Soviets from the Crimea in their backs. Hitler had to decide for the German troops to enter the Crimea and annihilate the Russian troops there. He sent his troops on. The battle was hard. The German leaders used parachutists in great numbers to fall in the back of the Russian troops. The Soviet soldiers had to surrender in early October. The full conquest of the Crimea would take many more months of constant efforts of fighting and sacrifices.

On the other fronts too, the Soviet troops now resisted with success. A new front had been established on the stretch Roslav-Kharkov-Mariupol. The resistance there to the German advance was very tenacious.

By the 25<sup>th</sup> of September 1941, in Leningrad, the German troops had taken Peterhof. Farther on, although constantly bombed by German airplanes, the Russian defenders held stubbornly on to their ground. At places, they counter-attacked and used the heaviest canons of the navy to fend off the German troops. In Carelia, the first snow began to fall. The winter would be precocious this year!

Hitler had to use the last weeks of autumn to force decisions at Leningrad and Moscow. He pronounced a long speech of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 1941, saying the *Wehrmacht* had launched a new offensive. The attack started between the mountains of Valdai and Roslav, in the centre. Two million German soldiers, 5,000 tanks and 5,000 airplanes were unleashed against the enemy's defences. The Germans drew on against Briansk and Viazma, important points on the roads Rjev-Kharkov. The Germans surrounded the towns on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October and captured them. The German's south columns entered Orel and the northern column approached the line of Moscow to Leningrad. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of October, the armoured German divisions took Mojaisk at 100 kilometres from Moscow! Other columns took Kalinin and had entered Klin. In the south, Kalouga fell, The troops reached Riazan on the Oka. The German encirclement of Moscow began to close.

At the same time, on the Sea of Azov, the Soviet front between Zaporozja and Melitopol had been breached. The Donetsk Basin lay open to the Germans. The situation in Moscow seemed desperate! The Russian troops had already evacuated the children from the capital. The Government and the ministers received the order to move to Kerybichev on the Volga. The German *Luftwaffe* bombed now almost constantly Moscow. Stalin asked the population to join in the defence.



On the 16<sup>th</sup> of October, the town of Odessa fell to the German troops after having resisted for three months. The German tanks pierced through the exterior defences of Moscow and advanced irresistibly to the Kremlin. In the south, the German forces reached Malo-Yaroslavets.

At that moment, Stalin called into the defence of Moscow 3 of the reserve divisions that had arrived only hours earlier. These troops succeeded in cutting the front-guards of the German soldiers off from the rest of the enemy army. They encircled them and destroyed them! Moscow had been saved! The city had also been saved by the snow, which had begun to fall copiously. The fighting continued furiously around Moscow. Battles also happened anew in Malo-Yaroslavets and in Kalinin. The German soldiers did all they could to break through the new Russian defences of troops, but they could not move up much against the wall of steel and fire that stood in their way. At Kalinin, the Germans did not even get beyond the Volga, and not beyond the canal of Moscow to the Volga. In Volokolansk, to Mojaïsk, Malo-Yaroslavets and Serpukhov, heavy fighting was on. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November, the *Wehrmacht* tried another attack to force their way past the Russian defences. But the Soviet artillery did wonders. They crushed the German assault columns and opened breaches in the German advance, so that their own infantry could once more occupy the terrain. Thousands of soldiers died without tangible results, except that the German troops had been stopped.

On 12 October 1941, Stalin had ordered 400,000 experienced soldiers with 1,000 tanks and 1,000 airplanes westward across Siberia into positions behind Moscow, replacing them with newly recruited soldiers to deter the Japanese.

Von Bock esteemed the move was very bad for the German troops. On 15 November 1941, the roads were frozen, bad enough for von Bock to resume his advance. To within 30 kilometres of Moscow. The Moscow-Volga Canal was cut off. It began to snow, temperatures to -34°C on the night of 4 December 1941. The German troops had inadequate clothing and they could not pass the winter in a shielded environment, such as in a large town. German equipment was freezing. The next night it froze to -40C!

Woollen and fur clothing was confiscated from the German Jews in late December 1941. The cases of frostbite among the German soldiers augmented. Winter had come, and yet the Germans were still encamped on the open steppe. They could not think of washing or changing their clothes. The Germans were dirty and venomous, swarming with lice. They suffered from suppurating wounds from the eternal scratching and scraping, from bladder and bowel infections caught from lying on the cold ground. The Soviet soldiers, on the other hand, had warm winter uniforms. They deployed ski battalions to move swiftly over snow-covered ground, light cavalry to pass over waterlogged terrain impassable to tanks.

On 5 December 1941, Zhukov ordered a counter-attack to eliminate the danger of Moscow being surrounded. Two days later, General Von Bock was facing 24 more Red Army divisions than in mid-November! His armies fought without supplies, weakened in numbers, lacking reserve forces. Weary and exhausted, the Germans could not hold. Hitler ordered to halt the advance. Wild blizzards brought down the Germans' telephone lines and blocked the roads. Only one railway line was available to serve the German retreat. Roads were blocked with immobilised tanks and vehicles.

Smaller Russian counter-attacks took place in the far north, at Tikhvin, and in the south near Rostov. These prevented the Germans from moving in reinforcements. Tanks ran out of fuel.

Ammunitions and rations were in short supply. On 16 December 1941, Zhukov ordered a full advance to the west.

In just ten days, the situation for the Germans had become desperate. The Russian advance was unstoppable. A chaotic retreat instead of an orderly retreat then waited on the German troops. This was the first major upheaval in the senior ranks of the German forces during the war.

The Germans were unable to force the Russian barrier! They tried at their flanks, at Kalinin and Tula, and they took Kursk on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November, but they did not get any closer to Moscow. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of November, it was the 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the revolution. Stalin could announce to the Soviet Council that the Germans had not succeeded in taking Moscow. Neither had it been able for the enemy to take Leningrad.

The Soviets had suffered 950,000 soldiers killed, a million men had been wounded and 378,000 men had simply disappeared. The German losses in the battles were estimated by the Russians at more than 4 million men, an impossible number. Leningrad and Moscow stood and held, free. The Battle of Moscow had been won by the Soviet armies.

In the south, the German troops had more success. They had broken the defence line of from Melitopol to Zaporozha. The German columns advanced to the Don. There lay the coal basins of Donetz, the richest mines of the Soviet Union. Farther on, lay the so-coveted Caucasus oil sources. The Germans remained immobilised by the cold and by the heavy Soviet resistance in the north. The German Command launched a new offensive! Their troops advanced on Kharkov. In the meantime, General Timoshenko had replaced Boudieny at the head of the Soviet armies of the south. His forces defended Kharkov. Melitopol fell to the Germans on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October. The Germans accelerated still their advance along the Sea of Azov. On the 15<sup>th</sup> and on the 20<sup>th</sup> October fell Mariupol and other Ukrainian towns. The German troops advanced also on Stalino, took it and occupied it since the 21<sup>st</sup> of October. More in the north, other German columns, which had won the battles of Dniepropetrovsk and Krasnograd, tried to pass Kharkov by the south-east. The battle for the town raged. The Soviet troops had to leave Kharkov on the 24<sup>th</sup> of October.

The German generals had not liked the shift of focus ordered by Hitler, but the diversion of forces to the south did not stop Guderian in the centre. Guderian had repelled a massive counter-offensive launched in late August and early September, and he captured a further 665,000 prisoners, 884 tanks and more than 3,000 artillery pieces.

In late September and October, Kiev and Kharkov were occupied by German troops. In November, German forces took Rostov-on-the-Don. They opened the prospect of cutting off oil supplies to the Red Army from the Caucasus, and of harnessing the industrial resources of the Donetz basin.

The German casualties stood then at nearly 400,000 men. Half the German tanks were out of commission or under repair. Hitler thought Stalin was now bound to sue for peace, and that would also bring Great Britain to the negotiation table. He again strengthened the Army Group Centre. More forces from the north came, for a resumption of the march on Moscow. In October 1941, 2 million German soldiers, 2,000 tanks, massive air power arrived for von Bock's offensive on the Soviet capital, on Moscow. This was the German *Operation Typhoon*. But von Bock's troops were tired, his units depleted, his supplies intermittent, his

equipment not fitted for a winter campaign. Von Bock had fatally underestimated the strength of the enemy, as Hitler had.

By October 1941, as von Bock had feared, the Soviet leadership had rethought and reorganised its whole way of conducting the war. Dimitri Pavlov, the commander of the Red Army on the western front was tried by a summary court-martial and shot. Stalin began to realise that persuasion, not violence, should be used to motivate the troops. He allowed his commanders greater freedom of action in their campaigns. He refused the evacuation of Moscow. On 10 October 1941, Stalin appointed General Georgi Zhukov to command the armies defending the capital. Zhukov had about 1 million soldiers, now. General von Bock pushed rapidly on to Moscow. Panic broke out in the city. Then, the rains came.

Guderian told von Bock he had to order a pause in the advance. He had found stiff enemy resistance, and he had noticed the indescribable state of the roads, which resembled merely mud tracks. Guderian's troops got bogged down, with broken motor vehicles, hopelessly stuck in the mud. His army moved and then slowed, because of the many dead horses. In late October, the German armies stuck in the mud and were immobilised for 3 weeks.

On 19 October 1941, Zhukov put 9 Soviet reserve armies in place behind the River Volga. These were mere raw recruits and men rejected previously, but still, they were 900,000 men! Moreover, Richard Sorge, Stalin's spy in Tokyo, convinced Stalin on 18 October that the Japanese were not going to attack Russia. Stalin could draw Siberian forces to the region of Moscow.

The German troops continued to ram at the Soviet front about everywhere. Kramatorsk fell on the 28<sup>th</sup> of October, Kursk on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November. On the Sea of Azov, at the town of Rostov, the Red Army tried to stop the German Army. More to the south, the Soviet lines in front of the Crimea had been broken. The invasion of the Crimea could begin. The Germans still advanced rapidly. They took Simferopol on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November. The Russians retreated to Kertch and Sevastopol. Yalta and Theodosia had been taken by the Germans almost without resistance on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of November, the German armoured troops entered Kertch, from where the Russians had already fled to Tauran. Only this piece of land in the sea separated still the Germans from Kuban, from the Caucasus and from the so precious oilfields.

It would be in the Crimea as elsewhere. The *Wehrmacht* urgently needed winter quarters. But these had to be conquered!

In the extreme north, a German offensive against Murmansk had been pushed back. At Leningrad, the Soviet troops tried to breach the ring of German steel, especially to the east, to be able to continue provisioning the city from this side. The Soviet troops regained Malaïa-Vichera there, on the Moscow-Leningrad railway link. They fought for the town of Tikhvin on the Vologda-Leningrad Line.

The German troops meanwhile, also tried to take Leningrad. But Kalinin, Klin, Solnetchnogorsk, Volokolansk, Mojaïsk, Serpukhov, Tula, all places around Leningrad proper, remained in the hands of the Soviet troops. The last German success that autumn had been the taking of Rostov on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November. With this town and with Kertch, the

*Wehrmacht* had now two excellent bases from which to continue after the winter their campaign to reach the Caucasus.

The first phase of the German campaign in Russia thus ended, after 5 months of gigantic, continuous struggles. The German troops had not been able to take Leningrad, Moscow and Murmansk. The Russian winter began! Germany had not gained the large, quick, decisive victories it had hoped for.

The Germans were now facing a war of attrition far from home, amid a hostile population and against an enemy that had still manpower reserves double those of Germany. Six months after the invasion of *Barbarossa*, about 1 million square miles, about 50 to 60 million Russians, meaning from 1/3<sup>rd</sup> to 1/4<sup>th</sup> of the Russian population was subdued. The Germans had killed 4 million Russian soldiers. Still, by 1943, the Soviets had an army ready of 6 to 7 million soldiers, nearly double the size of the then Axis Army on the eastern Front. The impressive initial strength of Germany, its efforts, had proved inadequate, given the magnitude of the task and the geography involved. There was an ancient war law stating that invading forces weaken as they progress, protecting lengthening supply lines, the sloughing off of occupation troops, wearing out men and equipment as distances increased, and running out of time as the famous Russian autumn and winter arrived.

The flaws in *Operation Barbarossa* then surfaced. Germany had attacked with 3 separate Army Groups instead of with a single force to focus on Leningrad and Moscow. The long trajectory to the Volga subverted the 3 separate efforts. Flawed too was the diversion of enormous resources to non-military objectives, which made the conquest far more difficult, the huge military resources devoted to the Final Solution on the Jewish Question. Flawed too had been the unique decision of the Germans to the sudden redeployment of Army Group Centre from its original Moscow route in August 1941 to join Army Group South in its encirclements of Kiev.

Hitler relieved at one time or another the *Wehrmacht*'s most successful commanders: von Bock, Guderian, von Leeb, von Rundstedt and von Manstein. He had 35 Army Corps and division commanders left in December 1941, arguing over tactical decisions. The problem with *Operation Barbarossa* was not so much the diversions and redirection of the German armies under Hitler's influence, as the lack of sufficient manpower for such a vast enterprise in the first place.

Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, commander of the Army Group South, was the first to go. He had ordered to stop the beleaguered armoured divisions of General Ewald von Kleist from withdrawing from the outskirts of Rostov, further than Hitler had been prepared to allow. Fearing they would be encircled, von Rundstedt refused to drive on. Von Rundstedt was fired on 1 December 1941, to be replaced by Field Marshal Walter von Reichenau. Later, Hitler conceded that von Rundstedt had been right, but he did not re-instate von Rundstedt. On 17 January 1942, von Reichenau died of a heart attack under severe mental and physical strain. Early December, von Rundstedt also had suffered a heart attack, but not a fatal one. Von Bock too suffered from over-exertion, *the Russian Sickness*. On 16 December 1941 he asked Hitler to go on sickness-leave. Von Bock left the troops on 19 December 1941. Hitler gave the new Command of Army Group Centre to Field Marshal Günther von Kluge.

On 16 December 1941, Hitler accepted the resignation of Field Marshal Walter von Brauchitsch, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army. He too had suffered a heart attack in mid-November. Hitler decided he would not replace him with another general, but by himself! He took over the directions of the military operations. The German marshals breathed a sigh of relief, as the responsibility for getting the German Army out of the mess before Moscow had been taken from their shoulders.

Hitler ordered reinforcements to be brought in from the west, and told the troops on the Eastern Front to hold their positions. He repeatedly ordered to stand firm, when all this brought a repeated danger of being surrounded by the Soviet armies. The German generals' blind insistence on attack all through the autumn and early winter of 1941, their failure to prepare defensive positions for overwintering, their naïve optimism in the face of what they knew to be a determined and well-equipped enemy, their studious refusal to draw the consequences from the increased tiredness of their own soldiers, the growing difficulties of supplies, the failure of much of their equipment in the bitter cold, brought them to a situation by December, where they were paralysed by despair and indecision, thus unable to conclude *Operation Barbarossa*. Hitler stabilised the situation, and that increased his contempt for them.

Field Marshal Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb, in command of Army Group North, visited Hitler on 12 January 1942 to ask him to withdraw from some positions he thought were indefensible. Hitler refused. Von Leeb handed in his resignation, which was accepted on 16 January 1942. Von Leeb's replacement was Georg von Küchler. Halder told him he was expected to follow Hitler's orders.

Whom the Gods wish to destroy, they first make them blind.

General Heinz Guderian met Hitler on 20 December 1941, to plead for permission to retreat. Hitler told him to dig in and fight. But the ground was frozen solid 5 feet deep, answered Guderian. Then the troops would have to sacrifice themselves, Hitler retorted. Von Kluge and Halder backed Hitler, and saw an opportunity. Guderian disobeyed Kluge's express command and led a major withdrawal. On 26 December 1941, Guderian too was dismissed. General Erich Hoepner, a courageous tank commander, equally requested permission to withdraw. Von Kluge ordered him to prepare an immediate retreat. Thinking the retreat was accepted, Hoepner began moving the troops out on the afternoon of 8 January 1942. Appalled and terrified at what Hitler might think, von Kluge reported the action to Hitler. Hitler dismissed Hoepner immediately from the Army, without a pension.

The Russian attacks finally ran out of steam. Zhukov had pushed the Germans back to the point from which they had launched *Operation Typhoon*, 2 months earlier. The result was that in 1941, 357,000 German soldiers were reported killed or missing in action, over 300,000 of them on the Eastern Front. These were huge losses, that could not be replaced. Moreover, for all their advances since 22 June 1941, the Germans had everywhere failed to achieve their objectives!

From 22 July 1941 on, at least 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the German armed forces was always engaged on the Eastern Front. More people fought and died on and behind the Eastern Front than in all the other theatres of World War II put together. In the end, it would be on the Eastern Front that

the fortunes of the war were decided. Nevertheless, the German armies did not stop and retreat yet!

By fighting in North Africa, Sicily and Italy, while their own homelands remained untouched, the Anglo-American armies got experienced, lethal, and always well-supplied. The Red Army ceased fighting the Japanese Army in 1939, honouring its non-aggression agreement with the Japanese of April 1941. The Soviet armies could dedicate all their forces against the Axis forces in Europe.

The British and American forces could now give some thought to peeling off rings of the new Japanese land and maritime empire, mostly by using their amphibious ground forces to cut off supply lines to Japan and to secure naval and air bases critical to the support of an eventual invasion on the Japanese mainland.

The large, non-stop offensive of the British RAF on Germany began on the 12<sup>th</sup> June of 1941 by the violent bombing of the Ruhr Region, Duisburg, Ruhrort, and Köln, Düsseldorf and Bremen with high-explosive and incendiary bombs. The first offensive lasted for 18 consecutive nights. The RAF airplanes bombed Berlin on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August. The bombings also occupied fighter squadrons the Germans could have well used in Russia. As of the 1<sup>st</sup> of September, the bombings intensified over Hamburg and Stettin.

### The War in North Africa as of November 1941

The British rearranged their armies in Africa and in the Near East. One army held Syria. Another held Palestine and yet another (the 8<sup>th</sup> Army) defended Egypt. The British still held Tobruk. The British General Auchinleck launched a new offensive as of the 18<sup>th</sup> of November 1941. General Wavell was then the Commander-in-Chief of all the British forces in Asia. Later, he was promoted to become the Vice-Roy of India.

Rommel had remained in a favourable situation. He could have defeated the entire British forces in the Near East by November 1941. But the German General Staff, the Generals Franz Halder and Friedrich Paulus found Rommel a pain! Rommel was considered an exasperating man to his staff officers, but his fighting troops worshipped him. Rommel's logistics depended on the harbour of Tobruk. And he had to rely on Hitler's willingness to give him more than just 2 divisions! Rommel could not persuade Hitler to let him rush on! Rommel pleaded he had the ability now to take Suez, thus to cut off the British from their Middle-East oil and to turn the Mediterranean back into an Axis lake. The answer was: no new, additional divisions!

The British 8<sup>th</sup> Army Corps of Auchinleck turned around the defences of Halfaya-Fort Capuzzo and led his troops then from about 50 kilometres from the coast to Tobruk. It isolated the enemy forces. The 30<sup>th</sup> Corps meanwhile, operated north of Fort Maddalena. This was the other British force in the surrounding manoeuvre. The 2 columns joined at Sidi-Rezegh. The British troops took Sidi-Rezegh after 36 hours of fast advance through the desert. They thus cut Rommel's *Afrika Korps* in two.

Rommel had kept the gros of his tanks in reserve before Tobruk. The British tried to annihilate the encircled German forces, but the Germans resisted with much courage and tenacity. Heavy fighting of tank groups took place in the triangle Capuzzo-Gambut-Bardia. Fort Capuzzo fell on the 21<sup>st</sup> of November 1941.

The Italians and Germans tried to retreat to the north-west, along the coast, to join the largest part of Rommel's troops near Tobruk. The German soldiers had retaken Sidi-Rezegh by the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November. They lost many men on the way. The British garrison of Tobruk meanwhile tried to break out, to join the British column that advanced to their rescue. The rests of the *Afrika Korps* coming from the east and an Italian division that held the sector east of Tobruk, could fear being definitely isolated. A new battle then began around Sidi-Rezegh, desperately defended by the Germans. Rommel sent them reinforcements.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of November 1941, the British infantry and tanks, supported by bombers of the French Free Forces, retook Sidi-Rezegh and made the junction with the garrison of Tobruk. A hard battle started then between the Italian-German forces, which disposed of important reserves, and the British ones.

The British bombers strafed the German and Italian basis of Sicily, of Italy and also the region of Tripoli. They attacked the ships that had to bring ammunition and reinforcements to Rommel's troops. The Axis transports were destroyed.

The Battle of Cyrenaica, of Libya, then entered a crucial phase. A British column had occupied the oasis of Djalo and of Anjila on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November. Another British column reached the sea south of Benghazi.

Erwin Rommel's situation became dangerous. His troops continued to fight, they even counter-attacked and tried to save their surrounded columns in the east. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December, Rommel could cut the extreme south of the corridor of Tobruk and to re-take Sidi Rezegh, so that certain isolated German troops could join his main army. But his losses in men and material were heavy. The battle stopped temporarily.

It started again on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December. On the 8<sup>th</sup>, the British retook Sidi Rezegh for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time! They re-established contact with Tobruk. Three days later, they occupied El-Aden. Rommel had to retreat. He tried to resist on the line of Gazala, where the British arrived on the 12<sup>th</sup>, and then have another order to retreat further. The Allies captured Derna on the 19<sup>th</sup> of December and Benghazi on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Rommel did not try to defend the city and the harbour. He drew back to the south-west. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of December 1941, the British troops arrived in front of Ajedabria, which the Germans defended, waiting for reinforcements to save them. The British Air Force hit these enemy troops so much, the Germans still retreated south on the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 1942, during a violent sandstorm. Bardia surrendered, as did the last German troops still fighting on the Egyptian frontier.

At Tripoli then disembarked strong German reinforcements, with tanks and armoured cars. Rommel might have joined those, but he saw the danger of being surrounded. He preferred the defence before El Agheila. On his left he had the Gulf of Syrte, covered by marshes of salt water. The position lay against the mountains, the crests of which ran to the oasis of Marada. Vast minefields protected the borders of those. Rommel ran into his refuge.

The British soldiers were exhausted as well, and their reinforcements disembarked on the 7<sup>th</sup> of January at Benghazi, arriving too late. El Agheila marked the end of Rommel's offensive.

Rommel had been able to save the largest part of his troops. He had received important reinforcements, which might allow him to restart an offensive in more favourable conditions. Auchinleck had not been able to destroy Rommel's army. The British and Allied troops had not reached Tripoli. The cause of this lack of success was due to the retreat of a part of the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army and on their transfer to the Pacific Ocean. The situation there had taken a catastrophic turn with the loss for the British of Singapore, which endangered Australia. The Australian units, with a complete armoured division, had been sent to India! Auchinleck had thus been stopped by the attacks of Japan, which had entered the World War in full force.

Rommel started a new offensive only a little later. He then had less men than when he began his campaign in North Africa. He received modest re-supplies and support of a growing *Luftwaffe* presence under Field Marshal Kesselring. He began to steadily reclaim all he had lost. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of January 1942, the tanks of the Axis rode out of El Agheila. With these German forces moved the Italian 133<sup>rd</sup> armoured division *Littorio*, which had recently arrived. The German troops were surprised at the weakness of the British defences in front of them. They retook Ajedabia, Saum and Artelat. The British tried to hold their line of Beda Fomm to the Gulf of Syrte. But the German attacks grew in force.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of January, General Auchinleck ordered to abandon Benghazi. Auchinleck gave the defence of Benghazi to the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade, which had to fight a heroic battle to break through the German lines and thus to join the 8<sup>th</sup> British Army at Mekili. Benghazi fell on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January 1942. The Germans reoccupied the territories they had to leave a month earlier, and among which Derna.

The 8<sup>th</sup> British Army retreated. It stopped on the 4<sup>th</sup> of February on a solid defence line south-east of Gazala. Rommel followed, hoping for a decisive battle. But on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February, the British Air Force destroyed his air cover. Rommel then preferred to replenish his provisions. Calm returned on the front for about 3 months!

## The Second Battle for Moscow and the Relieve of Leningrad

The German armies prepared for the Second Battle for Moscow. They assembled no less than 50 divisions, of which 13 were armoured ones, with more than 3,000 pieces of artillery, and about 1,000 airplanes to give the final assault on the Soviet Capital.

The German front followed the line of Kalinin to the Sea of Moscow, Charkoskaïa, Dorokhovo, Naro-Fominsk and more to the south positions somewhat to the west of Sephukov, Alexine, Tula, Bagorditsk, Volovo and Efremov. The point nearest to Moscow of this front lay at 70 kilometres from the centre of the city.

The plan of the German General Staff was to assault head on. In the north, the troops encircling Moscow and Reuza were the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> tank groups. In the south, at Tula and Stalinagorsk waited the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tank Army. By Kline-Dmitrov and Riazan on either end, the circle closed. A last encircling movement, in the centre, was confided to the infantry of Marshal von Bock. The Soviets had prepared for these assaults. Important reserves of soldiers and material had been brought in even to launch a counter-offensive at the moment the German assaults started.



The German offensive began on the 16<sup>th</sup> of November, in the northern sector. The Soviets defended as hard as they could, tenaciously, ferociously, knowing the future of their nation was at stake. The armoured troops of the German Generals Hoth and Hubnet advanced. The Russians constantly harassed them, so that the Germans moved only 6 to 10 kilometres a day. It took these troops 5 days to reach Kline and Istra. When the Russians saw they could not hold a position, they retreated methodically, and disciplined, together, to resist on new positions, obliging the Germans to repeat assaults a little farther. Thus, the German infantry could not rush in forward in any mass movement. The defender of Moscow was Marshal Rokossovsky. Kline fell, then Istra, and Rokossovsky withdrew on the line Kriukovo-Dedovok. This was the last defence of the city!

Farther to the north, the German progress was more rapid and more regular. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of November, the German troops assaulted the Canal of Moscow-Volga, a barrier to the surrounding of the town. The German soldiers moved to the east bank of the canal to avoid being attacked in their turn from the rear. But a bridge had not been blown up in the sector of Takhroma, south of Dmitrov. A battalion of German tanks rolled over this bridge. The Russians then counter-attacked very vigorously, destroyed the enemy unit and retook the bridge. Heavy fighting followed for several days on the canal. The Germans could not pass the canal to the east side! The battle stalled on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December, and the Russians held their terrain on the east of the canal. This was of prime importance for the provisioning of Moscow.

In the centre sector, the German troops found themselves equally up against very tenacious resistance. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of December, von Bock tried a supreme encircling movement, driving on from Novariia and Zvenigorod, aiming at the main road from Moscow to Minsk. On his right, another group passed the Nara and those troops moved north-east. The Russian front was in danger of being cut, as a German column had broken through at Nvaia and had moved in the direction of Aprelevka. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December, also the German offensive by the south-west came to a stop. The German soldiers had to dig themselves in to protect themselves from the waves of attacking Soviet soldiers.

In the south, Tula had been in danger of being taken already since the 30<sup>th</sup> of October. General Guderian had taken Stalniogorsk on the 18<sup>th</sup> of November and Vezev on the 24<sup>th</sup>. He had divided his forces in 3 columns and had then sent them, one to Kachira, the other against Riazan, the 3<sup>rd</sup> north of Tula, which town he wanted to win. Tula was the centre of the Russian defence in the south. It had resisted now for about 3 weeks to all German assaults! Another German troop pushed on to Tula from the north-west. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of December, the situation at Tula became desperate. The garrison had only a small corridor still open to communicate with Kostrov, to stay in contact with the rest of the Soviet armies. But it did not cede, and thus defeated the encircling movement of Moscow by the south. The Germans had arrived at Piatintza, at 7 kilometres from Kachira. If Tula fell, Guderian's left wing would have been liberated, and reached the back of the Russian centre. But as well in the south as in the north, the Soviet troops stopped the German assaults, and saved Moscow.

The Russians launched then their counter-offensive! The Russian troops had waited for the first signs of the waning of the enemy attacks. The 6<sup>th</sup> of December 1941 began the first assault of the right wing of the defence of Moscow. The German attack had been sent in the direction of Takhroma and Kline and Kronai- Poliana-Solnetchogorsk. The German troops

now had to retreat, taken in the north flank by the troops of General Lilioutchenko and in the south by those of General Rokossovsky. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of December, they reached Kline and Vynokovsk by the north, Solnetchnogorsk by the south. The German troops fought to not be surrounded. The Russian troops took Solnetchnogorsk by the 12<sup>th</sup> of December. Kline fell on the 15<sup>th</sup>.

The German soldiers fled in a rout, leaving behind tanks, artillery and provisions. For the Germans, this battle ended in a catastrophe! The Germans retreated and could only regroup on the River Lama, which they fortified in haste. The attack from out of Istra advanced too, and the Germans had been thrown back to Rouza. In 2 weeks, the German soldiers had lost all the ground won in 3 weeks of hard battles. They had to leave behind all their war material of their 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> groups of tanks. Their losses in men too, were staggering, for the fights had developed in the harshness of winter.

On the left wing, the counter-offensive of the Russian troops had started already on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November 1941. The German troops moving to Kachira had been defeated by the Guard Cavalry of the Russian General Below. A few days later, Tula had been relieved by a Russian attack out of Laptevo. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of December, Venez was taken. The Germans retreated to behind the River Chat. The German soldiers tried to stop a general assault at the Don and at the Chat. The Russians defeated the German Army in 2 days of fights. The Red Army then retook Stalinogorsk on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December, Epifan on the 13<sup>th</sup>, Bognoditsk on the 15<sup>th</sup>, and on the 19<sup>th</sup> they entered Plohskoïe on the Plava. The garrison of Tula launched then its own counter-offensive too. The Red Army drew forward west and threw back the routed German groups to the west bank of the Oka. They occupied Alexine.

By the 20<sup>th</sup> of December 1941, the two German army movements on the north and the south of Moscow had suffered terrible losses of men and material. The two Army Groups had practically been annihilated! The front then was established much farther from Moscow: Sea of Moscow to Volokolansk-Rouza-Dorokhovo-Naro-Forminsk-Nara-Alexine-La Plava-Efremov. The Russian advance of 2 weeks of fighting was 100 kilometres in the north of Moscow to 150 kilometres in the south! The German offensive had ended in a disaster. The Russian troops had won an important strategic success.

Eight days after the taking of Rostov, General Timoshenko had also launched a powerful counter-offensive on the Sea of Azov. He passed the Don at night, reconquered the town, killed more than 5,000 German soldiers, and captured tanks, canons and provisions. Very soon, General Timoshenko reoccupied Taganrog. The German General von Kleist abandoned in a hurry the headquarters of Mariupol. The Soviet troops then remained at the Mroirs. In the next days, they abandoned the region north of Rostov, until near Stalino.

Around Leningrad, where the German troops had attempted to starve the city, after a long, confused battle, the Soviet troops retook the town of Tikhvin, so that the great city could be provisioned once more. The Soviet troops had advanced to the railway line Moscow-Leningrad, to widen the breach in their enemy's front, gaining access to Lake Ladoga. The lake was tightly frozen over, so that trucks laden with food could reach Leningrad.

In the centre of the front, in the north and in the south, the initiative in the war thus passed to the Red Army!

At least 1.5 million Soviet-Russian soldiers and Germans died over months of contesting the city of Leningrad's rubble. *Operation Barbarossa* had aimed at taking Leningrad, Moscow and Kiev. The German encirclement of Leningrad lasted about 872 days from its beginning of 8 September 1941 on. The Soviets lost in all about 4 million soldiers killed, wounded or captured in the fighting in and around Leningrad during the siege. As *Operation Barbarossa* began, Army Group North moved at about 30 km a day through the Soviet-occupied Baltic States, covering the first 350 km or so in 2 weeks. Their leader was the anti-Nazi Field Marshal Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb. Von Leeb slowed by mid-July. At early September 1941, he had tank groups camped about 50 kilometres outside Leningrad.

Meanwhile, Finnish divisions led by the Finnish General Carl Gustav Emil Mannerheim, 16 divisions in all, had dug in at 30 km north of the city. By mid-September 1941, the Germans were at 15 km south from the city limits.

Then, Hitler ordered to cancel the direct assault on Leningrad. It was one of Hitler's expensive miscalculations. By February 1942, on some days, 10,000 inhabitants of the city perished from exposure to the bitter cold. They died from starvation and infections. As the corpses remained unburied in the frozen soil, the plague spread. Power, water and sewage services had broken down. The city shrank to 1/4<sup>th</sup> of its pre-war population. The Russian people had suffered enormously before the war from Stalin's purges, from state-induced famines and brutal industrialisation around the city. Skilled Soviet engineers were able to draw an ice-road across the frozen Lake Ladoga, sending in tons of supplies and evacuating about 1 million half-starved city inhabitants.

Hitler was furious when the Soviet troops thus thwarted his plans at Leningrad. Because Hitler started and interrupted sieges of the main Russian towns ad hoc, transferring armies northward and southward while firing generals, Leningrad, Moscow and Stalingrad all survived their sieges. As long as Leningrad was under siege, a fourth of all German forces were tied down far from the fronts of Moscow, the Crimea, and Stalingrad.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of December, Hitler published a proclamation, putting the blame of the disasters in Russia on the High Commandment of the German Army. General von Brauchitsch was dismissed. Hitler took the supreme lead of the German armies. He demanded new courage from the people and the army, as new challenges had to be faced, supreme efforts to be delivered. In fact, Hitler had taken already the leadership of the armies since the 4<sup>th</sup> of February of 1938, as well as ultimately the operational leadership of the troops!

The Soviet Armies and Stalin, using the terrible Russian winter, arrived at entirely destabilising the front of the German enemy. Temperatures fell to minus 25°C and lower. The German soldiers were not equipped to fight in such low temperatures. Many soldiers suffered from frozen feet, frozen noses or hands. Many stopped fighting and moving, which was even worse. They had to move to stay warm! The Red Army, well equipped for the cold, continued its offensives on the three Russian fronts, north, centre and south. The list of the towns the Red Army now took back on the Germans was impressive. On the centre front, Odojev and Gorbachevo fell on the 24<sup>th</sup>, Naro Fominsk on the 26<sup>th</sup>, Kalouga on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January of 1942. The Soviets launched their armies farther on. They advanced on Mojaisk, Volokolansk and the large railway line Kalinin-Rjev-Viazma-Sukhliniki-Kharkov. The German troops now definitely fought on the defensive! They could only slow the Russian thrusts.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of December, the German troops lost Likhivin and Belev. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1942 they lost Staritza on the Volga. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January, the Soviet troops took Malo Yaroslavets and Borovsk. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of January, they took Medyna and on the 20<sup>th</sup> Miatlevo. The German troops had to draw back. The Russian assault did not stop! A new Soviet offensive began on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January. Volokolansk fell again in Russian hands, and also Dorokhovo somewhat later. Rouza, on the river of the same name, fell on the 17<sup>th</sup>. Veria fell on the 16<sup>th</sup>. After 3 days of continuous assaults, the German troops were crushed. They fled towards Djask. The German officers knew that somehow, they had to stop the Soviet advance. They withdrew troops from the western front to strengthen their eastern front.

In the south, the Soviet troops of General Golikov had occupied Mossalsk on the 9<sup>th</sup> of January 1942. On the 14<sup>th</sup>, they took Kirov, had cut the railways Kalinin-Kharkov, so that the German troops could not use anymore these railway lines to circulate along the front. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of January, they took Sukhliniki. They surrounded Rjev, another strategic centre. The winter then reached its fiercest temperatures of from -30°C to -45°C. All the troops came to a halt and too much snow fell for any transport to be able to progress. The German Army used this period to organise their defences around Viazma and Smolensk, to avoid greater disasters still. The great winter Offensive of the Soviet Army, however, raged on the entire front, from Leningrad to Rostov! South of Tula, the Soviet troops assaulted the German positions in the direction of Orel, to Briansk and Kursk. The Red Army advanced yet, but could not reduce the German positions there.

In the south, the Soviets tried to retake Kharkov. Violent fights developed in the west, near the Middle Donetz. The Russian troops tried to surround the ancient administrative capital of the Ukraine. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of January, they could win back Losovaria. The next day, they cut the railway line to Poltava. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> February, they stood at 50 kilometres of Dniepropetrovsk. The Germans got in reinforcements. They could withhold the Russians from reaching the Dniepr. In the east, the Russian soldiers fought around Voroshilovgrad and Taganrog, two sites the German Army had been able to regain.

In the Crimea, Sevastopol still held after 3 months of resistance. The besieging Axis forces were led by General Erich von Manstein. He had a 2 to 1 superiority over the entrenched defenders. Early 1942, Hitler demanded Sevastopol's immediate capture. But Manstein had only a motley collection of Italian boats and small submarines. Sevastopol was also really not critical to the strategy of the Germans in the World War! It was a relatively small city, without much industrial importance.

The Russians disembarked new troops and retook Kertch and Feodosia on the 30<sup>th</sup> of December 1941. The 7<sup>th</sup> January 1942, other Soviet troops disembarked at Eupatoria. Their aim was to open Sevastopol and to chase the enemy from the Crimea. The German Command reacted in time. They succeeded in reducing the Russian troops at Eupatoria in a few weeks. On the 3<sup>th</sup> of February 1942, the Soviet troops had to evacuate Feodosia, but they continued to hold Kertch.

In the north, at Leningrad, the Russian troops having reached the Volkov, followed that river in the direction of Novgorod. The German could still hold that town. The Red Army had more success south of Lake Ilmen. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of January, they took Kholm and then advanced to Veliki-Luki, Vitebsk and Smolensk. The 16<sup>th</sup> German Army was surrounded at

Staraya Russa, but could save its position, which was essential for the German units then engaged in the siege of Leningrad.

With the last months of winter came the bad state of the roads. The frozen ground turned into mud. The front generally stabilised.

Meanwhile in Germany, the morale of the people diminished to depression. The German people lived on rations now, and the rations diminished! Hitler felt the need to reinforce his power. He had himself be elected by the *Reichstag* as the supreme judge of the *Reich*. The administration of the country was given to Heinrich Himmler. In France, the trial of Pétain, destined to proclaim the responsibility of France in the start of the new war, had turned to the confusion of Pétain and Hitler. The trial was interrupted and Laval had returned to power.

In Czechia, Heydrich had been assassinated by Czech patriots. The Head of the Security Police, appointed Reich Protector over Czechia, got wounded in an assassination attempt on him in Prague of 27 May 1942. He died on 4 June 1942. His death was the beginning of ferocious reprisals. He had been killed by Czech patriots flown in by the British Special Operations Executive, the SOE. Heydrich's killers were imprisoned, but they committed suicide. In retaliation, 1,300 Czechs, including 200 women, were executed. Lidice, a small village of Czechia was destroyed.

In Yugoslavia, the resistance forces of Tito fought continuously a guerrilla war against the Italian and German troops that occupied the country. Acts of sabotage, execution of traitors, began everywhere in the western countries. The *Gestapo* installed a reign of terror, with even mass executions and deportations. Hitler needed more German soldiers, as hundreds of thousands had lost their lives at Moscow, Leningrad, Sevastopol and other Soviet towns. Himmler got the soldiers from the factories, replacing the German workers by massively deporting foreign workers. Hitler also pressed his allies for more soldiers, but found less and less enthusiastic men to fight against the Communists in the Russian campaigns. At the same time, the RAF intensified its raids on German cities. All the German, industrial centres were bombed. Hitler began to worry about his western front, the front of Great Britain. He assigned von Rundstedt as the commander of the armies in the west. Von Rundstedt was then considered one of the best strategists of the *Wehrmacht* from his victories in the Ukraine.

The British attacks reached the continent. In the night of the 27<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> March of 1942, British troops attacked the army post of Saint Nazaire in France. The attack's only aim was to destroy the enormous doors of the sea basins in which the German submarines remained. The British commandos had quickly fled after this feat, and Hitler had taken his revenge by executing hundreds of patriots of Saint Nazaire.

The German Army needed to win the war in Soviet Russia! One of the surest ways to do that, was to cut the route between the USSR and Iran, for by those roads passed the American transports of war material to Russia. The German troops pushed in from the western side to Iran, the Japanese forces from the other. The best British forces in Asia would get crushed in the Persian Gulf. Then, the Japanese, German and Italian forces would move quickly at the assault of Russia. Once masters of Europe and of Asia, Germany and Japan could turn against the USA and Great Britain.

For such a plan to succeed, the British forces in North Africa had to be destroyed. The German High Command turned its attention once more to Africa.

## Tobruk and El Alamein

The German Air Force bombed the island of Malta for 3 months without interruption, to neutralise the RAF in the Mediterranean and to allow German and Italian reinforcements to be sent to Cyrenaica, Libya.

Since Rommel's last counter-offensive, not much had evolved in Africa! The 8<sup>th</sup> British Army lay in defence on the line El Gazala to Bir Hakim. Vast minefields protected the French-British positions. Most of the British tanks lay in a region 30 kilometres west of El Adem. The site controlled the roads south of El Ghazala. The guarding of Bir Hakim had been confided to the First Free French Brigade. It was a square territory of about 4 kilometres at each side, reinforced by trenches and minefields. The 1<sup>st</sup> French Brigade led by General Koenig, had 4 infantry battalions, a regiment of artillery with 6 canons of 75, anti-tank canons, canons of 47 and anti-tank canons Bofors. In all, it held 3,600 men.

Rommel's new offensive aimed at the retaking of Tobruk. Rommel had many airplanes. He had placed his tanks to the south, together with his Italian tanks. He thought to capture Bir Hakim rapidly, then to occupy the British airfields, El Adem, Sidi Rezgh and Gambia, thus encircling the infantry of the 6<sup>th</sup> British Army, as well as Tobruk. Rommel expected Tobruk to fall by the 30<sup>th</sup> of May.

The German headquarters launched the assault on Bir Hakim on the 27<sup>th</sup> of May 1942. Rommel's tanks rolled in the night in a large movement in the south-north direction around Bir Hakim. The Italian Division *Ariete* had to capture Bir Hakim. It started a violent assault against the French positions. After 2 hours of terrible combat, the Italian troops lost 32 tanks and had to retreat. They had been defeated.

East, the German tanks continued to advance, but they lost 50 tanks in a large, deadly skirmish with a motorised British brigade. Another German division moved to Akhroma. It too was attacked by British tanks and had to retreat. The British tanks threw back two other armoured detachments and tanks of the Germans that tried to reach El Duda and Sidi Rezgh. The RAF inflicted heavy losses on the German troops. As a result, Rommel was at a quandary. He had provisions only for a few days. In case of retreat, or if he wanted to bring in reinforcements, he would have to pass the minefields! Nevertheless, Rommel succeeded in cleaning up by the 28<sup>th</sup> two routes, one near Trigh El Abd, the other near Trigh Capuzzo.

A large tank battle ensued. By the 29<sup>th</sup> of May, the losses of tanks on both sides were very high. The 8<sup>th</sup> British Army seemed to have won a great battle. The Axis transports grinded to a halt. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of May, one French column, having rallied out of Bir Hakim, destroyed 25 Axis tanks that had stopped because of lack of oil. Meanwhile, the 4<sup>th</sup> British Brigade attacked all enemy communication posts and nearly destroyed them all. Rommel had kept open breaches in the minefields and had widened them by the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 1942. On the same day, the 150<sup>th</sup> British Infantry Brigade, which held Sidi Muftah, was annihilated by the Germans after skirmishes that lasted for 36 hours. The German troops opened a corridor of 15

kilometres wide in the British lines. Rommel briefly feigned the retreat. But he concentrated most of his tanks in a half circle east of the opened corridor and south of the positions held by the 50<sup>th</sup> British Division. Rommel hesitated to give the signal of the assault, for the First Free French Brigade resisted all attacks. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of May, one of such attacks had cost Rommel 8 heavy machinegun tanks. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of May, the German troops drew back. They returned by the 2<sup>nd</sup> June, demanding of the British to negotiate. The Italian officers came to the French force to ask to surrender, but that was refused. The next day, Rommel sent a letter to General Koenig, demanding of the garrison to surrender. Koenig refused.

Rommel then surrounded Bir Hakim with considerable troops. With his heavy artillery and with Stuka dive bombers, Rommel devastated the small square in which the 3,600 French soldiers still fought. When Rommel redemanded the surrender on the 5<sup>th</sup> of June, the French once more refused. The battle continued.

In the north, General Ritchie thought his opportunity had come to assault the German lines! He attacked in the night of the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> of June. The two attacks north of Bir Hakim did not succeed. The British infantry suffered heavy losses and its artillery had been eliminated by a German counter-attack. This defensive success of Rommel was all the more remarkable, as he hadn't even had to use his forces of Bir Hakim.

The French garrison was now in great difficulties. It could only be provisioned from the air, and the moment approached at which it would have to declare itself defeated.

General Ritchie ordered General Koenig to evacuate Bir Hakim. This operation was executed in the night of the 10<sup>th</sup> June to the 11<sup>th</sup>. The French infantry opened a road through the minefields and through the German troops! With what remained of its trucks, the French could escape and reach the British units that had come to their aid south-west of Bir Hakim. The next day, the German troops entered the site, surprised to find nobody there! Bir Hakim had delayed the movement of Rommel by 2 weeks. Koenig could save 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of his soldiers.

Rommel then continued his offensive. He concentrated his forces around Acrama and El Adem, cutting the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army in two. The German forces at Bir Hakim drew north. Rommel received the aid of the Italian 133<sup>rd</sup> armoured division *Littorio*. At that moment, the two sides had about the same number of tanks. The German tanks were heavier, more powerful, and thus superior in arms.

General Ritchie retreated his forces to El Gazala, fearing their destruction. The South-Africans drew back under the protection of British tanks, from Eluet to El Tamar and Akhroma, and from there stood near Tobruk. The British tanks paid this success very dearly. They could not face anymore the German tanks that were still intact. They had to evacuate the area. El Adem had to be abandoned without having been defended.

Auchinleck had by that time lost most of his tanks. His front guard posts could not be held. He had to retreat to a line that would make Rommel's communication lines very long and would bring him, Auchinleck, nearer to the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army that rolled to his aid. He would defend Tobruk. Auchinleck had a garrison of 30,000 soldiers and 3 months of reserves. He could hold on until a counter-offensive would come, which would chase the German troops out of Cyrenaica for the third time.

In the next 5 days, the combats of rear-guard actions continued on the line of El Adem to Bir Sheferzen. When the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army was safe inside the frontiers of Egypt, a part of its tank units turned around and were sent to reinforce Tobruk, which now had defences on a perimeter of 40 kilometres.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of June 1942, violent barrages of artillery fire and an aerial bombing in the direction of El Duda helped to destroy the mine fields. The Germans filled anti-tank trenches and they formed an open corridor to Tobruk. The RAF had by that time abandoned all of its airports. It could not intervene.

The assault of the German infantry began. Rommel's tank units soon drove into Tobruk and the town was taken, despite a few attempts of the British to counter-attack with their tanks. The next day, the British troops surrendered. They exploded their petrol reserves and destroyed their war material. Enormous provisions still fell into German hands. The 8<sup>th</sup> British Army thus lost a large part of her infantry and tanks. Rommel took Tobruk in one day and made 33,000 British and Commonwealth prisoners! The rapid surrender of Tobruk caused consternation in the Allied camp. The German propaganda used the fall of Tobruk in June 1942 to boost the morale of the Axis population.

This was the time of the 1942 German offensive *Case Blue* in Russia, the German's renewed offensive in the Caucasus by Army Group South for the advance to the Volga, and on the other side of the world, of the recent fall of Singapore and the Philippines. The Axis forces surged back in movement! But Germany had suffered 1 million casualties on the eastern front!

In Africa, Rommel gathered his forces and drove to Egypt. His supply lines deteriorated. The British had abandoned all their border positions and retreated to Mersa Matruh. These positions, however, were untenable once the Germans decided to attack. Rommel very soon realised the weakening of Mersa Matruh! He sent his troops on to assault the site.

Auchinleck then decided to build his line of defence at El Alamein. Rommel had expected to repeat a second Tobruk at Mersa. He only found New Zealand troops, which resisted him at Mingar, and kept their positions doggedly despite 5 German assaults. Then, during the night, the New Zealanders frayed themselves an escape through the German lines and joined the British troops on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 1942 at El Alamein. In the meantime, The US had entered the war. It was sending supplies to the British, and soon thereafter to the Soviet Union. Plans began to be made for the invasion of Algeria and Morocco. The *Luftwaffe* was losing its air supremacy in the Mediterranean. End June, Rommel reached El Alamein.

The Libyan harbour of Tobruk changed hands at least 3 times during the war in North Africa. It had been called Antipyrgos in antiquity, or the harbour opposite Pyrgos on Crete, an ancient Greek fortress. Its importance lay in its situation, as the only developed harbour in the region where sizable ships could unload. Tobruk was in this conflict the centre of fierce battles of Allied against Axis forces along the Libyan-Egyptian border.

On 22 January 1941, The Italians surrendered Tobruk to the British forces. On 12 June of 1942, Colonel General Erwin Rommel stormed the city, and on 12 November 1942, Rommel's units fled westward in retreat after their defeat at the Second Battle of El Alamein! By late May 1942, Rommel first fought against the British defence line extending from Ghazala, west of Tobruk on the coast, to draw out the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army led by General Neil



Ritchie. Rommel moved with his armoured groups to enemy minefields called *the Cauldron*. He waited patiently for Ritchie's counterattack, and then destroyed it. The British left the Ghazala Line. Rommel's *Luftwaffe* and artillery then blew a hole in Tobruk's defences and captured the harbour on 21 June from the South African General Hendrik Clopper.

At that moment in time, Rommel had 80,000 soldiers with him. But the British and Allied forces equalled about 120,000 men. The British had received Grant medium tanks with 75 mm canons, superior to Rommel's early model tanks.

El Alamein was a strong position. It had the Mediterranean on its right. It was protected on its left by the depression of El Qattara. Rommel had to temporise, for he had advanced far with his tanks, over 400 kilometres! He had to wait for provisions. El Alamein lay about 110 kilometres west from Alexandria, but over 400 kilometres from Tobruk, still the support base of Rommel.

Later in the month, Rommel had destroyed most of the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army and the German troops had reached a point at only 100 kilometres from the large naval base of Alexandria, and from there, the Suez Canal could be reached! The German High Command and the Italian forces saw victory come near. Mussolini even came to congratulate Rommel in Africa.

Meanwhile, the British troops reinforced El Alamein. The RAF remained master of the air there, and the newest Sherman tanks promised by President Roosevelt to Churchill on the day Tobruk fell, were already under way to Egypt.

## The Soviet Campaigns of 1942, the Preambles of the Battle of Kursk

The Russian leaders asked for a second front in West Europe. Nothing for such an event, which would need fleet disembarkments, had been prepared. The British war in Europe had been limited to the war in the air, where now the RAF practically dominated. As of April 1942, the RAF dropped in average 250,000 kilograms of bombs on Germany each night. This, of course, had consequences on the German war production. Nevertheless, this huge war effort did not satisfy the Russian leaders, who asked for a second front in Europe.

In the spring of 1942, The Nazi leaders still thought a victory in the east possible. Despite the staggering losses of human lives, young soldiers were still sent to the slaughterhouses of the Russian fronts. The German generals concentrated large forces near Kharkov. The Russian army leaders considered correctly the Germans would start new efforts of war, new offensives, from out of this important town and industrial centre.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> May of 1942, the Russian generals launched a pre-emptive offensive on the Donetz, between Bielgorod and Izium, a very violent attack, aimed at disrupting the German plans to retake Kharkov, or at least to weaken the German forces. The 8<sup>th</sup> of May also, German and Rumanian forces attacked the Kertch peninsula. Eight days later, they reconquered those lands. General Timoshenko launched his imposing forces of tanks and infantry in the Battle of Donetz. The Soviet troops advanced south of Kharkov to Krasnograd and in the north to Voltchansk and Petchenck. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May, the German troops began counter-attacks, even encircled the Soviet forces, and then moved back to their former positions. This offensive had not really been a success! No good news for the Allies! All the

more, since Rommel had started a new offensive in Africa, and the Japanese went from conquest to conquest in Indochina.

In the night from the 30<sup>th</sup> to the 31<sup>st</sup> of May 1942, the RAF launched its most formidable bombing a town ever had to suffer. About 1,200 bombers dropped 1,500 tons of bombs on Köln. Two days later, over 1,000 British bombers attacked Essen in the Ruhr, and on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June Bremen was devastated by a similar air attack. The German population had from then on to live with the continuous fear of such attacks on towns.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of June, after negotiations with Molotov of the Central Russian Committee, the Governments of London and of Washington announced a new British-Russian alliance and a more limited Russo-American agreement. The two treaties added that an agreement to undertake a second front in 1942, a second front in Europe, had been realised. Soviet Russia signed into the Lend-Lease program to obtain more war material from America, to be sent via Murmansk or via Iran. As a second front seemed impossible at that moment, Churchill and Roosevelt agreed on a large offensive in North Africa, obliging Germany to deploy larger efforts there. From North Africa, Italy could be invaded, and a front opened that could lead to the second front in Europe.

After their success near Donetsk, the German-Italian Army had begun an assault on the fortress of Sevastopol. The fortress and the city had resisted for 8 months to the siege! In fact, Sevastopol free lay in the way of the Germans in their plans to conquer the Caucasus. Sevastopol was a refuge for the Russian fleet of the Black Sea. It seemed necessary to reduce the place to rubble and to chase away the Soviet fleet before moving on to Tiflis. But the Russians knew the strategic importance of Sevastopol as well as the German leaders. Nevertheless, Sevastopol fell on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July of 1942. The German 11<sup>th</sup> Army of General von Manstein then surrounded Sevastopol and stormed the city. Manstein enjoyed air superiority by the *Luftwaffe Fliegerkorps VIII*. Most Soviet ships were sunk. All power and water services in the town were destroyed. Von Manstein had huge artillery canons to destroy the Russian concrete bunkers. More than 800 Axis artillery pieces and 6 Gamma mortars of 420 mm, 3 Karl-Gerät monsters for 600 mm ammunition, and the 800 mm Gustav canon that could fire 7-ton shells were used! Plus, the German forces had brought the large 280 mm coastal howitzers and 12 howitzers of 14 inch shells. The German Army suffered 25,000 casualties and a month's delay of the 11<sup>th</sup> Army's participation in Operation *Case Blue*. Only a few Russian officers escaped! It was the largest German bombardment of the war, as 30,000 tons of artillery shells were used to break the city. The Germans had suffered enormous losses, but they could feast on one victory more.

In May 1943, the last surrounded German and Rumanian forces hastily abandoned the city by air and by sea. Sevastopol definitely was of no strategic advantage to the temporary victors!

In the beginning of the summer of 1942, Hitler decided to throw the largest effort of the Army against Russia. His idea and the idea of his generals, was to cut the Soviet forces in two and to destroy both sections separately. The western pincher movement would be executed by troops that had operated in the Ukraine and in the Crimea. The southern offensive would be formed by the Africa Corps, to crush the Russian forces in the Caucasus, to conquer the natural riches of these lands, and then to move in the direction of India, a movement already begun by Rommel. The other operation had as aim to reach the Volga, to take Moscow and to

destroy the Red Army that had mainly concentrated in that zone. Once Russia conquered, Germany could start a new war with the British.

This plan was already seriously perturbed, when General Timoshenko took the initiative at Kharkov a few weeks before the date determined by Hitler for the German offensive. Rommel had to start on his own, and General von Bock in Russia lost a month trying to reconstitute his units and gather his armament.

Hitler had hoped to take Borissoglebsk on the 10<sup>th</sup> of July, Stalingrad on the 25<sup>th</sup>, Saratov on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August 1942 and Krybyshev on the 15<sup>th</sup> of that month. The decisive Battle for Moscow had to be waged before the winter. Baku, in the south, had to be taken by the 25<sup>th</sup> of September, quite still before the winter started. Hitler called all the strategic reserves of Germany to Russia! He massed 70% of his effectives on the 600 kilometres of the south front, meaning 179 German divisions. He obtained 61 divisions more from his Allies. In total, Germany launched 240 divisions, as many tanks as the world had never seen before, and an aviation far superior to any numbers his main enemy could send in the air.

The Russian General Staff thought the offensive would come in the region of the Donetsk, but General von Bock sent it off on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June in the direction of Kursk!

The German military leaders had massed there the most powerful armoured and motorised divisions to face the Red Army units. Their breakthrough came immediately and spectacularly. In 3 days, the German forces stood on the other side of the Don and the German troops already entered the outskirts of Voronej. The Red Army hurried in more troops to there, on the river of the same name, to organise the resistance. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of July 1942, the German General Staff could announce the taking of Voronej. Voronej had been one of the centres of the Russian defence, a site of strategic importance. If Voronej had really fallen, the Germans could rush on along the Volga, and end the encirclement of Moscow. Despite the German triumphant announcements, the Soviet troops held on to the town of Voronej! General von Bock redirected his army to the Don, to the west bank of the river, where he could organise easy defences. Defences? Wasn't he on the offensive? The German plan had been to encircle Timoshenko's troops and deliver a large battle on the Donetsk to obtain the surrender of the Russian general's troops, before he had been able to retreat to the Don. This meant already that the encirclement of Moscow by Voronej had not been possible, not by pushing on past Stalingrad, and not by moving north along the Volga!

The German troops had also taken the initiative in the direction of Kharkov, of Izium-Barvenkovo, and more to the south to Rostov. General Timoshenko had suspected such a movement. He had operated a vast but prudent retreat of his troops, all of them. He had understood the tactics of the Germans. He told his units they had two objectives: to afflict as many losses as possible to the enemy, and not to let themselves be surrounded. He plied back to the Don in good discipline, no panic, keeping the cohesion of his divisions. With calm courage, the rear-guards of his troops slowed down the enemy, so that the rest of the Red Army could make a rational retreat.

At that time, the German High Command split Army Group South in a northern Army Group A and a southern Army Group B. Hitler ordered Army Group A to destroy the enemy forces around Rostov-on-the-Don, and then to advance to the Caucasus to conquer the east coast of

the Black Sea, to enter Chechnya, then to reach Baku and its oil-rich terrains and countries there. Army Group B had to conquer Stalingrad and afterwards push on towards the Caspian Sea via Astrakhan on the Lower Volga.

The German General von Kleist took Rostov on the 24<sup>th</sup> of July 1942. The Russian troops still moved back, to the line Kletskaïa-Kalatch, in the large turn of the Don there. It seemed clear then to the Soviets, that Hitler wanted Stalingrad to be taken. The name worked as a red flag on a bull.

The Soviet troops wanted to defend the route to the large, industrial city. Violent combats resulted. The German troops lost each day thousands of soldiers, but they threw each time new troops in the battle. By mid-August, they did reach the Don near Stalingrad. The positions of the Soviet troops had suddenly degraded when German forces moved north, coming from the south from the railway line of Krasnodar to Stalingrad. The Red Army had to retreat to behind the River Mychkovka.

The German soldiers rolled on to Stalingrad in 3 strong tank columns, to take the city. The true offensive of the German divisions began on the 17<sup>th</sup> of August. The German units coming from the north passed the Don at Vertiatchi. They arrived at Stalingrad on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August, on the Volga, at the outskirts of the city, between Rynok and Erzovka, north of Stalingrad. This success cut the Soviet troops in two parts and it isolated the city totally. The only railway line lay on the right bank of the Volga. The city could nevertheless still be provisioned from the east. The Volga flowed tranquilly under the fire of the heavy artillery. The German *Luftwaffe* showed how very superior it was to the Soviet air forces. Besides, in the south, the Russian troops seemed separated and dispersed, and were eliminated, one unit after the other.

On the 31<sup>st</sup> of August, the Soviet forces marched back behind the protection of the Rivers Rossochka and Tchervlennaïa. Their front line, formed to the west by these 2 rivers, passed north by Spartokovets-Orlovka-Novaïa Nadedja. This was at about 30 kilometres of Stalingrad proper. The German troops were numerically stronger there, so they attacked to force a decision. At the beginning of September, they broke the Russian defence lines.

Not only raged then heavy fighting between the Don and the Volga, for right after having taken Rostov, the German troops of Army Group A had continued their progress to the Caucasus. Their advances had been rapid, but in early autumn, the German Armies were as well exhausted as reduced in numbers. They were still far from the oilfields of Baku and Grozny. The Commander of Army Group A was now Field Marshal Wilhelm List. List then thought he did not have the resources to drive the Soviet troops back across the mountain passes before the winter set in. Hitler raged, and sacked List.

Hitler took himself command of Army group A. He thought only he would be able to conquer the Caspian oilfields!

The German soldiers met with insurmountable resistance at the town of Ordzhonikidze. In November, surrounded by Red Army troops, the German forces fought their way out of encirclement. But they had to retreat. Hitler then appointed Field Marshal Ewald von Kleist to command Army Group A. Kleist too saw the danger of being cut off by the enemy. On 27 December 1942, von Manstein persuaded Zeitzler to ask Hitler for permission to withdraw

from the Caucasus. Hitler gave his assent. End 1942, the Germans marched back to Rostov-on-the-Don, then even further back.

On 19 February 1943, Army Group South sent 2 *Panzer* Armies northwards, stopped the Soviet advance and retook Kharkov. Another *Panzer* Army destroyed the Soviet armour further east. In March 1943, because of the warming of spring, the new mud stopped further movement. Germany had gone on the defensive on the Eastern front! Aim was now to preserve control over the heavy-industry zones of the Donetz Basin. There were rich deposits of coal and ore there. Its loss would mean the end of the war! In that spring of 1943, however, the Red Army had nearly twice as many men and 3 to 4 times as many artillery pieces and tanks as the Germans had on the Eastern Front. A counter-offensive was necessary.

The German objective was Baku and its very rich oilfields, which they hoped to conquer and bereave the Soviet troops of their needed petrol. They advanced very rapidly, especially because the Soviet troops in the region were now isolated from the rest of Russia. They lacked in soldiers, tanks and airplanes. The German troops drew on along the railway line of Rostov to Baku, into the pain of the Kuban. The Soviet troops abandoned the peninsula of Taman. The German soldiers rapidly occupied the Taman with troops of the Crimea.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of August, the German armies passed the Kuban and occupied Kropotkin. The fighting was very hard. The sites of Krasnodar, Armavir and the rich oil sources of those regions fell to the Germans. German columns meanwhile also pushed on in the direction of Astrakhan and they entered Elista. A battle was fought for the harbour of Novorossiysk. The defence of that town was tenacious. The Germans lost many men, before they could take the town in the beginning of September. The Russian fleet of the Black Sea had to seek refuge at Batum, so that the Russians could not anymore disembark men behind the German lines.

The German troops took Armavir. Then, the terrain became more difficult and the communications of the *Wehrmacht* got more complicated, as only one railway line served the entire region. Moreover, the Soviets had assembled their troops at that point. They had organised a strong defence, which would not be possible to take but at the expense of very many German casualties. For two months, in this mountainous region of the Caucasus, the *Wehrmacht* and the Red Army fought in isolated skirmishes of group to group. Finally, the Germans arrived at the outskirts of Grozny and Ordzhonikidze, where the Soviet troops barred them from still advancing to the Caspian Sea and to Baku. The German generals then tried to cut the road from Ordzhonikidze to Tiflis, and they hoped to follow it to pass the Caucasus, attack the Russian troops in the back, and to arrive at Baku by the south route. In October, they took Nalchik and Alagi.

In the autumn, the meteorological conditions worsened. Baku remained at 500 kilometres of the German advance. Hitler's plans had been somewhat thwarted!

## The forgotten Year of the War in Europe

The period of from July-Aug 1943 to the Normandy landings of the Allies in June 1944, has been called the forgotten year of the War.

In Russia, Hitler's generals asked for freedom of action to manoeuvre in the vast open steppes, hoping to cut off advancing Soviet armies and destroy them. Hitler refused, as he thought this was an excuse for a cowardly retreat. He told to hold the line. The result of the order was, that the German forces were forced in almost permanent retreat, burning and destroying everything as they went back. German discipline in the retreat broke down, looting happened everywhere, and buildings burned. Troops units retreated on their own, without waiting for orders.

The Red Army lost many men and arms in frontal attacks, their preferred mode of operation. But the German lines were nevertheless overwhelmed by far superior numbers in men and arms. The recklessness of the Russian soldiers made life cheap, more than ever. The battles became desperate! The combatants were increasingly willing to use violence in the pursuit of their aims.

The leading generals of the Red Army were Russians, people of from east of the Elbe, with conservative, monarchist, and nationalist values, cut off from the rest of the society.

General Gotthard Heinrici blaming the 1918 defeat on the Jewish-Socialist revolutionary conspiracy, hoped for the downfall of the Weimar Republic. He longed for a war of revenge against Germany's enemies. He was won over by Hitler's support of re-armament and his suppression of Social Democracy and Communism. His character was of innate conformism, and of a large sense of patriotic loyalty. He supported Hitler's aim of achieving European dominance for Germany. But he was therefore also narrow-minded; no priority was greater for him than the military aims, and he nurtured deep-rooted prejudices against Jews and Slavs, typical of his caste.

Fedor von Bock was no Nazi ideologue, but he admired Hitler for restoring Germany's national and military pride. He too was a professional soldier, caring for little else. He was a monarchist, and he did not like the intrusion of the SS into the *Wehrmacht*. He showed no open antisemitism.

Hitler never completely trusted the Army. He handed out promotions as a means of binding senior officers to his government, working on their vanity. But the senior levels of the officer corps remained aristocratic. Promotions and salary increase and bonus gifts were made discreetly by the Nazis to them, behind the scenes. Many senior officers received large sums at reaching 65. Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, Field-Marshal Hans-Günther von Kluge received such sums of money. And also, Guderian and Kleist.

Traditional Prussian military values such as modesty, probity, frugality, and a keen sense of honour were still quite in vogue. But even for the Prussian military, a career and the Field Marshal's staff were more important than the great practical principles and moral values that were at stake. Protestantism dominated in the military elite: 57% were Protestant, 26% were Catholics. The soldiers were Catholics in the majority. Officers came overwhelmingly from the educated and professional middle or upper-middle class. 43% were members of a Nazi organisation for officers.

At the beginning of the war, Germany could bring 90 divisions on the battlefields. In June 1941, this number had been augmented to 175 divisions. The divisions remained relatively cohesive with a sense of stability, and loyalty of comrades. The Army exercised the efforts of keeping the cohesion and the fighting power of the divisions. Nevertheless, the morale in the Army began to suffer from the defeats, which started at Stalingrad. Defeat in the end came not from disorganisation or inefficiency, but through the military and economic superiority of the Red Army, and of the British and US Armies.

The average age of the soldiers over the course of the war on German side declined steadily! Yet, the dominance of the generation remained by the young men born shortly before or during WWI. The majority of the German troops of from 25 to 30 years old mostly, were unmarried. The younger men without family ties were sent into the most dangerous situations. Of the soldiers born after WWI, 59% were member of a Nazi organisation, 69% were member of the Reich Labour Service, and. 83% of those born in 1913-1917 served in the armed forces already before 1939. 75% of those born during the period 1910-1920 had worked his way through one of the institutions of the armed forces. The soldiers were trained not just to be fighters, but also to be full members of the racial community of Germans.

All officers were required to learn and convince themselves of the National-Socialist world view, through books, pamphlets, etc. They received intensive ideological training, up to almost total indoctrination. The Army's sense of invincibility began to wear thin after December 1941, then far more dramatically declined after Stalingrad.

On 22 December 1943, Hitler ordered the creation of a team to coordinate 'National Socialist Leadership in the Armed Forces.' The Army created Nazi political education officers. Such men were also placed in the Navy and in the *Luftwaffe*.

For some soldiers, the Nazis were a tiny clique of criminals who did not represent the German people as a whole. They carried on to preserve Germany from Bolshevism. They accepted the barbarous conduct of the war by German soldiers in the east. The German soldiers continued to fight after Stalingrad out of the sense of comradeship and mutual support in adversity. Generally, all the German soldiers' aggressive masculinity was diverted outwards, towards the enemy. Numerous prosecutions were brought for the vaguely defined offence of 'undermining military strength: *Wehrkraftersetzung*, from defeatist utterances to self-mutilation. Criticism of the regime and its leaders was a criminal offence. Courts-martial were overwhelmingly used as a means of enforcing discipline and the will to fight. There happened 3 million cases of criminal offences, a staggering number, 400,000 of which were against civilians and prisoners of war. Of these, 30,000 ended with a death sentence. Compare this figure with the figure of such cases in World War I: only 48 executions for these reasons! At least 21,000 executions were carried out in World War II!

In the Courts-Martial, a prisoner was to be tried by 3 judges, but this rule was widely disregarded in the heat of a battle. Cowardice, desertion, and thefts of food parcels were severely punished. Terrorising the soldiers through the Draconian application of military justice may have helped keep the soldiers fighting long after they knew for certain the war was lost.

Hitler created his bodyguard, the *Schutzstaffeln*, the SS. This force later became the Adolf Hitler Standards, the *Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler*. The SS were originally conceived as a ceremonial unit, commanded by a Bavarian Nazi Josef (Sepp) Dietrich (born 1892). Dietrich's boss Himmler set up the larger organisation. By the end of 1939, the SS was joined by groups from the *Totenkopf Einheiten* (the Death's Head Units) formed by Theodor Eicke, to provide guards for the concentration camps. In June 1940, they amounted to 18,000 men. In November 1941, they were 140,000 men, with tank regiments and motorised infantry. They were ideologically committed, highly trained, and unconditionally loyal to Hitler. They had younger senior officers than in the rest of the Army! The military SS was an institution, not of the German people, but of the German race. Leading figure was Gottlob Berger, a close intimate of Himmler. In 1942, about 236,000 men served in the Military SS, in 1943 over half a million, and in 1944 about 600,000 men, of which 369,000 in active field operations. Regular Army commanders were disparaging of the Military SS. They considered its commanders lacking in professionalism and over-inclined to sacrifice the lives of their men. The senior generals were not wholly averse to the Military SS spearheading attacks and taking the bulk of the casualties. It preserved the lives of their own men, and reduced the strength of a serious rival force.

Army commanders alleged that the SS were more likely to commit massacres of innocent civilians, equally Jews, and carry out other crimes, above all on the Eastern Front. They had elite status, and fanatical ideological, racial commitments. The Military SS were exceptional in their disregard for the laws and conventions of warfare. They also suffered heavy losses as of those who served, a third were killed. The *Totenkopf Division* suffered 60% dead among officers and NCOs. But, poorly trained, its men often recklessly sacrificed themselves unnecessarily. The division wanted to show itself better than the rest of the Army.

There was definitely an anti-Christian indoctrination in the Military SS! Volunteers from Denmark, Norway, Flanders, Holland, began their service and then applied to be discharged, because of arrogant and overbearing treatment of foreign recruits. The Military SS was rapidly deteriorating in quality towards the end of the war.

Hitler increasingly withdrew from public view from 1942 on. There were rumours that he had fallen ill or been wounded. He became less open friendly. His distaste for bad news meant that his subordinates played up positive reports and showed temporary successes as if they were major victories. Hitler bullied and browbeat the General Staff Officers at his headquarters. He lost his temper when bad news was brought to him.

Hitler was aware that the military situation was deteriorating, but actually he always presented a façade of optimism. Hitler was still convinced then of his infallible genius. He became increasingly consumed by suspicion and distrust of his subordinates. No major decisions could be taken without him. He relied increasingly on pills and remedies prescribed to him by his personal physician since 1936, Dr Theo Morell: 28 different pills a day, plus injections! He had a controlled diet, for Hitler was a vegetarian. Morell was unable to deal effectively with Hitler's physical deterioration under the strain of the war. Hitler had electrocardiograms, which showed progressive heart disease, caused by sclerosis of the coronary arteries. From the spring of 1943 on, Hitler suffered from chronic indigestion with stomach cramps. He developed a tremor in his left hand, a growing stoop, and jerking movements in his left leg. From 1944 on, he shuffled,



rather than walked. He suffered of a mild, but worsening case of Parkinson's disease! He was ageing rapidly, and turning grey of hair. He had the appearance of an elderly, increasingly debilitated man. Hitler spent most of the time at his field headquarters, and in his mountain retreat of the Berghof in the Bavarian Alps. For example, for 3 months in 1944, from February to late July in 1944, he stayed there.

Goebbels became increasingly critical of Hitler's preoccupation with military affairs to the neglect of domestic politics. On 12 April 1943, Bormann was given the title of 'Secretary of the Leader'. On 30 August 1939, Göring could persuade Hitler to set up a 'Ministerial Council for the Defence of the Reich', to control the civil administration. Thus, Hitler had handed over the control of domestic affairs to Göring, the Council's chairman. Also in the Council were Goebbels, Himmler, Ley and Darré. In February 1940, Hitler ordered it not to meet again. Surely, he thought it was usurping power he could not share. Göring had a morphine addiction. The poor performance of the *Luftwaffe* caused a sharp fall in Göring's reputation from 1942 onwards..

Hitler's interventions in state politics were intermittent, arbitrary and often contradictory. He was unable to provide any kind of overall direction in domestic affairs. On 2 March 1943, a coordinating *Committee of Three* was established to help Hitler in his decision making. It ran up against the hostility of Goebbels and Speer, so it ceased to meet after August 1943. The result was a domestic power vacuum.

On 20 August 1943, Hitler dismissed Interior Minister Frick, providing him with the meaningless title of *Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia*, where Karl Hermann Frank, now appointed State Minister for Bohemia and Moravia, was still in charge. Hitler replaced Frick by Heinrich Himmler, with as immediate result an escalation of police repression in the heartlands of Czechia. Lammers, Head of the Civil Service, was reduced to have to ask the Head of the Party Chancellery to allow him to see the Head of State. It was the eclipse of the traditional state administration in comparison to the Party! Goebbels' power was continuously growing.

The Party's Regional Leaders had been appointed to the new posts of *Reich Defence Commissars*. This enabled them to act independently of the existing civil governors and regional military authorities. On 16 November 1942, the number of these Reich Commissioners increased from 13 to 42. The regions they covered were made identical to the Party regions.

Heydrich's successor as Head of the SS Security Service, Ernst Kaltenbrunner, in a report of 26 August 1944, confirmed that the Regional Leaders were bypassing the state administrators with their own staff. As the military situation deteriorated, Party Officials became ever more concerned to shore up morale and isolate grumblers and complainers.

Robert Ley, Reich Organisation Leader of the Party published an edict for block wardens to visit every household at least once a month, to reassure himself the inhabitants had the correct level of political and ideological commitment.

## The Luxemburg Resistance and Julian Vincius

Julian Vincius lived relatively at ease in Luxemburg after 1940. He would not grow so rapidly to a very rich man here, not as quickly as in Berlin. Still, during the war that raged around him and around the Grand Duchy, he could live well and relatively at ease. He would not get to be a very rich man during the war that raged around him, but he could live relatively well and at ease. He received all kinds of customers, people who were not very rich though still well to do, a few very wealthy traders, and very poor people. Occasionally indeed, also poorer patients rang at his bell and made it to his office. From these, Julian asked for little payment. He never refused patients. For the moment, he avoided contacting hospitals to work with them, desiring to remain as aloof and discreet as possible, and remain far from all contacts with the civil servants of the Grand Duchy. Functionaries, officials of the state apparatus, he considered more positive towards the German authorities, even though open cooperation with the German occupiers remained mostly, now, very limited in the Grand Duchy. Julian tried to live happily on his own, of course with his wife, Charlotte Baraine. They avoided any public life, stayed away from theatres and concerts, and held a very low profile in Luxemburg society.

One day, late in the afternoon, in January 1942, Julian received in his medical office a well-dressed, very formal, polite man who seemed to belong to the higher middle-class of the town. Julian looked at the elegant man from top to toe when he opened the door of his office and let the man come in from the waiting room. Julian now had enough customers to be able to afford a secretary, a middle-age nurse, who helped him three days a week with his administration. He paid the woman little, though no less than the secretaries of other doctors. She had her own working room with table, chairs and cupboards, with a door opening to the waiting-room. She could help hesitating or sick people come in to Julian's medical office rooms. Today, the nurse was not in. There were also no other waiting customers. Julian was alone in the apartment with his customer, a fact that now happened seldom.

The man stepped into the room and with a slight gesture of his hand, Julian proposed the man to sit on a chair in front of his table and desk. The man did so, remained silent, drew off his gloves and unbuttoned his heavy coat, then looked around and seemed a little impressed. Many visitors did so, for Julian had a four-room office behind the door of his waiting-room. In one room, he had his work table in dark wood, with strong carvings, brought over from Berlin. Ranges of books closed off two walls, and another wall was decorated with two large paintings of nature scenes, and three smaller pictures. Such oil paintings could only be seen in Luxemburg in the houses of rich people. They were signs of Julian's former wealth. Julian had to leave his largest paintings behind in Berlin. Rather than give them away to greedy buyers profiting from a Jew's need to move fast, rather than letting them simply hang on the walls, he had brought them to the National Museum on the *Museuminsel* of Berlin. Julian thus had to leave his most expensive, and largest paintings behind. The Museum clerks had accepted without much ado, after he had explained them from what kind of painters they originated. Julian regretted much having to leave behind the paintings he had liked so much, but he had steeled his heart out of necessity.

When the man had finished looking around, Julian asked, a little amused, 'well, Sir, how can I help you?'

The man shuffled on his chair, looked still on a few seconds, then opened his overcoat completely. Yes, it had been rather cold, frosty even, in the beginning of this year of 1942.

‘Herr Doctor Vincius, I believe you moved only recently to Luxemburg. You brought some of your best paintings with you. I complement you! They are fine, indeed.’

Julian Vincius could not suppress some surprise at hearing a near question on what the man might be supposed to answer, yet given as a statement. He felt his defences rise immediately, and the smile on his face disappeared.

He answered, ‘not recently, no. With what can I help you? Are you in pains?’

Julian’s effort to bring back the attention of the man to medicine had but little success.

‘No pains, no,’ the man gave back. ‘I wanted to see you concerning quite another subject. You see, Doctor, you arrived at Luxemburg town from Berlin, haven’t you? You had to leave Germany, because the Nürnberg Laws made a Jew of you again, even though you abandoned the Jewish faith for the Prussian Evangelist one, and raised your children in the Catholic and Protestant faiths, your first daughter as a Catholic and your boys as Protestants, am I right? Your wife is French and Catholic, and your eldest daughter you left in Berlin to guard your villa in Berlin. Am I right?’

Julian Vincius was irritated by the double question of the man, given almost as teasing, sarcastic mentions. Julian felt cold blood take his force with it. He thought he had before him a policeman of the German Gestapo, though the man had expressed himself in perfect French and wore no German uniform. Julian chose not to answer for now, and wait for what the man had still to say. It was no crime to be Jewish in Luxemburg, at least not as much as in Germany. His mind soared to attention.

After a few moments of silence, in which both men gauged the other, the man continued. Julian must have shown his shock. As any honest man, he could not hide something he knew could be dangerous.

‘Please, you do not have to fear anything,’ the man said, speaking as slowly and articulating sharply each word, as he had done before. ‘I am not a German policeman. I am no Gestapo. Quite the contrary, I would say! I prefer not to give you my name, now, nor the name of the organisation I am a member of. I work secretly in a Luxemburg resistance group. You see, I love my country and I do not like my country now to be occupied by foreigners and perhaps losing its independence.’

Julian Vincius could not relax. He remained sitting stiffly in his chair behind his table, hands firmly on chair and desk. This, what the man claimed, could be the truth, as it could be a trap. The least he said, the better!

The man seemed to understand, then talked on, ‘I cannot by any means prove to you I am a member of a resistance group. You shall have to take my word for it. Please call me Paul Gauss. That is not my real name, mind you. It is just a name I am known by in the resistance, equally in other resistance groups than my own. I am indeed a member of a freedom-seeking organisation, active in Luxemburg town and in the regions north of here. I am a fighter for independence of Luxemburg by all means, and a fighter for freedom. I love this country, its freedom, and would like to preserve the ancient character of the institutions of our beautiful country. Actually, I came here because I need your help. You see, we lastly organised an attack on, let’s say, certain German interests. We suffered in the attack. Two of our people died. I shall be direct now. This conversation should not last too long. Let’s say we had men suffering

from wounds. We couldn't have our wounded men be treated in any hospital. Such things may happen in the future too. Some of our men suffer wounds from shots or grenades exploding. Other wounds occurred during some of our actions. We would like to have our wounded men treated medically, by fine specialists of wounds, without having to bring them in at state hospitals. It so happens we know you have a reputation for handling wounds, diverse wounds of war and armed operations quite well. We know what you did in Freiburg and in Longwy, so many years ago. The information we had access to goes back to your years of studying at the university of Freiburg-im-Breisgau. You see, we are well informed. We know you were a professor at a department of the Berlin university, the head of a department at the *Charité*.'

Julian grew paler. The man went on, 'You must have been declared a Jew by the Germans after the Nürnberg Laws of 1936. You were dismissed by the Berlin hospital. But we know you worked honourably in the hospital of Longwy in the previous war. You treated civil French patients there, too, didn't you? Some have remembered that. You even married a girl of Longwy. Your elder daughter is still French, not German. Be not afraid, this information is only known by very few people in our groups. We need you. We think you might be willing to help us. We would like to bring to you, let's say, friends of us, wounded men or women, to be treated for nasty wounds or any other impairments inflicted on them by the German armed forces in the war and mainly during our actions. Would you be ready to help us?'

Julian Vincius hid his first astonishment, his fear of the information gathered about him so openly thrown on the table.

He said, 'how could I be able to help, when patrols of German soldiers circulate in town and regularly or irregularly pass by my office?'

'We can be very discreet, you know. We shall have to respect the curfew as much as we can. Believe me, we will be taking many more risks than you. We would not want to lose an excellent doctor such as you. But when needed, we shall take the risks and may have to knock on your door in the middle of the night. We have transport. We'll be armed. I can promise you we'll protect you, not just us, but all the resistance groups of Luxemburg, though few will know you, actually. We'll either come with a wounded man, or we'll come in a car or a truck, and take you to our wounded friend. Please be prepared, or tell us what we should have near to heal our men. We cherish our liberty and life as much as you, doctor. We won't do reckless things unless it is more than necessary. We have nurses too, for first help. We shall protect your wife and children.'

Julian was thinking he would have his children come to Luxemburg city as little as possible now, since he had been forced, but he did not share his thoughts with the man he had in front of him.

He simply continued, 'you leave me no choice, then. I agree, of course. You knew I could not but agree. But how can I be sure that when somebody comes to me he or she is a member of your groups?'

The man smiled and relaxed visibly. Julian noticed the man had been as tense as he. The man placed a small card on the table. It was a pre-printed card, less than a millimetre thick, no larger than 5 centimetres by 5. It was a grey and blue card, stating merely *Patriotes Indépendants* in French, a war name of the man wearing it, his residence, and a signature, though no name mentioned for the man whose signature was on the card.

‘This is not much,’ Gauss continued, ‘but it is something. When a man or woman presents you such a card, you should show your own. You see, we already prepared one for you. No photo. You’ll have to trust us, as the people showing you such a card should trust you. No name shall be genuine. You are henceforth for us one Wilhelm Schön. That card is on that name. If ever the German Police finds a card like this, you can always deny knowing about it. One of us will always come with a similar card. If you get caught, chew on the card and swallow it.’

‘Fine,’ Julian nodded. It was close to nothing, but he understood he could not ask for more. He leaned back in his chair, saying, ‘I too need to know one or two things.’

‘Fine,’ the man agreed.

‘If I will be taken to a place where a wounded man is, will there always be a nurse?’

The man shook his head, ‘there may be, but don’t count on it. There may be medicines, there may not be. Where you may be taken can be in town, in this town or in any other of Luxemburg. We’ll guarantee you safety as much as we can. I promise you that.’

‘Well then,’ Julian said, ‘Cognac? I could need one.’

The man smiled to the offer, ‘I too, I’d love a Cognac. Yes. But I’ll also have to go soon. I don’t want to be seen too much here, and in this street. Nevertheless, a Cognac would be fine!’ The atmosphere became less tense, than. And soon, Julian Vincius became a doctor of the Luxemburg resistance against the German forces. In fact, in the next years, he had to intervene little, not more than a few times each year. He gave many information on medical treatments without having to follow a resistance man far, and even passed information on that could be interesting for the resistance.

While they sipped at their brandy, the man still said, ‘very few men in the movements know you are Jewish. Don’t worry about that. Better not tell anybody, even those appealing for your help, that you are Jewish. There is at least one resistance group among ours, which though indeed anti-German, seems also to have been touched by antisemitic feelings. Nobody but you and me have to know you joined us!’

‘I am grateful,’ Julian said not without some sarcasm in his voice.

Still, he could not be angry about these developments. He had to choose a side in this war, as anybody. He had only waited for the moment he had to make the choice. He wanted to help indeed, wanted to live almost at peace somewhere, and he had made his choice. Moreover, he felt he could trust the man.

### *The Luxemburg Resistance*

From 14 August 1940 on, the young, Nationalist Luxemburgers wore proudly insignia with a red lion, signs they had also worn in 1939 for the centenary feasts of the independence declaration of Luxemburg. These young men fought in the streets against the activists of the pro-German movement of the *Volksdeutsche Bewegung*, who tried to tear off their insignia. This led to fights in the streets, for which the *Gestapo* had to intervene with much violence. The Luxemburgers now wore pin-badges, depicting the national colours of the Grand Duchess. This non-violent, passive resistance, was called the *Spengelskrich*, or War of the Pins. More than 50 young men got arrested by the *Gestapo*, and brought to be beaten up in the Villa Pauly of Luxemburg city on the *Boulevard de la Pétrusse*, the headquarters of the *Gestapo*.

The aims of the *Gauleiter* Gustav Simon were the Nazification of Luxemburg, the extinction of everything that was not of German origins, such as the French names and the French way of living, the destruction of Luxemburg state institutions. He prepared for the country's incorporation in the German *Reich*. In the autumn of 1940, the political parties, the labour unions, Parliament and the Luxemburg State Council were dissolved. All civil society organisations and the press were put under Nazi control. Wearing a French-Basque beret was forbidden. German institutions such as the *Hitler Jugend*, the League of German Girls, the *Winterhilfschaft* and the German *Arbeitsfront* were installed in Luxemburg.

The group of the Luxemburg Resistance to the German occupying troops and administration that had contacted Julian Vincius, were indeed the *Patriotes Indépendants*. This was one of the first founded resistance groups of Luxemburg, though by far not the largest. With time, there would be founded many such resistance groups. They were of two kinds, but all appealed to Julian Vincius. One kind of groups were called by the Nazis as the *Reaction*. They consisted of several Liberal, Christian and other patriotic organisations, all with different names in the *Letzeburgisch* language. In 1944, these would coalesce in the *Union of Luxemburg Freedom Organisations*, the ULF. Part of these rather rightist groups fought the Nazi ideology, but first and foremost they were Nationalist groups, though no Nazis. The second kind of groups were called the *Rotfront* organisations, the Red Front. These last were Communist and Socialist groups.

The very first such Resistance group had been already founded as of August 1940 by Catholic Scouts Movements in the south of the country, meeting at Esch-sur-Alzette. Other meetings took place in Luxemburg city, in Diekirch and in Wiltz. The Germans banned the Scout movements in Luxemburg, so the organisation went underground, using the name of the *Luxemburg Scouts of the Resistance*, in short the LS. As for the other, several groups, they had been founded by men such as Raymond Petit, Camille Sutor, Aloyse Rathes, Alphonse Rodesch, Hubert Glesener, Eduard Heyardt and Pierre Fonck. Josy Goerres founded the PI-men, the *Patriotes Indépendants*. The man who had come incognito to talk to Julian Vincius, was this Goerres, as Julian heard only after the war. The largest group was the *Luxemburg People's Legion* or LVL, the V standing for *Volk* or people. The *Luxemburg Patriotic League* or LPL, founded by Albert Meyer in Differdange, was the last of these groups. The Communists' largest group was founded by François Frisch, called the ALEF, the *Active Luxemburg United Front against Fascism*, with the E standing for *Eenheitsfront* in the Letzeburg language. The rightist organisations later came together in the March 1944 to found the *Union of the Luxemburg Freedom Organisations*. A Committee of 2 members of each of the main 3 organisations led this union. The total resistance effort in Luxemburg was thus never a unique, unified organisation. Yet, the groups cooperated when necessary, and the leaders knew each other.

The PI-men had no particular political programme. The LVL was rightist. It adopted the antisemitic ideology of the German Nazis, as well as the idea of the living space for the people of Luxemburg as presented by Hitler in *Mein Kampf*. Nevertheless, it too acted for the freedom of the country. Membership was forbidden to Communists and drunkards!

The resistance groups engaged in illegal meetings to coordinate their actions. They had propaganda activities and printed flyers with slogans against the Nazi occupation. They

procured weapons and explosives for the activists, and joined the armed forces of the resistance of the other countries, notably in Belgium and France. They supported the family members of arrested resistance persons, and sought to organise the illegal emigration. They edited the underground press, such as the Communist *Die Wahrheit*. More papers were edited too, and printed, though in limited editions. They sent reports to London, mostly via the network called of the *Martin Family*, founded in Marseilles by an Austrian Jew living in Luxemburg. These even provided information on the V-1 and V-2 rocket testing sites of Peenemünde. The Allies could bomb the production sites in the night of 17 August 1943. Several networks were eliminated by the Germans, but in the autumn of 1943 Josy Goerres started the Luxemburg intelligence anew. Information reached London, and also the French resistance, this through a Dr. Charles Marx, working with the French resistance. Direct acts of sabotage were rare and very risky in this small country. Yet, they did happen.

The most notable feats of the Luxemburg Resistance groups were the sabotage of the German referendum on Luxemburg of 10 October 1941, and the general strike of September 1942, plus the Battle of Vianden.

The Germans had planned a plebiscite in 1941 already, with 3 questions: on nationality, on language and on ethnicity. The German authorities expected 3 answers of ‘German’ on the questions, to see the Luxemburgers readily accept their annexation to Germany. The Resistance spread leaflets inciting the population to answer ‘draimol Letzeburg’, 3 times Luxemburgish! Initial polls showed more than 75% of the population would vote 3 times for Luxemburg, so the Germans cancelled the census early on!

The 1942 the General Strike came after the introduction by the Nazis of the conscription into the German Army for Luxemburg young men born between 1920 and 1927, announced on 30 August 1942. During the strike, 20 strikers were arrested, condemned to death by an exception tribunal, and executed at Hinzert. A 21<sup>st</sup> striker had the same fate, but was condemned and guillotined at the prison of Köln-Klingelpütz. The strike was repressed. After the strike, the *Gauleiter* Gustav Simon proclaimed the State of Emergency and introduced German exception tribunals. Thousands of Luxemburgers were arrested and tortured, hundreds were murdered in concentration camps. On 18 October 1942, the first young Luxemburgers were sent to the quarters of the *Third Reich*. About 3,500 young men refused to serve in the German Army, and went into hiding in the country. Most hid in the woods or were hidden by parents and friends.

One month before the *Battle of the Bulge*, 250 soldiers of the *Waffen-SS* tried to recapture the town of Vianden from the Luxemburg Resistance. They failed. This had been called the Battle of Vianden. The Germans could also not take Vianden, even though they had V3 canons that could send shells 40 kilometres far, on Luxemburg city. About 10 people lost their lives in the bombardment of the city, and much damage was done to the beautiful town.

The *Gestapo* hit back on the Luxemburg resistance with massive arrests in 1943 and with executions in 1944. Thereafter, the Resistance movements worked even more closely together. The Luxemburg Resistance hid as well anti-Nazi clergy, shot-down Allied pilots, as Jews in farms in the countryside. Gustav Simon announced on 17 June 1943 Luxemburg to be *Judenfrei*. From the 683 deported Jews, only 43 survived!

Some Luxemburg citizens collaborated with the German authorities. In September of 1944, about 10,000 people left Luxemburg together with the German civil administration. In 1945, about 5,100 Luxemburgers, men and women, were placed in prison for political collaboration activities and 12 collaborators were sentenced to death and shot in Reckenthal in Luxemburg city. About 1,600 people were sent to prison, 645 to workhouses.

As in Luxemburg, all countries of Western Europe occupied by the German Army had their resistance groups.

### *The Luxemburg Jews*

Jews had been living in Luxemburg since the 13<sup>th</sup> century. A community lived in the city near the Saint-Ulrich Gate. They had a cemetery in Clausen, behind the Luxemburg cathedral. They built a first synagogue in 1823. In 1894, they built a second synagogue on the corner of the streets of Notre Dame and Aldringen. The German occupying troops destroyed this synagogue in the autumn of 1943. About 3,700 Jews lived in Luxemburg in 1940, about 1% of the total population.

From 28 July 1940 on, the *Gauleiter* Gustav Simon ordered several measures on the Jews: their bank accounts were blocked, their assets were confiscated. They had to give up their jewels, antiquities and the fur coats of their women. Marrying non-Jews was forbidden, they had to wear ostentatiously the yellow star of David. As of July 1941, restaurants, theatres, cinemas, baths, etc, were forbidden to them. The Jews had to buy things between 9h and 11h in the morning, and were not allowed to leave their homes at evenings and nights between 19h00 and 9h00 in the morning. This campaign of Gustav Simon was called *Heim ins Reich*, home in the German *Reich*.

The Luxemburg Jews caught by the German Police were deported. The first train with 334 Jews departed from Luxemburg city on the 16<sup>th</sup> of October 1941. The Jews were sent to the German-Polish ghetto of Litzmannstadt. Later, 6 more such deportations followed, to the environs of Lublin, in the Theresienstadt ghetto, and from 1943 on directly to Auschwitz. The Nazis set up a camp to assemble the Jews in Fünfbrunnen, or Cinqfontaines in French, where up to 200 Jews had at times to wait for deportation. After the war and after the deportations, only 2 Jewish communities remained at Luxemburg city and at Esch, whereas before, 6 had existed: the ones mentioned plus Mondorf, Ettelbrück, Medernach and Grevenmacher. From the 3,700 Jews in Luxemburg, only about 2,500 survived the war.

During the war, about 5,700 Luxemburg citizens died, about 2% of the population, the highest percentage loss in Western Europe. Many buildings were destroyed or heavily damaged in the bombardments.

Julian Vincius and his family survived. They even lived relatively well. They enjoyed some protection from the fact Julian Vincius and the children were inscribed in the City Hall's books as fatherland-less, not specifically as Jews. After the war, Julian Vincius received, as all resistance men of Luxemburg, a war medal of the Resistance. He was proud of that medal, and



proud of having helped the people of the country that had offered him fine hospitality. He asked and obtained the Luxemburg citizenship.

### The War in Africa continues

In the other war theatres also, the German troops did not as well as before. The British troops had retreated to Al Alamein in North Africa, protected in the south by the depression of El Qattara, which was impossible to pass by any army. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 1942, Rommel launched the Italian *Littorio* Division against what rested of the British tanks. The Italians had been rebuffed, with heavy losses! When the day after, the German infantry attacked, also that assault failed, was stopped, and the Germans lost many soldiers.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, Rommel attacked in the south with his tanks, against the 4<sup>th</sup> Indian Division. The Germans could conquer their positions at Tel El Elisa, south-west of El Alamein. The Germans thought they had won a great victory! But the British troops had already prepared their counter-attacks.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July, Rommel ordered his troops to close in. The British counter-attacked violently, so that the Germans had to retreat. Rommel attacked again in the next 2 days, but could not break his enemy's lines. General Auchinleck and his troops held their ground. They fought back. They retook the Tel El Elisa! A new pause set in. The British 8<sup>th</sup> Army, less 80,000 men since Tobruk, had broken the advance of the Axis troops towards the Suez Canal. And the RAF was strong in the area! In the weeks that followed, the British troops began two large counter-attacks, which allowed them to ameliorate their positions in the hills of Ruweisat. Nevertheless, the British also could not, without very strong reinforcements, destroy the German troops.

At that moment, Churchill was in Cairo. He changed the High Command of his troops in Africa. Churchill replaced General Auchinleck by General Harold Alexander. And General Bernard Law Montgomery obtained the command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army. At about the same time, Rommel's supply train gave out. He had no reserves of gasoline left. About 85% of his vehicles were worn-out, captured British models.

Rommel found the British troops weaker in the south. The British had deliberately opened breaches in their lines there, in the direction of the El Qattara Depression, inviting the German column on. The British had, however, assembled forces, concentrated in the north, with reserve troops from the Nile. Rommel was pressed to advance. He ran into the trap! He launched his great offensive in the night of the 30<sup>th</sup> of August. He broke through the British lines between the Heights of the Ruweisat and the Himeimat. He drove north to engage the British tanks. The British, less in number, remained on the defensive. They bombed the enemy with their airplanes and their heavy artillery, then brought in convergent attacks of infantry. So far, the British tanks had refused the combats with the Germans.

Rommel had issues with his provisioning. He drew back on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September, leaving a few tens of tanks on the battlefield and thousands of men. Rommel understood he needed much more of everything to dislodge the British forces from El Alamein. The British too

were waiting for reinforcements to launch a new offensive. Montgomery waited patiently for more British forces to arrive.

## The War in Western Europe

Meanwhile, the war in the Atlantic Ocean raged on. In June, the Allies lost about one million tons in ships! These figures may seem a little exaggerated, but were not far from the truth. The success had been realised mostly by the German submarines, of course. The German Command knew well only this weapon could deter the Allies from opening a second front in Europe. In the USA, gigantic naval docks constructed fleets at a larger pace than could be destroyed. The British Navy formed convoys to protect the transport of merchandise. And British bombing continued to pound on the German manufactories.

As of the 26<sup>th</sup> of July 1942, the RAF began systematically to bomb the submarines bases in the continental ports, the industrial centres of the enemy, and the Allied bombers dropped ever more and heavier bombs on the naval centres of construction of the German submarines. Air Marshal Harris announced all industrial towns of Germany would be destroyed! The Nazis would thus not be able to continue their war effort.

The Soviet High Military Command insisted now more than ever on the creation of a second front in Europe. The project was being considered in London. The British public opinion supported the idea. And also in New York, people began to defend the initiative. But the matter was too enormous to be prepared at that moment, and still inconceivable from a military view.

Winston Churchill was in Moscow from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1942, accompanied by Harriman, a delegate of President Roosevelt. They explained to Stalin a second front was out of the question at the moment. First, the *Afrika Korps* had to be defeated. Nevertheless, a trial landing on the French coast was foreseen.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of August at dawn, the German defenders in Normandy saw an imposing naval force arriving from the sea towards them. The German troops on the coast immediately dressed barricades in front of all the barracks and headquarters in the environs of Dieppe. But as of 07h00 in the morning, the Allied radios warned the local resistance cells to remain immobile. The mostly Canadian troops disembarked and executed their mission of destruction. At Dieppe, the British even disembarked tank units. While the battles raged, the tanks could not pass the dikes to the town, and remained immobilised on the beach until the German troops could destroy them. For 9 hours, the Canadian soldiers remained in the town. Then they drew back, after having suffered heavy losses. More than half of their men had been killed or taken prisoners. The experience at least had proven that it was possible to disembark and surprise the German troops on the coasts of France! But much more means had to be thrown into such battles!

The coastal cities of France near where the Allied forces had disembarked were La Rochelle, Saint Nazaire, Brest, Lorient, Saint Malo, Cherbourg, Le Havre, and more to the north Antwerp.

Admiral Karl Doenitz had redeployed most of his U-boat fleet in fortified pens at Brest, Lorient, Saint Nazaire, La Pallice (La Rochelle) and Bordeaux. Especially the reinforced concrete U-boat shelters at Lorient were huge! The coastal area there had been reinforced to the German Atlantic Wall strategy. The harbours had been reinforced with concrete bunkers, coastal artillery, underground supply depots, and minefields at sea and on land. The German Army had been successful in denying the Allies use of these harbours, but now, the Allied troops advanced over land. The Allied advance could not be stopped. Until the November 1944 opening of the harbour of Antwerp, logistics continued to plague the Allies and caused a marked slowdown in the British and American progress.

The largest deep-water harbour near the Allied landing sites of Normandy was Cherbourg. It surrendered to the Allies on 29 June, 3 weeks after D-Day. German Navy Commander at Cherbourg was Rear Admiral Walter Hennecke. The harbour could not be used until mid-August, for Hennecke had wrecked the harbour's infrastructure.

The Allied troops then laid a siege to Brest. The Germans surrendered this port only on 19 September. The port facilities had been blasted into ruins! Brest remained irrelevant, the more so when the larger port of Antwerp had been captured by the Allies.

The Allies concluded that the nihilistic strategy of the Germans made it hard to justify the cost of frontal assaults on the port. They skipped further sieges of coastal cities. La Rochelle, Saint Nazaire and Lorient were thus surrounded by Allies, but never stormed. They capitulated anyway by the end of the war in 1945. Saint Malo and Le Havre had been largely reduced to ruins. The German command had kept thousands of German soldiers in garrison in the ports, soldiers who otherwise might have offered key manpower in the defence of the Ruhr Region, about 12,000 soldiers in all.

From 2 October to 8 November, tough battles ensued to free up the estuary of the Schelde, to gain open access to Antwerp. Antwerp became only ready after 28 November.

## Stalingrad

The Battle for the city of Stalingrad began in earnest on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 1942. The German troops thought to take the town rapidly. They did control the Volga up to Astrakhan. The German soldiers assaulted the city with 2 armoured divisions of tanks, coming from the south, accompanied by a motorised division and three divisions of infantry. From the north-west attacked 2 more divisions of tanks, 2 motorised divisions with armoured cars, and six divisions of infantry. More forces attacked from the west. The German troops had more than 300,000 soldiers to assault on the town, about 1,500 airplanes and formidable heavy artillery. The battle was fierce. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of September, the German soldiers took the heights on the west side of Stalingrad. On the 13<sup>th</sup>, the fighting continued in the outskirts of the town, even under dive-bombing bombardments by the *Luftwaffe*. The city was by then already a heap of ruins. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of September, the German troops broke through the defence in the sector of Elchonka, and equally in the north. On the 16<sup>th</sup>, they took the central railway station and occupied further northern quarters, as in the south and the west. The German troops reached the Volga. The city was cut in two. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of September, the German High Command published an announcement of the taking of Stalingrad. The news was premature!

The Russian soldiers fought from out of each window, each building, each possible defence point. The bridges over the Volga had been blown up. The population, including the women, fought against the enemy. Nobody left the city! The Volga protected the last railway that ran from Astrakhan to Moscow. The Russian troops could not retreat from this vital link.

The struggle proceeded atrociously. Among the Russians, the word spread, 'hold or die'. They fought fanatically for the town. Each day, the German soldiers thought to have conquered, to be able to claim victory, but the fights continued unabatedly, from house to house.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of September, Hitler pronounced a crucial speech, in which he told the German soldiers would take Stalingrad, but then the deeds of conquest would be over for Germany. The Nazis would concentrate on the organisation of the lands they had been able to occupy with their troops. Nobody would be able to take back what the German Army, the *Wehrmacht*, had taken so far. This seemed to end the drive of conquest of the *Wehrmacht*! Had Hitler understood the German Army could not win the war? Was his strategy from then on a defensive one? Germany simply lacked the means, arms and men to launch other great offensives. The war production would henceforth be directed at defensive arms, submarines and fighter planes. But Hitler held on to the symbol, to Stalingrad! He had sworn to take that city. The weeks passed in ferocious fights around the town. The city was crushed by bombardments, but the Russians fought on! The situation did not change in October and November. The Russian Army could still arrange the provisioning of the city. Food came in by boat over the Volga, during the night. The German troops did not advance anymore. They also didn't leave! Although the soldiers didn't believe anymore in the success of the offensive, they fought on, and died. Of Stalingrad, nothing remained but the rubble of the ruins. Here, Hitler's ambitions stopped!

## The new Phase of the War

Meanwhile, in Egypt, the British troops prepared for a vast counter-offensive against the soldiers of General Erwin Rommel. They felt the war had arrived at a decisive turning point with the tenacious resistance of Stalingrad.

At about the same time, the series of conquests of Japan seemed to have come to a stop. The immense war industry of the USA had reached its highest output, and arms flowed in to the Allied troops. President Roosevelt and Winston Churchill held a conference in Washington, during which they decided first to chase the German troops out of Africa. The 8<sup>th</sup> British Army had to grab the initiative and break up the defence lines of the Axis countries. Imposing British-American troops would ensure it was made impossible for Rommel to return in counter-offensives. The *Afrika Korps* had to be crushed. The war had again to be brought to Western Europe!

Since the battles of June 1942, the front in Africa had stabilised at El Alamein. A decision could not be forced. The Axis troops could transport troops and material by ships from Italy, but a short distance off, but the British Navy and the Royal Air Force could inflict very heavy losses on those. During the months of September and October 1942, nearly 4/5<sup>th</sup> of all

transports over the Mediterranean were sunk. The Allied communication lines, though much longer, were far less vulnerable than the Axis ones. The British Army under General Alexander disposed now of considerable power in tanks and aeroplanes. The troops were well trained. The British had obtained vast advantages over Rommel in manpower, fuel, artillery, airplanes, tanks, including 300 new US *Sherman* tanks. Montgomery had ample air reconnaissance and so obtained a fine, accurate knowledge of Rommel's positions. While the British remained taciturn over their efforts, Rommel boasted he would stay in Africa forever. The British then decided to strike first.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 1942, the war in Africa entered another phase. The RAF held a formidable attack against the airfields, against the troop concentrations and on the artillery of the German Army. More than 1,000 bombers took part in the raid. More than 550 German and Italian airplanes were destroyed on the ground. Petrol tanks had been blown up. Rommel's aviation was obliterated in the attack! And the RAF were masters of the skies. In the meantime, the British troops had been working for 2 weeks to clear the German minefields, so that the British tanks could attack the German and Italian camps. On the eve of the coming battle, the German High Command in Africa was a mess. Rommel was on medical leave, and only returned on the third day into the battle. His replacement, General Georg Stumme, died on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the battle, apparently of a heart attack. The *Battle for El Alamein* would last from the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 1942 to 7 November of that year, in two weeks of fighting. Hitler forbade a strategic retreat, which proved once more to be a suicidal order.

The German troops were especially concentrated in the north, on a length of 10 kilometres of front inland from the sea. Behind the minefields, the front's centre lay open over 15 kilometres, then to the south and until the El Qattara Depression. Rommel had placed his forces from the sea to the depression, over a depth of 15 kilometres. He had 3 divisions of German infantry, 4 divisions of Italian infantry, one German tank division and one Italian tank division. Other tank divisions lay behind, near the Depression. The British brought 5 infantry divisions in the first line and 2 reserve divisions, plus 3 tank divisions, one placed along the El Qattara Depression and 2 others placed at 100 kilometres behind the front, north of the Ridges of Ruweisat. The centre of the German front was rather open, to draw in the British forces, but General Montgomery did not fall into that trap. He adopted a plan the Germans had not expected, and by which he could surprise his enemy.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October, at 09h30 in the evening, the *Battle for El Alamein* started by a formidable British barrage of artillery fire. The offensive began in the north, where most of the German troops lay concentrated. This surprised Rommel! After the bombardment, the British infantry went into the attack, supported by groups of tanks. The British advance was rapid. At 05h30 in the morning, the British soldiers arrived at 6 kilometres from the mine fields in the centre of the German front.

The 25<sup>th</sup> of October remained calm, except at the Depression of El Qattara, where a diversion attack was launched by the British to stop the Axis forces of the south from coming to the support of the battle in the north. Rommel then returned to the battlefield. He ignored Hitler's orders. He wanted to abandon Libya and retreat, return to the Tunisian border. The German troops had no adequate supplies, and not sufficient air cover to save the army. Rommel had

no fuel anymore. He had only 10,000 combat-ready Germans and Italians left. In fact, there was no *Afrika Korps* anymore in North Africa, other than Rommel's remnants and a few Italian garrison troops in Libya! Rommel knew that even in the summer of 1941, Hitler still had the supplies of fuel to continue his advance. Later, Hitler had sent considerable reinforcements by air to Tunisia, to meet the US soldiers in November 1942 and even in early 1943. Now, Rommel did not know anymore what Hitler's true objectives were in North Africa, other than not losing too quickly from superior Allied forces.

During the day, the German troops counter-attacked vigorously. The British artillery served heavy losses to the German tanks with their canons. In the night, avoiding the heat of the sun, the infantry advanced and marched on. Both sides lost soldiers, but the Axis troops lost far more than the British. In the night of the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November, the British soldiers broke through the Axis defence. The British infantry marched for 4 kilometres deep in a front of 6 kilometres long. The infantry passed the minefields and cleared corridors for the tanks to pass. So far, Montgomery had spared his troops, avoiding unnecessary losses. The Axis tanks had already taken part in the defence and in the combats, the British ones had not. The RAF had assured the support of the infantry! The Germans had *Tiger* Tanks, the British their English *Crusaders*, plus *Grant* and *Sherman* American tanks. Montgomery had wanted his tanks to enter the battle 'fit and well', and at the right moment.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November, the British tanks advanced. The tank battle happened near the hills of Tel El Aqqaqir. Rommel had sent many of his tank groups to that point. In the morning, at dawn, a British tank regiment attacked the enemy in the rear, while the battle developed in front. The battle lasted the entire day. The British suffered heavy losses, but they destroyed a considerable number of Axis tanks. In the evening, the German tanks ran out of petrol and had to retreat to replenish. During the night, the British took the Tel El Aqqaqir. Rommel had been defeated! The German defence had been crushed by the British attack. The German troops could only be destroyed totally, or flee. All the remaining trucks were used. The German troops abandoned their Italian Allies in the desert. The British troops found them somewhat later. The Italians were dying of thirst. During this day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> November, the Axis troops lost 260 tanks. For the complete clash at El Alamein, their losses amounted to 500 tanks, 650 airplanes found destroyed on the airfields, 1,200 canons and 75,000 men killed or taken prisoners. Among these was the German General von Thoma, the operational leader of the *Afrika Korps*. Six months still of battles ensued.

From the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November on, the British troops pursued the rests of the *Afrika Korps*. The hope of Rommel remained in a quick retreat to the borders of Libya, to regroup there and to hold there until new reinforcements would arrive, ready for a counter-offensive. The British troops were in pursuit, however. Day and night, the RAF harassed the fleeing German columns. In their rear, the British tank units made thousands of prisoners, men almost starved and weak by lack of food and water.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of November, the 8<sup>th</sup> British Army took the passes of Halfaya and continued to pursue and harass the German troops. El Alamein meant a formidable British victory.

New Anglo-American forces then jointly disembarked in Africa on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November.

*Operation Torch* was name of the landing of US troops in Morocco and Algeria. The US soldiers had to capture the key ports of Casablanca, Oran and Algiers with over 100,000 British and US troops. The Allies would squeeze the German and Italian forces in Tunisia between the Allied forces then present in Morocco and the advancing British 8<sup>th</sup> Army of Montgomery.

Radio London announced the news, which caused an immense response of hope in occupied Europe. General de Gaulle called on all the French free forces to support the effort. 'Our Algeria, our Morocco and our Tunisia, will constitute the basis for the liberation of France!' The French General Giraud could promise to bring 300,000 soldiers, which the Americans would equip with modern weapons. The French Army thus entered the action in North Africa two weeks after the Battle of El Alamein. The Allied fleet had been prepared at Gibraltar. The disembarkments took place on the coasts of Algeria and Morocco. Then, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November 1942, the British and American troops disembarked in the lands that belonged to the French colonial territories.

The hostilities started at Algiers at 01h00 the same morning! They stopped already at 07h00 the same morning. At Oran, the garrison surrendered, but on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November at 10h45. The American troops landed at Medhia, Fedhala and Safi in Morocco. They advanced to Casablanca and found some resistance. The French Vichy-loyal battleship *Jean Bart* bombed the American troops! The *Jean Bart* was quickly put out of harm by air attacks. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of November, the Admiral Darlan, who had been delegated by the Government of Pétain in France to resist the invasion, joined the Allied camp. It ordered the cease-fire. Darlan changed sides!

General Eisenhower had agreed to make of Darlan the head of the Government of North Africa. General Giraud held the head of the French military forces. On the 23<sup>th</sup> of November, the Governor of Equatorial Africa, Boisson, rallied to Darlan. The men of the French Free forces had not much liked this turn of events for someone who had collaborated for so long with the Nazis. Roosevelt justified his choice as an opportunistic measure, necessitated by the military situation. Darlan was assassinated on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December at Algiers by a young patriot. Giraud, in the confidence of Roosevelt, then also took on him the political direction of the liberated territories. The arrival of the British and Americans and the non-resistance of the French forces took Hitler and his ministers by surprise. Hitler reacted with 2 measures. First, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November, German soldiers entered the French territory managed by Marshal Pétain, completely against the terms of the armistice, in the south of France and in Corsica. On the 12<sup>th</sup>, German forces occupied Tunisia from Bizerte to Sfax, where the Allied troops had not arrived yet.

France was not anymore really allied to Germany, then. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of November, special German troops had tried to take by surprise the French fleet at anchor in the harbour of Toulon. The French sailors sabotaged their ships. Some of them fled and reached Algiers or Gibraltar.

The Allied units that had gone on land in Algiers immediately drew to Tunisia. Other French troops fought there with the Axis troops. Despite orders given by Admiral Esteva for staying neutral, the French troops had at first been surprised by the arrival of German troops being flown in. They had tried operations to delay battles, but they also had received orders to hold

Mejez-el-Bab, the western door to Tunisia, and to wait for the British forces disembarked at Bône.

The British troops advanced, but were attacked by powerful raids of the *Luftwaffe* stationed in Sicily. These troops therefore suffered heavy losses. The German forces could advance rapidly. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of November, they judged themselves strong enough to attack Mejez-el-Bab. The French soldiers had to retreat to Oued Zarga. On the 21<sup>st</sup>, the Italian troops tried to take Sidi N'sir. The aim of the Axis forces there already was to take all the key positions west of Tunis and hold up the disembarked Allied troops. On their side, the British wanted to profit from the fact the enemy had not yet many heavy arms, to take Bizerte and Tunis and so rapidly to end the campaign of Africa.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of November, the British and American tank units effectuated a rapid and intense attack in the direction of the Gulf of Tunis. They reached Tebourba on the 27<sup>th</sup>. On the 29<sup>th</sup>, they occupied Sidi Sala, Bou-Kadrine, Mateur, Djedeida and Cheylus. They destroyed 33 Stuka German dive bombers on the ground, on the airfield of Djedeida. The Axis forces had still a powerful air force in Sicily. These airplanes counter-attacked on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December, and they could chase the French troops out of Tunis. As the British troops fled in some disorder, they could also inflict high losses on them. The front then established itself on the line of Tamara to Sidi N'sir, Mejez-al-Bab, Goudellat, to Bou-Arada.

The Germans, however, had not been thrown back into the Mediterranean. A substantial German airlift to Tunisia brought in tons of supplies, tanks, artillery and more than a division of fresh German soldiers. End November 1942, the thus reconstituted German-Italian *Panzer* Army had 3 new divisions added to the remaining Italian Army in Libya, plus what was left of the old *Afrika Korps*. These forces were now called the enlarged *Army Group Africa*, still with Rommel in command.

As the meteorological conditions worsened, both forces slowed down. Nevertheless, the French troops developed a systematic offensive to reach the coast between Sousse and Gabès, and thus succeeded in cutting off the Axis forces from the rest of their troops. They fought in the mountains, without tanks. They held their communications with Algeria open.

At the east of the African front, the situation of the Germans had become worse. The British units had stopped at El Agheila for 3 weeks, after General Montgomery had launched an offensive after the defeat near Tunis. He occupied El Agheila on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December and advanced to Buerat, where he stopped as of the 26<sup>th</sup> of December 1942, to reorganise his troops. He expected strong opposition at Tripoli. By mid-January 1943, he ordered the advance and by the 23<sup>rd</sup> he could enter Tripoli triumphantly. Rommel had retreated to his defence line of Mareth. Rommel thus marched backwards, because the strategic situation had changed entirely.

While Montgomery pushed on to Tripoli, along the coast of the Gulf of Syrte, General Leclerc moved irresistibly to the town from the south. The French forces were used to the desert! In December 1942, when Montgomery entered El Agheila, General Leclerc, who had come from Lake Tchad, had concentrated his troops at Zouar in the very arid zone of the Tibesti. His aim had been to eliminate the last German resistance that menaced the flank of the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army, and to reach the Mediterranean while doing so. It had been an advance of 2,500 kilometres, though made at the coldest period of the year. The temperature was only



at 38°C in the shadows. Leclerc left on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December and conquered Umm el Azaneb on the 4<sup>th</sup> of January 1943, Sehba on the 5<sup>th</sup>, El Gatroum on the 6<sup>th</sup>, Mouzouk on the 12<sup>th</sup>, and Mizda on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January 1943.

Rommel had by then already left Tripoli and his convoys rode to Tunisia. It was especially the Leclerc threat to his flank, that had decided him to proceed thus. The Leclerc Division entered Tripoli on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January. The next day, Leclerc took the fortified place of Ghadames on the frontier with Tunisia. He advanced towards Mareth.

## At Stalingrad, 1943

Germany had been defeated before Moscow and at Leningrad, so Hitler's belief in the fragility of the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union had decisively been proved wrong! *Operation Barbarossa* had failed to achieve the aims with which it had set out in June 1941. The Red Army had gone on the offensive, and forced the German Army to retreat. The bitter cold of the depths of winter, followed by a spring thaw that turned the ground to slush, made any fresh campaigning difficult on any scale until May 1942. Then, Stalin ordered a series of counter-offensives.

The Soviet Union's facilities for arms production had begun to turn out significant quantities of military equipment: 4,500 tanks, 3,000 aircraft, 14,000 guns, more than 50,000 mortars, to be brought to use in the Soviet spring campaign of May 1942. Nevertheless, Stalin's first counter-attacks proved as disastrous as his military engagements in the previous autumn.

In May 1942, in the Kharkov area, a first large-scale Soviet offensive ended with 100,000 Red Army soldiers killed and twice as many taken prisoner.

On 20 January 1942, Field Marshal Fedor von Bock was back from sick leave. He fought a prolonged and ultimately successful campaign in the Crimea. But the German lines thinned! The German troops fought on, advanced with great difficulty and considerable losses. The troops were tired. Von Bock took the city of Voronezh. At Voronezh, key Soviet divisions nevertheless escaped encirclement and destruction. With effect of 15 July 1942, Hitler relieved von Bock of his command, replacing him with Colonel-General Maximilian von Weichs. Von Bock, embittered, spent the rest of the war home.

On 16 July 1942, Hitler changed his headquarters to a new centre called *Werewolf* near Vinnitsa in the Ukraine. This was a compound of damp huts, plagued by daytime heat and biting mosquitoes. It was also the operational headquarters of the Supreme Command of the armed forces. The main thrust of the German summer offensive, remained to secure the Caucasus with its rich oilfields.

Army Group South had then been divided in a northern sector A and a southern sector B. Hitler now ordered Group A to finish off the enemy forces around Rostov-on-the Don, and then to advance through the Caucasus, conquering the eastern coast of the Black Sea, penetrate into Chechnya and Baku on the Caspian, oil-rich territories. Army Group B was to take Stalingrad, to push on into the Caspian via Astrakhan on the lower Volga. In this plan, Hitler continuously underestimated the Soviet Army.

At that time, on the Volga, another tragedy reached its ending. Hitler still wanted Stalingrad to be taken. After 4 months, neither side had much changed. Stalingrad today is called Volgograd. It has a population of 1 million people. Formerly, it was called Tsaritsyn. In Germany, the public opinion began to become aware of the uselessness of the effort. Despite the numerical superiority of the German *Wehrmacht*, success had not been obtained. The High Russian Command was preparing its counter-offensive.

During the battle on the Don, the Soviet troops could hold strong defences at Serafimovitch, Sirotinskaïa and Kletskaïa, to serve as basis of future attacks. They concentrated their troops in the large turn of the River Don. Thus, the plan of the Soviets was to break through the German defences to the north of Stalingrad. The leader of the German troops in the town was General Friedrich Paulus. The Russians wanted to launch their attack from Serafimovitch in the north, from the south near the Lake of Bormantsach and to encircle the enemy, to destroy the German troops if they refused to surrender.

At the beginning of the campaign, Army Group A assaulted the Crimea. Field Marshal Erich von Manstein defeated 21 Red Army divisions, killing or capturing 200,000 out of the 300,000 Soviet forces facing him. Sevastopol resisted. After a siege of a month, it too fell. 90,000 Soviet troops were taken prisoners. But the German Army lost 100,000 casualties! A new tactic of the Russians was to perform a series of tactical retreats, which denied the Germans the vast numbers of prisoners they had hoped for. In 3 large-scale battles, the Germans took between 100,000 and 200,000 prisoners, though many times fewer than before.

Army Group B occupied the oilfields at Maykop, but the refineries had been destroyed by the retreating Russians. Austrian mountaineering soldiers climbed Mount Elbrus, the highest in the Caucasus. Still, Hitler raged.

Meanwhile in 1942, Army Group North had moved against Leningrad. Leningrad had been cut off by the German forces since 8 September 1941. 3 million people lived in the city and its suburbs. Supplies dwindled. The city inhabitants began to starve, eating dogs, rats, even each other. A communication line was nevertheless kept open across the ice of Lake Ladoga. 440,000 inhabitants were evacuated. According to German estimates, a million Russian civilians may have died in the winter of 1941-1942 from the cold and starvation. 500,000 more inhabitants were evacuated. Everyone grew and stored vegetables. Massive quantities of ammunition and food were shipped in across Lake Ladoga and stockpiled for when the frost began. The Red Army even installed a new pipeline on the bottom of the lake to pump in oil for heating. About 160 combat airplanes of the German Air Force were shot down trying to stop the provisioning. The winter of 1942-1943 was less severe than its calamitous predecessor: frost came late, in mid-November.

Massive assaults of the Red Army on German forces in the Leningrad area failed to relieve the city centre. Attacks of the Soviets were repulsed in fierce fighting. In the south of the city, the Germans held fast in the face of repeated Soviet advances.

The Soviet Armies launched a strong counter-attack on the town of Rzhev in August 1942. Halder asked to withdraw. There was an alarming improvement in Russian tactics: the Soviets began to coordinate tanks, infantry and air support much better. They coped better with the harsh weather conditions. In the summer, temperatures reached 40° in the shade, and massive dust-clouds were thrown up by the advancing motorised columns. It was troublesome to see clearly in such conditions. Hitler refused the retreat and ordered to press on. On 24 September 1942, Hitler dismissed Halder, telling him he had lost his nerve. Halder's replacement was Major-General Kurt Zeitzler, previously in charge of coastal defences in the west. He was a convinced National-Socialist.

By the end of that year 1942, in the Nazi forces, about 1.5 million soldiers of various nationalities had been killed, wounded, invalidated, or taken prisoner on the Eastern Front. This was nearly half the invading force. 327,000 Germans were dead. Such losses were hard to replace for Germany! The Eastern Campaign had stalled. The German Army yet still advanced to Stalingrad.

The German airplanes failed to establish complete air superiority around Stalingrad. As soon and as fast as the Russians lost airplanes, they rushed in replacements to the combat zones from other fronts. But the Soviet Air Force had not achieved domination either. In the spring and summer of 1942, the Germans moved to Stalingrad, gateway to the Lower Volga area and the Caspian Sea. On 23 August 1942, the German airplanes bombed the city, causing massive damage and loss of life. But German tanks advanced virtually unopposed. Stalingrad crumbled in ruins. Stalin allowed the civilians to evacuate the city.

On 12 September 1942, General Friedrich Paulus's Sixth Army, backed by General Hermann Hoth's Fourth *Panzer* Army, entered Stalingrad. Paulus was born in 1890. He was the Deputy Chief of the Army General Staff, when he received his command in early 1942. All his career had been in staff posts, he had no real combat experience. Hitler and Paulus thought the Red Army had no resources anymore. The city should fall in weeks. Hitler had already decided to kill the entire adult male population of the city; the women and children were to be deported..

On 30 September 1942 indeed, Paulus had about overrun 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the city.

Senior German Generals such as Paulus, his superior Weichs, Halder's successor Zeitzler, all, advised Hitler to order a withdrawal. They feared the losses incurred in a lengthy period of house-to-house fighting. But on 6 October 1942, Hitler reaffirmed the city had to be taken. The name of the city alone made the effort worthwhile!

Stalingrad had been encircled from 19 August 1942 to 22 November 1942 by the German Army, by the northern wing of Army Group South, led by General Friedrich Paulus. It was Hitler's error to have split the Army Group South in half, and have one half only sent to Stalingrad. The aim of the Army Group South was to finally destroy the active fighting spirit and strength remaining to the Soviets, and to conquer as far as possible their most important war resources of oil, the oil of the Caucasus.

Stalin then gave a free hand to General Aleksander Vasilevskiy and Georgi Zhukov, the general who had stopped the Germans at Moscow a year earlier. He gave the command of the Red Army forces in the city itself to General Vasili Chuikov.

The bombed-out ruins of the city provided the Soviet soldiers with ideal conditions for defence. The Soviets dug in, ambushed the advancing German troops, broke up their mass assaults, led them to concealed anti-tank guns and heavy weaponry. The Soviets used mines, booby-traps, until even hand-to-hand fighting ensued.

The Soviet breakthrough came in the rear! Large quantities of fresh troops, fully equipped with tanks and artillery mounted a huge encirclement operation against the Germans. In October

1942, the Red Army had created 5 new tank armies and 15 tank corps. One million soldiers were assembled, ready by early November 1942 for a massive assault on Paulus's lines.

General Maximilian von Weichs, Commander of Army group B, decided to help Paulus concentrate his forces on taking the city itself. Rumanian forces would take over half of the German positions in the west, freeing up more Germans for the assault on the city itself.

Zhukov knew the poor military record of the Rumanians, and of the Italians in the north-west. He sent 2 armoured corps to the Rumanians and Italians in the north-west, and another 2 tank corps to face the Rumanians in the south-east. Paulus failed to strengthen his defences, and his foreign forces, preferring to keep his tanks close to the city, where they were actually of little use.

From 19 November 1942 on, the Soviets attacked the Rumanians, 100 miles west of the city. They used 3,500 cannons and heavy mortars. They blasted a way through for their tanks and the infantry. The Rumanian Armies were overwhelmed, fled in panic and confusion. The columns of T34 tanks poured through the gap. The Soviets also drove Paulus's men towards the city. The Germans failed to move troops in to the tank thrusts of the Soviets, to meet one another in a classic encirclement manoeuvre. On 23 November 1942, the 2 Russian tank columns met at Kalach. They cut off Paulus's forces from the rear, leaving Hoth's armour outside the encircled area. The Russian plan began to be executed by mid-November 1942. Limited counter-attacks by the Soviet troops kept the Germans busy between the Don and the Volga, north-west of Stalingrad. The offensive of the Soviet troops began on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November with a large artillery bombing on the German defences south of Serafimovitch.

This was the signal of the offensive that would only end two years later in Berlin! The Soviet infantry assaulted the German troops. At noon already, the Russian tanks and motorised divisions rode through several breaches in the German defences. The infantry cleared the terrain behind. They made many prisoners! The German troops tried to stop the onslaught with their tank units, but the Soviet troops overwhelmed them. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November, the Soviet troops entered the town of Kalatch, a further 100 kilometres south on the Don, taken 3 months earlier by the Germans. In the rear, the Soviet infantry reached the River Chin to preempt any German initiative coming from the west. The Soviets annihilated the 3<sup>rd</sup> Rumanian Army at Raspepinskaia. The Rumanians had been trapped by the rapidity of the Russian advances. The offensive in the south-west had begun 24 hours later than the initiative in the north. The German resistance was far greater there! By 17h00, nevertheless, the Russians broke through the German defences and the Soviet tanks fought in the rear of the enemy. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November 1942, the Russian front guards passed the river Karpovka. Two days later, they managed to make contact with their forces of the north at Sovietskoie. The German troops of Paulus that guarded his army, found themselves encircled at Stalingrad. The Germans had 11 divisions of infantry, 2 divisions of tanks and one division of cavalry. The Germans lost in this movement of the Soviets about 72,000 prisoners, 134 airplanes, 1,782 tanks, 2,232 canons and 7,306 trucks. The Russians fortified their positions, to throw back the German reinforcements sent to save Paulus.

In the north, a Soviet offensive began out of Voronej in the direction of Kursk to stop the Germans from using their reserves to come to the aid of the German troops in Stalingrad. In

the south also, the Soviets placed important troops in front of Kotelnikovo, the only direction from where a German counter-offensive could come.

Two German divisions of tanks, 4 divisions of infantry, 2 divisions of cavalry drew forward to break through the Russians by the Kotelnikovo-Stalingrad railway axis. General von Manstein had superior forces and he advanced fast! But the Russian resistance held! The German counter-attack weakened then progressively. More Soviet troops arrived. They crushed the German troops and allowed only disorganised groups to flee back south.

The encirclement of Stalingrad held, despite these important fights. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 1943, the Russians invited the German troops inside the city to surrender! The Germans didn't want to lose face. They provisioned their troops by the air. But the Russian anti-airplane guns and the Russian fighter planes shot down more than 600 German transport airplanes.

By late November, thus, the German troops became the besieged! The two huge pincher movements on the Stalingrad and the Don fronts had targeted the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army's northern and southern flanks. The Russian *Operation Uranus* had to organise and place the trap of the Russian encirclement to the German rear, near the city of Kabach. Ill-equipped subordinate Rumanian 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Armies guarded the German flanks. Massive Soviet artillery barrages pulverised the German troops. By 23 November 1942, the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army was completely surrounded. The siege of Stalingrad could begin, and would last until 2 February of 1943.

Paulus still had 20 divisions, 6 of them motorised, and 250,000 soldiers in total. Paulus tried to break out in the west. He had no clear plan, and he hesitated, for breaking out meant a retreat, which Hitler had forbidden. A little later, Hitler organised a relief force under Field Marshal von Manstein and General Hoth. Hitler refused Paulus to withdraw.

On 20 November 1942, Manstein sent a telegram to the beleaguered forces with orders to hold on. Manstein's forces were 2 infantry divisions and 3 Panzer divisions under Hoth's command. These attacked from the south on 12 December 1942. But on 19 December 1942, the German relief armour had been stopped in its tracks, still 35 miles away from Paulus's rear lines.

Zhukov, meanwhile, attacked the Italian 4<sup>th</sup> Army in the northwest, overrunning it and driving south to cut off Manstein's forces from the rear.

On 28 December 1942, Hoth's armour was allowed to retreat, as his forces were virtually surrounded. On 23 December 1942, Hitler finally told Manstein that Paulus could attempt a breakout. But the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army had only enough fuel to go 12 miles before it ran out of petrol! Göring had promised to airlift 300 tons of supplies in a day. He managed little more than 90, and after Hitler's intervention barely more than 120, only for about 3 weeks. It was hard to land in the snow, and airfields were under constant attack from the Russians. Supplies of Paulus' Army were getting low.

The Germans hid in underground holes. Lice and shortage of food weakened the Germans' resistance. They ate horsemeat. The weather deteriorated sharply in January. On 28 January 1943, Paulus issued the order that the sick and wounded should be left to starve to death. Food and ammunition were running out.

The command of the Red Army troops west of Stalingrad was held by Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky. He battered on.

On 16 January 1943, the Soviets captured the last German-held airfield in the environs. In the southern sector, the Rumanian soldiers just ran away, leaving a huge hole in the defensive line.

The weather grew colder. The 20,000 wounded Axis soldiers were driven back into makeshift underground hospitals and cellars. 100,000 Germans were already killed by then. Hitler still ordered Paulus to fight on. All Soviet approaches should be met by gunfire. Yet, on 22 January 1943, Paulus suggested that surrender was the only way to save the remainder of the soldiers. Hitler rejected the request. Rokossovsky's advance split the pocket in two. 100,000 German soldiers remained prisoners in those pockets.

On 30 January 1943, Hitler promoted Paulus to Field Marshal. The measure seemed to have been intended as an invitation to Paulus to commit suicide.

By late December 1942, efforts of General Erich von Manstein's Army Group Don in Operation Winter Storm had tried to reach the entrapped 6<sup>th</sup> Army. They had to grant they could not reach the German 6<sup>th</sup>! They abandoned their efforts.

The leader of the German troops was General Paulus. His staff did not like him. Other generals had difficult times. General Paul von Kleist, Commander of Army Group A, had ignored Hitler's orders and thus saved his surrounded Army group A in March of 1944. General Erwin Janecke refused to sacrifice his trapped 17<sup>th</sup> Army in the Crimea. Hitler dismissed him. Paulus followed Hitler's orders and stayed in Stalingrad.

The German Army still had 330,000 soldiers behind solid defence positions in Stalingrad.

The final battle started on the 10<sup>th</sup> January 1943 with a formidable artillery bombardment on the Germans, which lasted for three weeks! The Russian troops passed the German defence lines in the west. They pushed the German soldiers back over the Rivers Rossochka and Tchervoenñaia. The Soviet assault troops arrived the 17<sup>th</sup> of January on the line Pestchanka-Bolchaia Rossochka. On the 24<sup>th</sup>, they had arrived to within reach of the German guns south-west of Stalingrad. Thousands of German soldiers had already died from hunger and cold. Many surrendered immediately, although SS soldiers shot on them when they tried to flee. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of January, the German positions in the centre of the town were cut in two. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of February, the now promoted to Field-Marshal Paulus and the group in the south capitulated. The next day, the north group did the same. The tragedy was fulfilled.

The Russian generals who fought at Stalingrad were first of all General Vassily Chuikov, a brawler, who liked to bivouac with his men, and General Gyorgy Zhukov, the architect of the Soviet counter-offensive that had cut off the Germans at Stalingrad from their other forces. Zhukov stood up to Stalin and thus ensured his plans for *Operation Uranus* were carried out as he had envisioned.

The large 6<sup>th</sup> German Army, whose aim had been to take Stalingrad and Moscow, did not exist anymore. Field Marshal Paulus with 24 of his generals, 2,500 officers and 91,000 German soldiers were made prisoners. Stalingrad was the costliest land battle in history.

On 31 January 1943, Paulus finally surrendered. Rokossovsky and Marshal Voronov from the Supreme Soviet Staff arrived to take the formal surrender, with a photographer and an interpreter. But Paulus refused to cease fire in the other pocket. Still 6 German divisions were in Stalingrad. On 2 February 1943, the Germans surrendered completely after a heavy Russian bombardment. The German Army surrendered 235,000 German and allied troops from all units, included from Manstein's relief force. 200,000 soldiers had been killed in the German and Allied Army.

Dressed in rags, filthy, unshaven, lice-ridden, often barely able to walk, 91,000 German and allied soldiers marched in captivity. They died in their thousands on the way to the prison camps. By April 1945, over 55,000 prisoners were dead. Fewer than 6,000 of the men captured at Stalingrad eventually found their way back to Germany.

The soviet Secret police began to convert the prisoners to anti-fascism, even to Communists. In 1943, they formed a *National Committee of Free Germany*. One of the leading figures of the movement was the pilot Friedrich von Einsiedel. Also joined Field Marshal Friedrich Paulus. Paulus made a series of broadcasts of propaganda to Germany on behalf of the Soviets. Paulus thus became a deep embarrassment to the Nazi leadership.

On 2 February 1943, about 100,000 starving Germans surrendered at Stalingrad! That was what was left of the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army of 300,000 soldiers. The soldiers left, were famished and went into Soviet captivity. Nearly 90% of them would perish in Russian camps. The survivors were allowed to return to Germany in 1955 only. Stalingrad cost the Axis forces from 150,000 to 200,000 men dead and missing, with tens of thousands lost Hungarians, Italians and Rumanians. In addition, Group Army A had suffered 300,000 more casualties. The Soviets suffered about over 1 million casualties, killed, wounded or made prisoners.

The Soviet Army lost many more men in 1941 in the war. The German armies captured more than 665,000 Russians in and around Kiev. In the Vyazma and Bryansk pockets they lost 650,000 prisoners. In July and August 1941, the Soviets lost another 600,000 prisoners to the encirclements of Army Group South. They lost also about 7,000 tanks and 6,000 artillery pieces there.

After Stalingrad's end, Germany never conducted a clear-cut, large offensive campaign again. The strategic aims for *Case Blue* had been so ambitious, that even Stalin was surprised initially that the 1942 German offensive had not targeted either Moscow or Leningrad. After February 1943, survival and not victory was the only hope for the German armies on the Eastern Front. A huge German Army had been swallowed whole by the Soviet Union! In 1941 overall, the German armies had suffered enormous losses of over 1.1 million casualties, 35% of the original army that had entered Russia in 1941 was gone. The German forces were now half a million men fewer than the force that had begun *Operation Barbarossa*. In the first 6 months of this operation, the Germans had added 100,000 men to their armies on the Eastern Front, whereas the Soviets had increased their military by over 3 million men. The German Army had been able to eliminate Red Army soldiers by the unimaginable rate of 7 or 8 to one, but not at 30 to one!



After Stalingrad, Army Group B of 50 divisions, led by General Maximilian von Weichs, reached the Volga. Army Group A under Field Marshal Wilhelm List, came close to Grozny. By October 1942, the Luftwaffe sporadically bombed the oil fields around Grozny.

The great victory at Stalingrad boosted the morale and the enthusiasm of the Red Army. For Germany, it was the first time in history a German Field-Marshal had surrendered. The gigantic Hitlerian Army, launched to conquer the east, had met disaster.

After Stalingrad, the Soviet troops continued to take the initiative. On the 20<sup>th</sup> November, they took the offensive in the Caucasus. Around Grozny in the south, in the Kalmuk Region in the north, they forced the German troops to withdraw from their Caucasian strongpoints. Other Russian offensives started on the River Donetz, at Voronej and north of the Valdai Mountains. Veliki-Luki was liberated. Near Leningrad, the siege of the city had been lifted by the taking of Schlüsselburg, also in December 1942. Leningrad was not blocked off anymore. Moreover, it was winter, a very harsh winter, in which the German troops suffered hard. In the south, Krasnodar and Rostov fell. The German troops could only hold Taman with Novorossiysk. The Russian troops then turned to the west.

Voroshilovgrad on the Donetz fell later, Kursk and even Kharkov. A month later, in a desperate German offensive Kharkov returned to the German troops. Then, in the first days of March, the Soviet troops broke the German front north of Moscow and took back towns such as Rjev, Gjatsk and Viazma. In early spring, the Red Army threw back the Germans to their positions of November 1941. The Soviets had advanced by almost 700 kilometres, annihilated about 850,000 German soldiers, made 350,000 prisoners and captured or destroyed 5,000 airplanes, 9,000 tanks and 20,000 pieces of artillery.

A general feeling of deep shock amongst the Germans at home followed. Germany had suffered huge losses of men, as the enemy strength had been badly underestimated. Some Germans saw in Stalingrad the beginning of the end. Most serious criticism against the Army leadership was uttered. Why had the 6<sup>th</sup> Army not withdrawn while there was still a chance? People were criticising Hitler without actually naming him. Why did Hitler not save the lives of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army by ordering them to capitulate? Germany had a crisis in morale!

Many Germans began to condemn the war. They wanted it to end. People were openly criticising the regime, declaring it to be inefficient, poorly organised and corrupt. Widespread pessimism entered the hearts and brains of the German people.

On 14 February 1943, Goebbels delivered a speech in the Berlin Sports Palace to 14,000 Nazi fanatics. He announced new measures against luxuries and amusements, and proposed a Spartan way of life for everybody. Moreover, he asked for total war: the mobilisation of every last resource, including women workers. Was that the way Germany would acquire new territories, the necessary living space? Could one really now still believe what the Nazis wanted and had promised?

What was total war? Was the speech of Goebbels not just a bid by Goebbels to seize control of the home front? Hitler created a Committee of Three to initiate the Total War measures. Members of it were Martin Bormann, Hans-Heinrich Lammers, and Wilhelm Keitel.

Göring had become addicted to heavy doses of morphine. In the autumn of 1943, the Committee of Three already ceased to function. What point was there in demanding a boost in production, when there was not enough coal and steel to build tanks and airplanes? No petrol to fuel them! The Total War boiled down to an attempt to suppress domestic consumption in order to divert resources to war production, but the possibilities were limited.

On 30 January 1943 still, the Committee of Three cracked down on non-war related production and consumption. The Committee ordered the closure of all non-essential businesses: 9,000 small businesses in Brandenburg alone. Hence, followed a widespread resentment in the lower middle class as independent shop-owners were now forced to become wage-labourers in arms factories. Widespread resistance and evasion were the result of the Nazi measures. The measures had to be stopped, the people said. Rationing continued in Germany, harsher than before. In October 1939, the official food ratio was of 2,750 calories/day for civilians, 3,600 cal for the armed forces, 4,652 cal for labourers engaged in particularly heavy physical work. For civilians the rations were about 10kg of bread a month, 2,400 grams of meat, 1,400 grams of fat-stuffs including butter, 320 grams of cheese, etc. By mid-1941: meat was down to 1,600 grams a month. Rationing for fruit, vegetables, and potatoes was introduced. At the beginning of 1943, these figures were brought to 9kg of bread a month, 600 grams of cereals, 1,850 grams of meat, 950 grams of fat. And in January 1945, the rations had still diminished to 3.6 kg of bread, 300 gram cereals; potatoes were still in plentiful supply at 10kg a month. The great majority of people found the food rations barely enough to survive on. Hence, there was widespread grumbling and discontent in Germany.

In front of these realities, Goebbels' rhetoric of suffering and sacrifice failed to convince the Germans. Hitler must have understood. He did not appear anymore in public. The Nazis continued to raise additional funds for the war effort in Germany, by raiding people's savings. The government silently creamed off savings to pay for arms. Money flowed from savings banks into arms construction. At the same time, bartering spread and black marketeering grew.

## The Battle of Kursk

The Battle of Kursk was the greatest land battle in history. It began with a German offensive on 5 July 1943 and lasted somewhat less than 2 weeks until 16 July 1943. It flared up with a Soviet counteroffensive on 12 July 1943, which lasted somewhat longer than a month to 23 August 1943.

Josip Stalin was then, of course, the ultimate leader of everything in the Soviet Union. Chief of the Russian General Staff was General Giorgi Zhukov, as of January 1941. The Commissar for Defence was Marshal Semyon Timoshenko, the equivalent of the Minister of War in a Government, and Deputy Chief of Operations was General Alexander Vasilevsky. The Foreign Minister was Vyacheslav Molotov. An important and dangerous figure, dangerous for everybody, was the Head of the NKVD, Levrentiy Beria. The Deputy Head of the Planning Division of the Russian General Staff was Lieutenant-General Nikolai Vatutin.

The Soviet Union population was then about 190 million people, the German population 80 million people. The main issues for the German Armies at the beginning of *Operation*

*Barbarossa* had been the difficult terrain, the vast distances, the truly inhospitable Soviet autumn and winter, incompatible German locomotives and rolling stock. Less than 17% of the German ground forces were motorised. So, 625,000 horses had been used to invade Russia, but horses got hungry and thirsty. The Germans also had 600,000 vehicles of 2,000 different models and variants. Later, they would reorganise their armies for such figures, but not yet.

The Soviet Armies were organised in 5 sections. The Northern Front was led by Lieutenant-General M.M. Popov, the Northwestern Front by Colonel-General F.I. Kuznetsov. This last was to fight against the German Army Group North. The Soviet Western Front was led by General D.G. Pavlov, directed against German Army Group Centre. On the Southwestern Front led Colonel-General M.P. Kirponos, to fight against the German Army Group South. Finally, on the Southern Soviet Front led Major-General I. Tialenev, against the Rumanian Forces.

For the cleansing of the captured territories, Germany had *Einsatzgruppen* or Special Operation Units. These acted as paramilitary death squads. They would be responsible for the Genocide of the Russian Jews. Moreover, on 8 September 1941, a German OKH decree, a decree of the *Oberkommando des Heeres*, stated that Soviet prisoners of war had 'forfeited all rights'. The decree had horrendous results, as it seemed to allow all German excesses of cruelty in the captured territories.

In *Operation Barbarossa*, the First Strategic Echelon for the Soviets consisted of 3 shallow and incomplete defensive belts. The Second Strategic Echelon were 5 Soviet armies on the Dniepr and Dvina Rivers. Stalin had installed the *Russian State Committee for Defence*, the GKO, a body with total power to conduct the war as it saw fit. It would direct the *Stavka*, the Supreme High Command of the Soviet Armed Forces, their General Staff. Stalin was in title and in power the Supreme Military Commander of the Soviet Union. Days later he also became the People's Commissar of Defence. He moved 1,523 factories more than 1,000 miles from Moscow by November 1941.

On 11 September 1941, Zhukov took command of the Russian forces at Leningrad. He had been in and out of favour with Stalin. Stalin had to recognise Zhukov was his best strategic general, and a general always eager to fight, but that didn't mean he liked the man. By mid-August, Zhukov had launched the Yelnya Offensive against the Germans. This led to the Battle for Smolensk. In that battle fell 750,000 Soviet casualties and 250,000 German casualties. The Germans were exhausted after Smolensk. And yet, the German Armies attacked once more.

The German *Operation Typhoon* towards Moscow opened on 30 September 1941. On German side fought here 2 million men, with 14,000 artillery pieces, 1,000 tanks, and 1,390 combat aircraft. The German forces were led by General von Bock. The Red Army had 1.25 million men to resist, 7,600 artillery pieces and mortars, 930 tanks, and 667 combat aircraft. The Germans had scored major victories at Vyazma and Briansk. The 650,000 Soviet troops in the first lines, with 6,000 artillery pieces and mortars were nevertheless overrun! A 300-mile breach had formed in the Soviet defences.

On 6 October 1941, General Giorgi Zhukov arrived on his front. He merged the Western and the Reserve front together, though he had still only 90,000 men of these soldiers, all that was

left after the Battle of Smolensk. He rushed soldiers to the Mozhaisk line to save Moscow. With agreement of Stalin, he launched his offensives. The Russian attacks were stopped by the rain, the bad weather, and the mud. The *Wehrmacht* had suffered 686,000 casualties by then. On 25 October 1941, the South Army Group of von Rundstedt took Kharkov. Rostov fell on 21 November 1941. On 5 December 1941, Hitler halted the offensive and authorised the limited withdrawal of Army Groups Centre and South. *Barbarossa* was now finished. By end October 1941, the *Stavka*, the Soviet upper command echelon, had ordered the formation of 9 reserve armies, with 9 tank brigades, 49 tank battalions, more than 100 ski battalions and 90,000 men replacements for the Reserve and the Western fronts.

After the winter of 1941-1942, after the Russian counterattacks, Hitler replaced several higher officers. He replaced Von Rundstedt with General Walter von Reichenau in Army Group South. He exchanged Von Bock with Field Marshal Günther von Kluge in Army Group Centre. He replaced Von Leeb with Colonel-General Georg von Kuechler in Army Group North. And Guderian was sacked amid claims of an unauthorised withdrawal of troops. By the first week of January 1942, Hitler had sacked about 35 senior generals of *Operation Barbarossa*.

Nevertheless, on 5 January 1942, the Soviet counterattacks ran out of steam.

Stalin's ill-founded spring 1942 offensive achieved little. The disaster led to another loss of 440,000 Red Army troops and inflicted but 80,000 losses on the Germans. A new German assault was then started in the Crimea. Von Manstein was elevated to the rank of Field Marshal. On 12 May 1942, the Soviets attempted to retake Kharkov. The battles made 275,000 casualties to the Russians, 650 tanks lost and 1,600 artillery pieces. The Russians had suffered 1.4 million soldiers as casualties since the beginning of the year. German losses stood at 190,000 men. The war in the East was getting costly.

In 1942, Hitler's strategy was to clear the Red Army along the Don south of Voronezh, and then between Rostov and Stalingrad. The Germans were to push on with Army Group South to seize the oil fields at Maykop and Astrakhan. Stalin placed his defensive weight against Army Group Centre, around Moscow. Therefore, the Red Army was unable to take the initiative in the south. The Germans split their forces. Army Group A was to destroy the enemy south of the Don, then move to the Caucasus, to capture Grozny. These forces were led by field Marshal Wilhelm List. Army group B was to head for Stalingrad. Its main aim was to block the land communications between the Don and the Volga. The 6<sup>th</sup> German Army reached the outskirts of Stalingrad on 23 August 1942. By that end of August 1942, Zhukov got appointed as Deputy Supreme Commander in Chief, with as orders to take control of the developing situation in Stalingrad. On 9 September 1942, Hitler sacked Field Marshal List, and Hitler himself took command from out of his Ukrainian Headquarter. Colonel-General Franz Halder was angry with Hitler, in fury, so he was replaced by General Kurt Zeitzler in November 1942.

By end 1942, Zhukov launched his *Operation Uranus*, a new Soviet offensive. The Soviets attacked with have 1.1 million men, 13,500 artillery pieces and mortars, 900 tanks and 1,414 combat aircraft. *Uranus* started on 19 November 1942 against the Rumanians. The Soviet troops surrounded Paulus at Stalingrad. Hitler did not want Paulus to break out. Paulus had to

establish the *Festung Stalingrad*! His *Luftflotte 4* Commander was General Wolfram Richthofen, support for the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army.

Army Group Don (now called Group A) failed in its *Operation Winter Storm*. The Soviets launched their *Operation Mars* to remove the Rzhev salient opposite Moscow, and attack the German rear with 800,000 Soviet troops, and 2,350 tanks. The Russians lost in the operation 500,000 men, for little territorial gains. German casualties were only about 40,000 men.

At that moment, at Stalingrad, one airstrip only remained open to the Germans. On 9 January 1943, Paulus rejected an offer to surrender, but on 31 January 1943, Paulus capitulated the day after his promotion to Field Marshal. The cost of Stalingrad for Germany and her allies was about 800,000 men. The Soviets suffered 1.1 million casualties. But the operation ended in a major German defeat!

*Operation Citadel*, the German assault on Kursk, was fought in July 1943. Before that, the Russians had retaken Kursk (on 8 February), Rostov (on 24 February), and Kharkov (on 18 February). They had made progress along the Lower Dnieper. *Citadel* began in its preparations on 19 February 1943. It was Manstein's counterstroke. He took 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the terrain the Germans had just lost, but could not take Kursk.

Germany had in 1941 36 divisions, and 3.8 million soldiers. In 1943, it had 179 divisions and 2.7 million men. The Soviets, however had in 1943 about 6 million men! The balance of power had changed! In the spring of 1943, Germany had still 2,209 tanks, of which only 600 were really operational, and 6,360 field artillery pieces. The Soviet Union had 12,000 to 15,000 tanks and assault canons, with 33,000 field artillery pieces. In 1942, the Soviet Union had produced 25,436 aircraft, 24,446 tanks, 127,000 artillery pieces. Germany had produced 15,409 aircraft, 9,300 tanks and 12,000 artillery pieces only. The Chief of the General Staff of the Soviet Army, of the *Stavka*, was now General Aleksander Vasilevsky. Chief of Operations, the deputy of Vasilevsky, was Aleksei Antonov. These were excellent leaders. In the spring 1943, the Soviet Union was far outproducing Germany in arms!

After the Battle of Stalingrad, the Red Army moved to an offensive in the south, called *Operation Little Saturn*. By January 1943, a wide gap of up to 300 km had opened between the German Army Group B and Army Group Don. The advancing Soviet Armies threatened to cut off all German forces south of the Don River, including Army Group A, which operated in the Caucasus. The Soviets had retaken Kursk on 8 February 1943 and Rostov on 14 February. The Soviet Bryansk, Western and Central Fronts prepared for an offensive to encircle the Army Group Centre between Bryansk and Smolensk.

By then, the German Armies had reorganised.

Army Group Don was renamed Army Group South under von Manstein. Army group B was dissolved and its forces divided between Army Group South and Army Group Centre. Manstein thus inherited the massive opening in the German lines. Von Manstein intended to destroy the flanks of the Soviet armoured division, while retaking Kharkov and Kursk. At first, von Manstein's offensive had no name, then its advance was known as the *Third Battle of Kharkov*. The operation started on 21 February. Kharkov was taken on 15 March, Belgorod on 15 March. The Russian counteroffensive left a Soviet salient extending 250 km from north to south and 160 km from east to west into the German area.

On 15 April, Hitler issued an Operational Order Number 6, calling the Kursk operation. The directive was drafted by Kurt Zeitzler, the Chief of Staff of OKH. *Operation Citadel* would mean a double attack, directed at Kursk, to surround the Soviet defenders of five armies and seal off the salient. Citadel's aim thus was to reduce the Kursk salient by von Kluge's Army Group Centre and von Manstein's Army Group South. The strategy of the Russians could only be to defend the city of Kursk, bleed the German troops dry, and then to launch a counterattack. The German troops were to be drawn into this trap.

In all, 4 million men, 69,000 artillery pieces, 13,000 tanks and self-propelled guns, and furthermore 12,000 combat aircraft battered at each other from the beginning. Russia threw in 1,426,532 soldiers, Germany about 518,000. Three to one! 2,365 tanks for Germany fought against 4,938 Soviet armoured vehicles. The Soviets had 31,415 artillery pieces, and also rocket launchers. The Germans had lost command of the sky with 1,372 aircraft against the Russians' 3,648. The Soviet Red Army had built up large reserves in everything, from men to war material. In all, Germany was outnumbered 3:1 in soldiers, 5:1 in artillery, 3:1 in tanks and armour, and 4:1 in aircraft.

On a map of Russia, one shall find in the north-south direction the cities Orel in the north, Kursk in the middle and Belgorod in the south. The Russian salient pushed from Orel to Belgorod. Further into the heart of Russia lay the city of Voronezh.

To the north, left flank of the salient advanced the forces of Colonel-General Walter Model, with the 47th *Panzer* Corps of General Joachim Lemelsen consisting of 4 *Panzer* divisions, with 331 tanks and guns (45 Tigers), 178 field artillery pieces, and 54 *Nebelwerfer*, cannons that threw shells to form thick fog. On that flank also stood the 41st *Panzer* Corps, led by General Josef Harpe. He had 1 additional *Panzer* Division, 2 infantry divisions, 304 tanks and guns, 180 artillery pieces, and 54 *Nebelwerfer*. There was also the 23<sup>rd</sup> Corps of General of the Infantry Johannes Freissner with 1 reinforced infantry division and 2 regular divisions. These had no tanks, but 62 assault guns, 214 field guns, 57 medium and heavy *Nebelwerfer*. To the north-east waited Infantry General Hans Zorn with his 46<sup>th</sup> *Panzer* corps and 4 infantry divisions, with 9 tanks, and 31 artillery pieces. Also waited there the 47<sup>th</sup> *Panzer* Corps, with 4 infantry divisions, with 9 tanks and 31 assault guns. This meant in total for Army Group Centre: 770,000 men, 2,451 artillery pieces, and 7,417 field canons and mortars. Von Manstein had 2 *Panzer* divisions, 1 *Panzer Grenadier* division, 1 infantry division, with 595 tanks and assault guns, 244 artillery pieces, and 59 *Nebelwerfer*.

In the south, on the right flank, lay the 4<sup>th</sup> *Panzer* Army of Hoth with the General of *Panzer* troops Werner Kempf, with the 111<sup>th</sup> *Panzer* Corps consisting of 3 *Panzer* divisions, and the II SS *Panzer* Corps under SS *Obergruppenführer* Paul Haush, with 494 tanks and assault guns, 179 field artillery pieces. Here too waited 1 Infantry division of Hermann Breith with 200 field artillery pieces and 54 *Nebelwerfer*, and the 11<sup>th</sup> Corps under General Erhard Raus with 2 infantry divisions and 3 infantry divisions of General of Infantry Franz Mattenklott's XLIII Corps.

Von Manstein's Army Group South advanced for the main attack. In the north of him was the 4<sup>th</sup> *Panzer* Army of Hoth, and south of him was the 48<sup>th</sup> *Panzer* Corps of *Panzer* General Otto von Knobelsdorff with 2 tank divisions and a *Panzer Grenadier* division called

*Grossdeutschland*, and 1 additional infantry division. Von Knobelsdorff had 595 tanks and assault guns, 244 field artillery, and 59 *Nebelwerfer*.

On Knobelsdorff's right stood SS-Obergruppenführer Paul Hauser with 494 tanks and assault guns.

The reserve was only to be released on Hitler's authorisation. It was the *Panzer Corps* of General Walter Nehring with 181 tanks, and 123 assault guns.

On the Russian side, in the central front stood General Konstantin Rokossovsky (b. 1896), an extremely capable man, with an exceptional analytical mind. He had as troops the 13<sup>th</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 65<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup> Infantry Armies plus the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tank Army of Lieutenant-General A.G. Rodin. Added to those was the 16<sup>th</sup> Air Army of Lieutenant-General S.I. Rudenko. In all 711, 575 men, with 1,785 tanks and assault guns, 12,453 field guns and mortars, and 1,050 airplanes. Plus: the 13<sup>th</sup> Army of Lieutenant-General N.P. Pukhov on 20 miles of front, with 51,000 anti-tank mines, 29,000 anti-personnel mines, in 3 echelons of 20 miles deep and also with 223 tanks and 47 assault guns.

On the Voronezh Front stood General Nikolai Vatutin, 41 years old. With the 6<sup>th</sup> Guards, 7<sup>th</sup> Guards, 38<sup>th</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup>, 69<sup>th</sup> Armies. 1<sup>st</sup> Tank Army, 2<sup>nd</sup> Air Army, parts of the 17<sup>th</sup> Air Army. In all: 625,591 men. He had 1,704 tanks and assault guns, 9,751 cannon and mortars, 881 aircraft, 2 echelons (6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> Guards) and a 3<sup>rd</sup> echelon of reserves.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Guards under Lieutenant-General I.M. Chistyakov were at 40 miles of the front line. With 682 cannon and mortars, 88 *Katyushas*, 135 tanks and 20 assault guns. They had in first line 69,688 anti-tank mines, and 64,430 anti-personnel mines.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Guards under Lieutenant-General M.S. Shumilov were at 30 miles of the front. With 1,573 field guns and mortars, 47 *Katyushas* and 224 tanks, 22 assault guns.

In this Central and Voronezh Front stood 1,337,166 soldiers, close to double the German strength, with 4 times the number of guns.

As still deeper reserve for the Russians waited the *Steppe Front* under Colonel-General Ivan Konev (45 years old) with the 4<sup>th</sup> Guards, 5<sup>th</sup> Guards, 24<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>, 53<sup>rd</sup> Armies, 5<sup>th</sup> Tank Guards. They amounted to 573,195 men, with 1,639 tanks and assault guns, 9,211 guns and mortars, and the 5<sup>th</sup> Air Army of 563 aircraft.

The German *Tiger* tanks had an 88 mm gun. They could penetrate a T-34 armour at 1,800 yards. Enough armour to withstand a 76 mm gun. The *Ferdinand* tank was a turretless *Tiger* with an 88 mm gun. It was a 50-ton machine, with a speed of 45 km/h. The German Panther was equally a 50-ton tank. It had sloped armour, a 75 mm gun with high velocity shells. It was probably the best German tank. The *Tiger* and the *Ferdinand* tanks were slow, however, heavy, cumbersome and unreliable. They had a short range, and they lacked battlefield mobility.

In *Operation Citadel*, the Germans could count on 1,830 aircraft. General Model had the 730 aircraft of General Otto Desselach, *Luftflotte* 6. General von Manstein had 1,100 aircraft under Colonel-General Robert Ritter von Greim, *Luftflotte* 4.

A tank division of the Soviet Army had not all T-34s. 40% of the tanks were lightly armoured T-70 with a 45 mm gun. 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of all Soviet tanks at Kursk were light T-70s. The Soviets also had the KV1, which had the same gun as the T-34, but thicker armour. They were heavier and slower.

The Russian defences had been particularly built for the German attacks. The 1<sup>st</sup> Line consisted of a zone of entrenchments, with 5 lines of barbed-wire fences, wide ditches, mines, dammed rivers, steel anti-tank defences with sawed teeth. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Line was the Soviet defensive zone. It had anti-tank resistance points, trenches of rifle men, bunkers with machine-guns, gun pits, barbed wire, and almost 4 km of trenches. The Soviets had posted 11 dug-in tanks and 200 anti-tank guns per mile. The 3<sup>rd</sup> line had the same defences as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Line.

### *The Kursk Offensives*

#### 5 July 1943

Citadel, *Unternehmen Zitadelle*, was launched on 5 July 1943. A 50-minute German bombardment started the operation. This aimed at neutralising the Soviet artillery, to disrupt the Soviet command and the control centres. It was followed by a tank attack. The bombardment happened with great accuracy. The Soviet Armies had thrown up large, strong defences over the entire front, 300 km deep, to withstand the German onslaught. The Soviet artillery opened fire first, thus betraying to the Germans they knew the assault was coming. Soviet bombers attacked German airfields crowded with German aircraft. They were noticed by the German radar systems. The Germans shot down 425 Soviet airplanes for a loss of only 36 of their own airplanes.

The Soviet troops launched an aircraft attack with 132 II-2 Shturmovik ground-attack aircraft, escorted by 285 La-5 and P-39 fighters. The Soviets had hoped to catch the *Luftwaffe* unawares, but instead, they suffered considerable losses into one of the greatest air battles of the war!

In the south, the main attacking force was the *Grossdeutschland Panzer Grenadier Division*, with 384 tanks and a heavy company of 15 *Tigers* and 200 *Panthers*. It was directed at Gertsovka, Butovo, and then Cherkasskoye. The *Panthers* plunged into a minefield and so the attack faltered. Mine clearers came, tracks of the tanks were repaired. The Commander of *Grossdeutschland* was General Walter Hoernlein. Waves of German Stukas attacked, under good German communications. *Grossdeutschland* took Butovo. Cherkasskoye fell in the afternoon. The German attack had been executed with the terrible, cruel *Flammenpanzer* IIs, flame-throwing tanks.

Around Trivsechnoe attacked the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of Hoth's striking force, Paul Hausser's II SS *Panzer Corps*. And 3 SS-*Panzergrenadier* divisions: the *Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler*, *Das Reich* and *Totenkopf*. They battered against Lieutenant-General I.M. Chistyakov 6<sup>th</sup> Guards. A *Keil* of 42 *Tigers*, 404 other tanks and assault guns then moved to Gremuchii, Berezov and Bykovka.



The LAH first moved to Bykovka, well supported by the *Luftwaffe*. Battles in the trenches ensued. The Germans used flame-throwers to clean them up. The Soviet's first line of defence cracked. Chistyakov fled to Lieutenant-General M.E. Katukov's 1<sup>st</sup> Guards tank Army. The LAH, *Leibstandarten Adolf Hitler*, then sped on to Oboyan. One SS-*Untersturmführer* Michael Wittmann destroyed 8 Soviet tanks and 7 anti-tank guns! A 4-hour battle developed between *Das Reich* and the Soviet T-34s. The *Totenkopf Division* took Gremuchii, then pressed on to north of Belgorod.

The 6<sup>th</sup> *Panzer Division* led by Major-General Walter von Hünersdorff, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Heavy Tank Battalion of Clemens Graf Kagenack passed the northern Donetz River. The first Soviet defence line of Maslovo Pristiani was taken. At the end of 5 July, Manstein's attack against the Voronezh front had not achieved much. Only the 1<sup>st</sup> Russian defence line had been taken and passed. The Germans had underestimated Vatutin's defences.

Army Group South's thrust had been slowed. The Russians prepared their 2<sup>nd</sup> defences. The Soviets reinforced Shumidov's 7<sup>th</sup> Guards. Vatutin was determined to stop Manstein's offensive.

In the north, General Model's 9<sup>th</sup> Army began the attack, to fracture Marshal Rokossovsky's defences. The 505<sup>th</sup> heavy *Panzer* battalion pushed on to Bodoyan and Butyrki. The 1<sup>st</sup> Russian line defences still held. The villages of Alexandrovka and Butyrkin were taken. The German attack broke through. Vatutin then reinforced his 2<sup>nd</sup> line of defences, and used 3 armoured corps of General Rodin's 50,000 men and 600 tanks to hold the line. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Soviet Tank Army moved north to screen the approaches to Vatutin's 2<sup>nd</sup> line from Teploe to Olkhovatka to Bonryi, backed by the 17<sup>th</sup> Guards Corps.

This first day of *Zitadelle* had realised no disastrous fragmentation of the Red Army. The Russians remained well prepared. Their defence lines had not been broken through. They had lost much more aircraft than the Germans. The Soviet units understood that the *Wehrmacht*'s offensive methods depended on the command of the skies.

#### 6-8 July. The German Progression

The Germans launched an attack on the 2<sup>nd</sup> line of Soviet defences. They esteemed the Voronezh Front was more vulnerable to be broken. The German troops threatened Prokhorovka and Oboyan. The Russians sent their 27<sup>th</sup> Army to reinforce Vatutin. They dug in their tanks with only the turrets showing.

At 03h00, the LAH and *Das Reich* pushed forward, led by 120 tanks and the *Tigers* in front of the *Keil*. Their orders were to penetrate the minefields southeast of Yakovlevo and advance to the Pokrovka - Prokhorovka road. The Red Army could not stop the Tiger attack! Their defences were breached. The Soviets then launched counterattacks, so that the *Luftwaffe* was forced to prioritise calls for their services, because of dearth of petrol, oil and lubricants, repair battle damage necessary, and the necessary routine maintenance on the airplanes.

On 6 July in the afternoon, Luchki fell. *Das Reich* pushed on. Hausser's penetration touched the village of Teterevino, southwest of Prokhorovka. Battles happened along Hoth's flanks.

II SS *Panzer Corps*' right flank was wide open. The Army Detachment Kempf had failed to make adequate progress. Vatutin undermined it further, attacking with General Shumilov's 7<sup>th</sup> Guards Army. But Hoth's men broke the Russian infantry attack. The defence of the Russian 81<sup>st</sup>, 73<sup>rd</sup> and 78<sup>th</sup> Guards Rifle Divisions proved very strong. Clemens Graf Kagenneck was frustrated by the Soviet defences. He had suffered fearsome losses. By the end of the day, the Army Group Kempf had been deftly contained by the Soviets. II SS *Panzer* Group had been denied the aircraft protection it needed!

General Knobelsdorff began to attack the Soviet 1<sup>st</sup> line. The Grenadier division *Grossdeutschland* forced on with strong *Luftwaffe* support. They reached the River Pena. The Pena was too difficult to pass, so Knobelsdorff sought northeast for more favourable terrain and fords. *Grossdeutschland* carved a way through the mines. They pierced the Soviet defence line at Lukharnino, while other groups stalled. *Grossdeutschland* had then only 80 of its 350 supporting tanks still operational! The battle had been terrible. The losses of Manstein in the first 2 days of battle amounted to 263 tanks and mobile guns and 10,000 men. Richthofen's *Luftflotte* had lost more than 100 aircraft. *Luftflotte 4* Chief of Staff, General Otto Desselloch could not but notice the increased Soviet air presence over the battlefield.

The Soviets had their own issues, as Vatutin noticed with awe a big hole growing in his defences, and by midnight he had committed all of his front reserves. He asked for reinforcements. Stalin gave him the 5<sup>th</sup> Guards Tank Army of Lieutenant-General Pavel Rotmistrov, from the *Steppe Front* reserve. Vatutin had to continue to exhaust the enemy. Konev protected Kursk unmoved, until Stalin called him to move on. Substantial Soviet forces then moved to the Prokhorovka area.

### 7 July

It was cooler and wetter weather. Countless missions were performed on this day, accompanied by scores of tank kills. The Russian defence of Oboyan and Prokhorovka was very tenacious. Teterevino and Greznoy were taken by the Germans, by Hausser's division, on this day. Knobelsdorff continued his attack on the Soviet 2<sup>nd</sup> Line with 300 tanks, of which 40 *Panthers*. A crunching battle took place west of Pokrovka. The Germans suffered heavy losses of their precious *Panthers* in a minefield. Nevertheless, the German onslaught pushed back the Soviets to Syrtsevo. The Soviets halted the Germans there by strong defences. In the evening, the Russians reinforced Syrtsevo. Hoernlein directed his *Tigers* to outflank the village, but too many *Tigers* broke down in mechanical failures. His movement faltered.

The various Soviet operations, all to blunt the German advance, were proving extremely costly to the Russians. The High Command's attrition strategy was not without cost to the finite resources of Vatutin. Nikita Khrushchev was Stalin's political representative at Vatutin's headquarter. The two men conferred in command. The battle reached a critical point.

### 8 July

The German High Command launched from around 05h00 in the morning a new offensive of II SS and 48<sup>th</sup> *Panzer Corps*. *Das Reich* held the line from Teterevino along the Lipovyi-Donetz river. The *Division Totenkopf* had also arrived at last. The Germans reinforced the II

SS *Panzer Corps* with *Totenkopf*. That provided immediate good results, as the Soviets had to relinquish Bolshie Maiachki in the morning. They withdrew from Gresnoie to the Psel River. Soviet counterattacks of Vatutin were repelled by the Germans. The fighting was ferocious, very intense. The Soviet thrusts had yet failed to bring Hausser's advance to a halt.

A Russian attack took place around the village of Gostishevo, 10 miles north of Belgorod. The *Luftwaffe* spotted the preparations and ravaged the Soviet tank corps. Its Fokke-Wulff Fw-190 airplanes were armed with SD-2 cluster weapons. The infantry of the Russians got decimated by the cluster bombs. They had to flee, and 50 T-34 tanks were rendered inoperable, then 30 more! A tank formation had been stopped by air power alone!

II SS *Panzer Corps* rolled on beyond Gresnoie, but failed to break through the Soviet defences. At dawn, a new attack of the *Grossdeutschland* of Knobelsdorff developed along the east bank of the Pena. 11<sup>th</sup> *Panzer Division* moved forward on the road to Oboyan. The Soviet defence began to crumble at Syrtsevo. The defence overall began to waver. In the early afternoon, the Germans took the village. About 40 Soviet tanks arrived at a hamlet south of Verkhopenye. They were met by German assault guns, and these destroyed the tanks piecemeal. *Grossdeutschland* then approached Verkhopenye. Counterattacks in the division's flanks took place. The Soviets were held off. Verkhopenye was not taken on the 8<sup>th</sup> of July!

In the night of from 8 to 9 July, Vatutin ordered his troops to withdraw from Verkhopenye, fearing destruction. New defences were set up north of the town, across the Oboyan Road along the Solotkina River, and to the Psel River. Vatutin hoped there to halt Hoth's 4<sup>th</sup> *Panzer Army* long enough to feel the force of armoured counterattacks. On Hoth's left, the Soviet 6<sup>th</sup> *Tank Corps* advanced against the German troops, and from the right came considerable Soviet armoured forces.

On 8 July in the evening, Manstein, Hoth, Hausser, Knobelsdorff and Kempf discussed. They found it beneficial for the German 9<sup>th</sup> *Army* to be pushing through Rokossovsky's defences north.

In the north, Model launched infantry attacks. They made progress to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Line of the Russian defences. Rokossovsky then unleashed the 16<sup>th</sup> Soviet *Tank Corps*: 100 T-34 tanks struck at 01h30. This developed into a major concentration between Soborovka and Samodurovka. The Red Air Force flew in close support. Air battles developed.

By early afternoon, General Lemelsen's 48<sup>th</sup> *Panzer Corps* was in assault with 300 tanks. A large tank battle ensued near Olkhovotka, one of the most strongly fortified sections of the main defensive belt. The advancing infantry was met by a hail of fire. The Soviet 2<sup>nd</sup> Line held! The Soviets hit back with local counterattacks. The 47<sup>th</sup> *Panzer Corps* had been starved of its ability to manoeuvre. The Germans had to meet Soviet troops, determined to throw them back.

The *Battle of Ponyri* then developed. The 13<sup>th</sup> Soviet *Army* held it at all cost, so that it became a mini Stalingrad. For Germany, the 292<sup>nd</sup> *Infantry Division* attacked with elements of the 9<sup>th</sup> *Panzer Division*. *Stuka* dive-bombing helped. But the Germans had to stall! The Soviets defended too well. Ponyri remained in Soviet hands. No breakthrough happened here! Rokossovsky managed to reinforce his defences.

On 7 and 8 July, the German 9<sup>th</sup> Army continued to fight against the Olkhovatka defences. On 7 July developed a new attack of the 7<sup>th</sup>, 47<sup>th</sup> and 41<sup>st</sup> *Panzer Corps*. The attack was directed towards the Teploe Village, Olkhovatka and Ponyri: an offensive of brute force to smash holes in the enemy's defences. The attack got support from 400 aircraft of *Luftflotte 4*. Counterattacks came then by the Red Air Force. The Soviets achieved general and local air superiority over the Central front. Chief of Staff of *Luftflotte 6* was *General der Flieger* Friedrich Kloss.

By noon, a 2-mile gap had been formed between the villages of Samodurovka and Kashara. German *Tiger* tanks flowed in. The 47<sup>th</sup> *Panzer Corps* had gained a position from which they could make a direct assault on the Olkhovatka Heights. But the Russians had already well protected the ridges. The Soviet Air Force attacked the Germans. The Russian T-34 tanks then appeared. The German attack on the Olkhovatka heights had been stopped before it had even started! The Russian air force had dislocated the two German *Panzer* divisions.

Model had little more success at Ponyri. The German attacks failed. Assault after assault was thrown back. Rokossovsky flooded the area with gunfire. A large battle for Ponyri thus developed until Model's reserves were running out. The German 9<sup>th</sup> Army was being worn down and denied territorial advantage.

On 8 July, Model persisted with his attempts to take the Olkhovatka heights. 300 *Tigers* advanced into new mine fields. The Germans nevertheless reached the heights. General von Gaucken was the 4<sup>th</sup> *Panzer* division commander. Despite all heroic battles, the Germans could not take the high ground around Teploe that day of the 8<sup>th</sup> July! This denial of access of the Germans on 8 July was critical to the Soviet Central Front's continuing health. The Germans were even pushed back out of Teploe. In the next 5 days, Teploe changed hands several times. The Olkhovatka heights could not be taken by the Germans. In that sector, even by the 12<sup>th</sup> July, the front had not moved.

### 9 July

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of July, a conference took place at the headquarters of the 47<sup>th</sup> *Panzer Corps* with von Kluge, Model, Harpe and Lemelsen. They agreed they had no hope anymore of achieving a quick breakthrough. To assist the southern attack, they would continue to maintain offensive pressure on the Soviets. A rolling battle of attrition would continue. This was a turning point for *Operation Zitadelle*. It was an acknowledgement that Model's attempt to reach Kursk had run into the ground! Rokossovsky had the time and space to fend off whatever Model could throw at him.

Stalin and Zhukov agreed on an offensive against the Orel salient of the German forces, towards Bryansk. The attack began on 11/12 July, to relieve pressure on the Central Front, as Model would be faced with an enemy attack at his rear. Survival was a lottery now, reaching one's destination could not be guaranteed in the Kursk salient. The partisans and the Red Air Force targeted the *Wehrmacht's* lines of communications with extensive and methodical attacks. Railways were systematically bombed. The *Luftwaffe's* resources decreased each day. *Zitadelle* was being ground down from Kiev to the front line at Kursk! The reasons were obvious: complex Russian defences, a tenacious enemy for the Germans, and bad weather.

Model's offensive in the north had been contained. Manstein's attack in the south remained strong.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of July, Manstein attacked with 500 tanks across a 10-mile front. *Keils*, fighting groups of from 60 to 100 tanks with *Tigers* in the front, once more went into the offensive against the Soviet 1<sup>st</sup> Tank Army and the 6<sup>th</sup> Guards Army.

Verkhopenye fell to the Germans after hard fighting all morning. The German 11<sup>th</sup> *Panzer* Division then continued to Oboyan, to the northern outskirts of Novosselovka. There, again heavy fighting happened, so that the Germans could not roll on. The 11<sup>th</sup> *Panzer* Division moved to more westwards, *Grossdeutschland* also advanced to the Russian's west flank.

By nightfall, the 48<sup>th</sup> *Panzer Corps* was at only 12 miles from Oboyan. *Grossdeutschland* suffered strong counterattacks, which stalled Hoernlein's troops.

There was a notable drop off by the *Luftwaffe* in support of the German formations by the 9<sup>th</sup> of July. This was due to declining German air assets, and rising Soviet resources. The Soviet Air Force bombed the German airfields several times that day. Air sorties of 7-8 July fell from 829 to 652 for the Germans, while Soviet sorties rose from 1,100 to 1,500! The Red Air Force had reached air superiority on 10 July.

Heavy fighting happened also for Hausser's corps in the night of 8 to 9 July. Numerous local counterattacks by the Soviets brought the Germans to a halt. The *Totenkopf Division* replaced the *Leibstandarten Adolf Hitler*, LAH, in the nose of the salient. *Das Reich* held the corps' flank north of Smagadino, and the 167<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division protected it to the south. *Das Reich* remained fixed in place for 3 days due to Russian counterattacks. Hausser still had 249 armoured vehicles on the 9<sup>th</sup> of July, but he had lost 202! LAH attacked then the village of Sukho-Solotino, and captured it at noon. *Totenkopf* took Kochetovka and assaulted Hill 241.6, which overlooked the Psel River. At night, the hills were still in the hands of the Soviets.

Meanwhile, the Soviet 5<sup>th</sup> Guards Tank Army arrived. General Rotmistrov led it. It had 593 tanks, 37 assault guns, thousands of artillery pieces. In the night, the 5<sup>th</sup> Guards' tanks deployed around Prokhorovka to attack the German 4<sup>th</sup> *Panzer* Army. The strike against Orel was imminent. The Russian 5<sup>th</sup> Guards were to encircle and defeat the main German group rolling to Oboyan and Prokhorovka. Manstein and Hoth had, however, planned for the II SS *Panzer Corps* to confront the developing Soviet threat to their flank. Hausser's formation thus redeployed to face Rotmistrov's tanks to the northeast. II SS *Panzer Corps* was to take Prokhorovka rapidly. The Russian intelligence picked this up. A conference took place in the Oboyan of Vatutin. The Russian generals discussed new developments.

The 4<sup>th</sup> *Panzer* Army still had 500 operational tanks; II SS *Panzer Corps* accounted for 294 of them.

### 10 July

Heavy thunderstorms developed that day. *Grossdeutschland* strove to finish the 6<sup>th</sup> Russian Tank Corps on Hoth's left flank. The 6<sup>th</sup> Tank Corps was not entirely destroyed. It fought on.

### 11 July

In the night of 10-11 July, the 48<sup>th</sup> *Panzer Corps* took Hill 244.8, but it would advance no further during *Zitadelle*, its deepest penetration made into the Russian front. Oboyan was still 12 miles away.

The Germans received orders to strike against Prokhorovka on 10 July. This offensive was to be conducted by the LAH, supported by *Das Reich* on its right, and *Totenkopf* on its left. LAH Commander was Theodor Wisch.

*Totenkopf* opened the attack, sought to cross the Psel and seize Hill 226.6 in very hard fighting. *Totenkopf* took 430 casualties. It nevertheless crossed the Psel by noon. Hill 226.6 was taken by dusk. Meanwhile, LAH and *Das Reich* had to fend off the counterattacks and made no headway. LAH reached 5 miles from Prokhorovka by midnight. The Russians had line after line of defences there!

III *Panzer Corps* was at 22 miles from Prokhorovka. They had high hopes and equally concerns, for *Zitadelle* was clearly reaching its climax, as General Busse, the German: Chief of Staff of Army Group South noticed with growing awe. Manstein did not expect any more to reach Kursk. Kempf also was in a negative mood, as his formations were exhausted with excessive casualties. Lieutenant-General Walter Nehring's reserve 24th *Panzer Corps* of 3 divisions and 112 tanks was on its way. It would arrive too late, with too little armour. Nevertheless, Manstein wanted to push on.

### 11 July

By 11 July, even Manstein knew that *Zitadelle* had failed. But he wanted to continue the attack. Breith was more sanguine to continue the operation. The 6<sup>th</sup> *Panzer Division* had broken into the open countryside northeast of Belgorod. The *Panzers* charged towards Prokhorovka. This was a delicate moment for Vatutin's defences. He had to stop one way or another the III *Panzer Corps* offensive. Manoeuvres of all tank divisions then happened. Enemy infantry was retreating, so Hoth concluded the armoured threat on his flank had vanquished. He told Hoernlein's men to attack once more northwards. But Vatutin threw in elements of the 5<sup>th</sup> Guards. This was placed in new positions around Prokhorovka. Manstein sent in the II SS *Panzer Corps*. But artillery fire from Petrovka and Prelestnoye on the Psel Valley fired on it. Then, the Soviets launched a counterattack on the LAH. This armour ran against new anti-tank installations.

In heavy rain and wind, the Germans nevertheless constructed a bridge over the anti-tank ditches, between the Psel River and the main road. In the night of the 10-11 July, the Germans found the bridge was not strong enough to hold the weight of the tanks. *Totenkopf's* grenadiers fought then against the 31<sup>st</sup> Russian Tank Corps with magnetic mines and firebombs. Medium tanks could cross the bridge. LAH took the high ground! Then, another German attack came on the Oktiabrskii State Farm. The defences initially repelled the onslaught. Around 17h00, the Germans took the farm.

*Das Reich* took Belenikhino and Vinogradovka, then it thrust south to Prokhorovka. LAH took Storozhevoe and Jamki.

In the north of the salient fought Field Marshal Model with the 9<sup>th</sup> Panzer Army. He tried to preserve his tanks, thus slowed his advance, and then lost his tanks anyway, blown up by mines. After 5 days of ferocious combats, his advance grounded to a halt.

Army Group South with its 4<sup>th</sup> Panzer Army, under Hermann Hoth, and Army Detachment *Kampf*, under Werner Kempf, would have to pierce the southern face of the salient.

In the south, Manstein had deployed his considerably larger *Panzer Army*, with more than 200 *Tiger* and *Panther* tanks. He was slowed down by minefields, which destroyed 25 of his tanks on the first day. Another 45 *Panthers* were crippled by mechanical failures. The *Panthers* and the *Tigers* proved superior to the T-34, shooting the T-34 to pieces at distances well over 2 km! Manstein's and Hoth's forces advanced steadily. The Soviet generals began to panic. Then, they buried a large proportion of their tanks in the ground for protection, up to the turret. The German tanks had to approach to extremely close to destroy the Soviet tanks, well camouflaged. The Soviets even let the German tanks pass them, before destroying them at close quarters from behind.

The southern German attack thus slowed down, but on 11 July 1943, von Manstein's forces had anyhow broken through the Soviet defences and reached the town of Prochorovka.

### 12 July

Vatutin ordered at 08h00 the 5<sup>th</sup> Guards Tank Army to deliver a counterstroke to Pokrovka. *Das Reich* had a hole in its front! The II SS *Panzer Corps* was on the attack, on initiative of Hausser. Its attack had started as of 06h30: the 18<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Guard Corps advanced.

The destiny of *Zitadelle* would be decided in the south! Two German spearheads would be converging to Prochorovka. Would Manstein breathe new life in *Zitadelle*, or would the Soviets kill off the German offensive and destroy the *Wehrmacht*'s ability to yet launch offensives in the area?

At dawn, the preparations for the Soviet attack across the southern salient started. Under Hill 226.6. The *Totenkopf* Division advanced along the Psel River. *Das Reich* was in position in front of Vinogradovka. The railway lines and the road ran parallel there, running into Prochorovka. The attack would be launched between the railway and the road. II SS *Panzer Corps* had still 294 tanks. Rotmistrov had 616 tanks T-34 and T-70s. The Russian 18<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> Tank Corps faced LAH. Hausser struck first. At 06h00, the *Luftwaffe* struck on the Soviet positions, and then the Germans advanced. The *Tigers* and *Panzers* were all important to force the breakthrough. But of *Tigers*, only 15 were left for the II SS *Panzer Corps*, 10 for the *Totenkopf* Division, 4 for the *Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler*, LAH, and 1 for *Das Reich*.

The Russian 5<sup>th</sup> Guards Tank Army charged the *Panzers*. A large tank battle ensued. It was a very ferocious battle. Air operations were severely affected by the bad weather. The operation raged on the left of III *Panzer* and on the right. The Germans had no *Luftwaffe* support anymore! There was no German dominance in the skies. Wave after wave of Russian tanks came. They ran into the ranks of the German tanks at high speed. It was a 3-hour battle of tanks. Nevertheless, by 11h30, a minor German breakthrough happened near Hill 252.2. This was the *Battle of Prochorovka*, a slogging match with the Soviets attacking, not the Germans!

The *Totenkopf* Division advanced over a bridge on the Psel. The 60-ton *Tiger* tanks could run over it. An unrelenting and bloody attack followed. *Totenkopf* took Hill 226.6 by 13h30. Yet, it was a weak offensive only! LAH could not join them, as these ran into the Russian 5<sup>th</sup> Guards Tank Army. *Das Reich* fought to repel attacks by the Russian 2<sup>nd</sup> Tank and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Guards Tank Corps under Major-general A.S. Burdeiny, a very aggressive commander.

The German troops, LAH, then attacked the village of Storozhevoe. On 12 July in the course of the morning, the German salient leading into Rzhavets had been expanded and the bridgehead deepened. II *Panzer Corps* was at 12 miles south of Prokhorovka. The 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> *Panzer* divisions prepared to support the 19<sup>th</sup> *Panzer* Division in its dash to Prokhorovka. Vatutin and Rotmistrov had managed to contain the II *Panzer Corps*. Now they had to face 100 German tanks and assault guns to support Hausser's attack. The Soviets also wanted to stop the 48th *Panzer Corps* before it reached Oboyan! The Soviet armies formed a counterattack. In the evening, the overwhelming Soviet armour had taken Berezovka, and they were approaching Verkhopenye. The Soviet attacks spread. Then, a large air battle developed between the *Luftwaffe* and the Red Air Force.

Heavy defence battles were being fought to the north. The Russian formations dominated the hapless 48th *Panzer Corps*! A battle of over 2 days, 12 and 13 July, developed also there. By noon of the 12<sup>th</sup> of July, von Manstein was aware of the scope of the Russian counterattacks.

LAH continued its attack in heavy rains. *Totenkopf* took the village of Polyzhaev. It was then stopped by the Soviets. Assaults were also launched by the Soviets against *Das Reich*. They tried to fix Kruger's formation in place and degrade it. All the afternoon, Soviet counterattacks pounded on the Germans. Heavy fighting raged! New assaults developed near Belenikhino: 26 captured T-34 tanks painted with German crosses fought against 50 Soviet T-34 tanks. The Germans shot at the additional fuel reservoirs placed behind on the Soviet T-34 tanks. The Russians were cleverly utilising their greater resources to negate the Germans superior tactical ability and grind them to a halt.

At the end of 12 July, von Manstein's offensive ambitions had been dealt a serious blow. The rains still fell heavily. II SS *Panzer Corps* had been fought to a standstill. The Soviets had suffered heavy losses in their unsuccessful attempt to defend Prokhorovka. Vatutin still had to push back the German forces of General Hoth. The battle continued throughout the night. II SS *Panzer Corps* remained on the offensive. Von Manstein hoped the arrival of III SS *Panzer Corps* would change his fortunes. Vatutin's key aims were to hold Hausser and block Breith. Von Manstein demanded that II SS *Panzer Corps* take Prokhorovka.

There, on 12 July, the Soviet generals counter-attacked in what they called *Operation Kutuzov*. Tank General Pavel Rotmistrov sent in fresh forces, and advanced from 380 km in the rear with more than 800 tanks in 3 days. He sent 400 of them in from the north-east and 200 from the east. The Germans were taken by surprise. They had only 186 armoured vehicles, of which only 117 of them tanks. But the Soviets failed to notice a 4.5 m anti-tank trench dug by Soviet pioneers as Zhukov's preparations of defence. The first lines of T-34 tanks ran directly into the ditches. The other tanks veered aside in panic, crashed into one another, and burst in flames as the Germans opened fire. By the middle of the day, the German troops could report 190 wrecked and deserted Soviet tanks left on the battlefield.



The loss enraged Stalin, who threatened to have Rotmistrov court-martialled. Rotmistrov, to save his skin, agreed with his political commissar, Nikita Khrushchev, to claim the tanks had been lost in a battle in which more than 400 German tanks had been destroyed. It was in fact the greatest military fiasco of history! Loss of the Soviet forces in all was of 235 tanks, loss of the German forces: 3 tanks.

On 12 July 1943, while the German offensive was still in progress, the Red Army launched a counter-blow with over a million fresh troops, 3,200 tanks and self-propelled guns, 25,500 artillery pieces, grenade-throwers, and nearly 4,000 aircraft. The Soviets had now in all 2.25 million soldiers, 1.5 million of which were combat troops. They could throw in the battle 4,800 tanks, 35,200 artillery pieces, about double the Red Army force at Stalingrad. Massive partisan operations also happened in the German rear. The Red Army advanced over a broad front.

### 13 July

Hausser's troops were still in motion, but in very poor ground conditions of rain and heavy mud. The Russians held in defence. Two LAH attacks lasted little more than an hour before they impaled themselves on the Soviet defences and could advance no further. *Totenkopf*, led by Priess, had to inform Hausser by noon that he needed to withdraw his armour to Hill 226.6 if he was not to be encircled and destroyed. Priess pulled back.

Rotmistrov detached one tank regiment to strengthen the defences on the southern approaches to Prokhorovka.

*Das Reich* held its positions, the *Panzer* Regiment endeavoured to advance southeast, from between Ivanovka and Vinogradovka. It was stopped! By the end of the day, the II *Panzer* Corps had achieved little.

The 9<sup>th</sup> day of *Zitadelle* had proved a massive disappointment to von Manstein and the German High Command. Model was already, also, withdrawing formations from the northern Kursk salient to handle the rapidly developing Soviet threat to the Orel salient. Oboyan and Prokhorovka remained in Soviet hands in the south.

On 12 July, the Allies had landed 160,000 troops and 600 tanks on Sicilian soil! Mussolini's regime was looking very fragile. German formations had to be sent to there. Hitler wanted to direct *Zitadelle* to be rapidly concluded.

Von Kluge and von Manstein called Hitler's *Wolffschanze* in East Prussia. Hitler told them he had to conclude *Zitadelle*. Von Manstein believed the Germans were on the verge of an important military success by breaking the Russian 1<sup>st</sup> Tank Army and the 5<sup>th</sup> Guards Tank Army permanently. He wanted to destroy those completely. Withdrawing would offer the Soviets an opportunity to strike back. His forces were in a strong position to complete the job. The compromise was to close down *Zitadelle* in the north, but yet continue the southern offensives with II SS *Panzer* Corps.

Hitler had ordered Walter Nehring's Corps, 24th *Panzer* Corps, south to the 1<sup>st</sup> *Panzer* Army in preparation of a likely offensive between Kursk and the Sea of Azov. Von Manstein was furious! He needed those troops. Von Manstein's job now was the destruction of the Soviet armour south of Psel. This was called *Operation Roland*. *Operation Roland* had as aim for II SS *Panzer* Corps to defeat the Soviets south and southwest of Prokhorovka. *Totenkopf* and

LAH were to hold the Russians, and *Das Reich* plus III *Panzer Corps* were to reach out to one another and form a union.

#### 14 July

The German *Operation Roland* began at 04h00. It started with a large bombardment of the Soviet lines. Then, the Germans attacked past Belenikhino. This was taken by noon. *Das Reich* indeed won Belenikhino and Ivanovka, at dusk. It reached Pravorot at 4 miles south of Prokhorovka at dusk, in very heavy fighting. Despite heavy losses, the Soviets held their line.

Zhukov arrived on the 13<sup>th</sup> of July. He wanted to continue the attritional strategy! He agreed with Vasilevsky that German energy would every day be sapped and with each day it would come nearer to a halt. So, the battle continued. The Soviet troops did not collapse! And yet, the *Panzer* divisions continued to advance. The 7<sup>th</sup> *Panzer* Division made contact with *Das Reich* in the afternoon of 15 July. III *Panzer Corps* had fought now for about 10 days. Breith struggled to hold his ground. The *Totenkopf* Division and LAH fought off all Soviet attempts to dislodge them. *Operation Roland* began to fail in some chaos.

The German lines came under increasing pressure from Soviet counterattacks across the southern salient. Von Manstein knew his offensive must soon come to an end. Vatutin's command remained cohesive and well-motivated. The Germans had no reserves left to call upon. They could do nothing more than hold the Soviets back in defence. Their attacks petered out.

#### 15-23 July

On 17 July 1943, the German tank commanders received the order from Hitler to withdraw. Hitler ordered on 23 July to stop definitely the offensive in the southern salient. The front remained in stalemate. Von Manstein had in fact underestimated the Soviet resources and their fighting capabilities.

#### Conclusion

Kursk was Hitler's last offensive in the east. It stripped the *Wehrmacht* of its last vestiges of invincibility. It diluted its fighting spirit, robbed it of hope.

On 12 July, the Soviets had retaliated. They counterattacked against the Orel part of the salient. Orel fell on 5 August. Two weeks later, the bulge was removed to a depth of 50 miles. Kharkov fell on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August to the Russians. A few weeks later, the Germans were in retreat along the entire southern front.

The 3 immense battles of Kursk, Orel and Kharkov all within 2 months, marked the ruin of Germany on the eastern front. Stalingrad and Kursk were massive blows from which Germany never recovered.

The main factors of the Soviet success were their tenacious defence with many, adequate resources for the task. The *Wehrmacht* had been weakened already and had it difficult to sustain their initial momentum. The invaders' cruelty to the Soviet population was by then well known. Also important was Stalin's careful harnessing of the gigantic Soviet union's

manpower. The Soviets had free access to the raw materials they needed for their armaments program. The country's production potential by then was gigantic. These were the foundations for the Soviets' eventual triumph and the attritional strategy won. The *Wehrmacht* was being systematically worn down, despite the enormous losses in soldiers and materials of the Soviet Red Army.

The Russians had basic but decent weaponry. They had robust troops. The Russian population was desperate to win the Great Patriotic War. The *Wehrmacht* leant heavily on the by then well experienced *Blitzkrieg* principles, on their professionalism and superior weaponry. But the Soviet counterattacks could begin as of 12 July. Rokossovsky and Vatutin lost 177,847 casualties, 1,600 armoured fighting vehicles, 252 tanks and 159 aircraft in that one day. But the Germans had lost the production battle in bomber attacks on Germany and with raw materials lacking. The Soviets then used *Operation Zitadelle* as the perfect opportunity to grind the *Wehrmacht* further down, whatever the cost.

Losses in all by the German Armies in the Battle of Kursk were 252 tanks. The Russian losses amounted to 2,000 Soviet tanks. In artillery pieces, the Germans lost 500 against nearly 4,000 for the Soviets. In airplanes, 159 German airplanes were lost, but about 2,000 Russian fighters and bombers. Germany lost 54,000 men in casualties, Russia 320,000. Still, the battle had only a relatively minor impact in strategic importance, except for the Soviets' ultimate aim: holding on and let the Germans break their teeth on their tenacious defence. The war of attrition was finally won by the Soviets and thus also the entire *Battle of Kursk*.

The *Tiger* and *Panther* German tanks were far superior to the T-34s. But they were far too few in number compared to the Russian tanks. Nevertheless, a German summer offensive had finally been repulsed by the Soviets!

23 August 1943 marked the end of the counter-offensive of the Red Army. The Soviet losses then stood at 1,677,000 men, whereas for the Germans 170,000 men were casualties. The Red Army losses amounted at 6,000 tanks, whereas the Germans lost 760 tanks. Russian losses of 5,244 artillery pieces, versus about 700 on German side. The Russian losses were at over 4,200 aircraft, the German losses were for 524 aircraft. The Soviet Army losses of July and August 1943 were at about 10,000 tanks and self-propelled guns. Germany lost 1,300. But the German ranks got very thinned.

The German forces withdrew from Kharkov. Hitler dismissed General Werner Kempf, the operational commander. The Germans withdrew from the Kursk battlefield. The campaign was finally a strategic Soviet success. The maximum depth of German advance was about 8 to 12 km in the north and 35 km in the south. The Germans, however, were unable to break through the Soviet defences and they got caught in the significant operational reserves of the Red Army. The *Battle of Kursk* left the Soviet Armies in possession of future initiatives, not any more the German *Wehrmacht*!

## The Nazis and the Race Issues in Germany

The new Nazi Penalty System was enforced by a whole new series of legal sanctions. For instance, the death penalty would be applied to anyone convicted of publicly trying to subvert or cripple the will of the German or allied people to military self-assertion. More than 40 such offences were defined.

Executions for criminal offences in Germany began to increase dramatically. In 1939, 329 people were sentenced to death. In 1940, 926 thus died. Further figures were for 1941: 1,292. 1942: 4,457. 1943: 5,336. The Regional Special Courts and the National People's Court handled 16,560 death sentences: 664 in 1933 to 1939, 15,896 during the war. Of these, 12,000 were carried out and the rest commuted to life imprisonment. Since 1936, executions in Germany were done by the guillotine. By 1942, equally by hanging, as this was quicker, simpler, and less messy. In 1944, there were 10 principal executioners and 38 assistants at work in Germany. There was therefore a serious overcrowding in the death rows of the German prisons!

The State Secretary of the Justice Ministry was called Schlegelberger. Hitler held a speech on the subject of crimes on 26 April 1942 in the *Reichstag*. He said he would intervene himself in cases and relieve of their office judges who were 'failing to realise the requirements of the times'. This was directed against the long-established principle of the irremovability of the judges. Minister of Justice was Franz Gürtner. He died in January 1941. His office then went to Franz Schlegelberger, the main civil servant in the Ministry. On 20 August 1942, Hitler replaced Schlegelberger with Otto-Georg Thierack, a hard-line Nazi and President of the People's Court. The State Secretary Roland Freisler moved over to the People's Court. On 18 September 1942, Thierack agreed during a meeting with Bormann and Himmler that 'asocials' would be handed over from state prisons to the SS, for 'extermination through labour'. More native Germans were thus sentenced to death.

More than 20,000 prisoners of state prisons were handed over to the SS, usually to be taken to concentration camps such as Mauthausen. The mortality rate of transferred prisoners was 35%, far higher than for the inmates apart from Jews. Inmates of prisons experienced steadily deteriorating conditions as the war progressed. Food ran low in the prisons. Weight loss and vitamin deficiencies weakened the prisoners, made them susceptible to infections.

Women convicted of criminal offences were 46,500 in 1939, 117,000 in 1942. These were mostly offences against wartime regulations. All crimes were on the rise. But the sexual offences declined sharply, rape by more than 50%.

Overcrowding in prisons was a serious problem. The proportion of female inmates stood at 9% of the prison population in 1939, to 23% in 1943. More than 43,000 women were then behind the bars. They lived in dirt and disease. They had infestations with scabies and lice, as they received almost no showering. Also, typhus epidemics broke out, and of other infectious diseases. Beatings were commonplace in 1944 and 1945.

Even after 1943, more Germans were held in state prisons than in concentration camps. People were arrested as 'saboteurs' or 'shirkers'. Executions were widely published. Most Germans

sent to camps became long-term inmates. Political prisoners had to wear a red star. There were Nazi block leaders or *capos*. In 1939, there remained 21,000 mostly German inmates in the camps. September 1942: 110,000. January 1945: nearly 715,000, including 202,000 women. For instance, in Buchenwald: 100,000 new prisoners were admitted in the camp in 1944 alone.

Jews and Slavs received the lowest rations and the least adequate accommodations. Hunger, overwork, beatings and disease turned them into *Moslems* or *Muselmänner*, those who had given up all. They died of ill-treatment and exhaustion.

A commission of investigation under an SS judge Konrad Morgen had by October 1944 uncovered evidence of corruption in the administration of a number of camps. Only a few responsible men were shot. Most prominent was the commander of Auschwitz, Rudolf Höss. He was transferred on 22 November 1943 to administrative duties in the concentration camps inspectorate.

Also Karl Otto Koch, commandant of Buchenwald, had fallen prey to corruption. Koch had embezzled large sums of SS-money, allowed prisoners to escape, had key witnesses murdered. Konrad Morgen arrested Koch on 24 August 1943, and had him condemned to death. Koch was shot in Buchenwald.

Overcrowding of prisons meant that all sorts of diseases spread quickly. Early 1941, Himmler approached the T-4 Berlin unit. They were too occupied with euthanasia, the killing of the mentally handicapped and mentally ill at that time. In August 1941, the killing programme was halted on Bishop von Galen's interventions. Two leading T-4 administrators, Philipp Bouhler and Viktor Brack sent T-4 doctors to assess camp inmates. They operated under the designation as 'Special Treatment 14 f 13'. In this code, Special Treatment meant killing, 14 meant reported deaths in the camps, 13 was the cause of death, gassing. These doctors visited the camps, filled out forms for those they singled out for killing. The forms went to Brack's office in Berlin, then to selected killing centres: at Bernburg, Hartheim, and Sonnenstein. The Jews were called compulsive, rootless psychopaths, and with anti-German mentalities. Or 'fanatical German haters and psychopaths.'

The doctors selected in the camps of the Old Reich and in former Austria designated about 12,000 victims. Most of the victims were killed in gas chambers.

After August 1941, disputes began among other groups in the chancellery of the *Führer*, so the programme was put under the formal control of Herbert Linden. Herbert Linden was Reich Commissioner for Healing and Care Institutions in the Ministry of the Interior. But the T-4 group continued to do its work under Viktor Brack, its leading figure. The mass killings had to give way to individual murders, so as not to arouse public suspicions.

On 18 November 1941, the strongest open attack on the programme was delivered by Franz Büchner, a professor of medicine at the Freiburg University. But the medical staff at the T-4 headquarters in Berlin and in other institutions continued to be committed to the idea of killing 'life unworthy of life', as the Nazis spoke of it. Murder through fatal injections or starving to death thus continued! In Hadamar, for instance, 4,422 inmates died of starvation. The Chief physician at Hadamar was Adolf Wahlmann. He justified the killings. Starvation and lethal injections were also used to kill poorly disciplined and refractory patients. Hadamar, Kalmenhof, and Kaufbeuren-Irsee especially were killing prisons. Also killed were foreign

forced labourers, particularly Poles, who had become mentally ill or had contracted tuberculosis. Even children were killed. 63 children were killed in the Kelsterbach Institution, as racially undesirable offspring.

The killing of psychiatric patients extended beyond the *Reich*. In Occupied Poland, and in the territory of the Soviet union. The same murders happened. The equipment provided by Albert Widmann and the Criminal-Technical Institute was used. The SS first tried locking patients into a building and blowing them up with explosives. Too many bodies! Then, they gassed them in carbon monoxide mobile gas vans. Soviet sources suggest about 10,000 victims were killed this way in Germany.

Voices in protest rose from the Confessing Church in October 1943 at a synod in Breslau. Reactions of non-cooperation of the Catholic Church happened already in early 1943. On 29 June 1943, a Papal encyclical *Mystici Corporis* condemned the German ways. On 26 September 1943, the Catholic Church openly condemned the killing of innocent and defenceless mentally handicapped and mentally ill, the incurably infirm and fatally wounded, innocent hostages and disarmed POWs, criminal offenders, people of a foreign race or descent. The Catholic Bishops of Germany reacted most. Their protests were read out from the pulpit in churches across the land.

Hitler regarded Gypsies as particularly subversive, because of their itinerant lifestyle, and their aversion to regular, conventional employment. They were a eugenic threat for Germans! In September 1939, the German Gypsies had been rounded up, registered with a special office in Berlin. All the Gypsies of the Łódź ghetto were taken to Chelmno and gassed, about 5,000 Gypsies. Large numbers were shot elsewhere. Several thousand Gypsies were killed in the Sajmiste camp in Serbia. Such murders also took place in Croatia and Rumania. The deportees were living in conditions of indescribable misery without food. They looked emaciated, and were covered in lice. On 16 December 1942, Himmler ordered the deportation of more than 13,000 German Gypsies to Auschwitz. That was about half of the Gypsies population of the *Reich*! Thousands more came from Czechia.

In all at Auschwitz-Birkenau were 14,000 Gypsies from Germany and Austria, 4,500 from Bohemia and Moravia, 1,300 from Poland. The sick were sent to the gas chambers. More killing of the Gypsies continued there on orders of Rudolf Höss. 800 children were sent to Buchenwald early October 1944, and killed. The total number of Gypsies brought to Auschwitz was more than 20,000. All died or were killed. They were considered to be asocial, criminal, and useless to the national community. They were made to wear the black triangle of asocials. About 2,000 to 2,500 Gypsies were sterilised in the war.

Homosexuals were designated by a pink triangle on their shirt. Male homosexuality was illegal. Himmler was obsessed with hunting down homosexuals. Also, Hitler. On 4 September 1941, the death penalty was introduced for sex with a minor. In November 1941, Hitler issued a confidential order prescribing execution for homosexuality in the SS. The measure was not implemented very thoroughly.

In 1940, within the armed forces, there were about 1,100 convictions of homosexuality. About 1,700 per year were executed for the rest of the war. Then, on the pressure of Ernst Kaltenbrunner, the Head of the SS Security Service, 2,300 homosexuals were sent to the

concentration camps every year, to Sachsenhausen, Dachau, Buchenwald, and other. About 5,000 to 15,000 homosexuals in all were sent to concentration camps in the war, about half might have perished. The Nazi policy towards homosexuals was becoming more radical and more exterminatory during the war.

The *Göring Institute for Psychological Research and Psychotherapy* gathered stories of infidelities of married women at home. Young women saw nothing wrong in indulging in sexual relations with racially inferior foreign workers or with prisoners of war. An SS Security Service report laid the responsibility of female immorality on female idleness, on the lack of female employment and on the comparatively high family benefits given to soldiers' wives and widows. Sex was becoming a commodity, with young women in particular bartering it for scarce foodstuffs and luxuries such as chocolate, silk stockings, or cigarettes. Life was cheap and could easily be cut short. Men came home on leave at increasingly infrequent intervals in the later part of the war.

### *Nazism and Religion*

One reason for the relative lack of success of Himmler's attempt to produce more children for the nation by encouraging illegitimate births lay in the fact that the overwhelming majority of Germans still steered their moral life by the rules of the Christian religion. The overwhelming predominance of Christianity encouraged conservative attitudes towards sexual morality, reinforced by the preaching of pastors and priests. This was not welcome to the Nazi hierarchy. Hitler emphasised again and again his belief that Nazism was a secular ideology founded on modern science. He was particularly critical of what he saw as its violation of the law of natural selection and the survival of the fittest. For Hitler, Christianity would mean the systematic cultivation of humane failure. It was indelibly Jewish in origin and character. It was a prototype of Bolshevism. He thought National Socialism and religion would no longer be able to exist together. He would not have to persecute the Churches though: they would simply wither away. The future was Nazi, he knew, and the future would be secular.

As Hitler and the leading Nazis became more confident in the outcome of the war, they resumed their attacks on the Churches. Anti-Christian literature was being distributed by the Party once more. The main message was that National Socialism was incompatible with Christianity. The Nazis took action. Hermann Göring banned chaplains from the Air Force. Church property all over Germany was seized for conversion into maternity homes, schools for evacuated children, or hospitals for wounded soldiers. In September 1940, a blanket ban was placed on new novices joining any monastic order; and in December 1940, all monasteries and nunneries were expropriated and the monks and nuns expelled. By May 1941, 130 monasteries had been taken over by the Party or the State.

About 59 priests were arrested in Bavaria alone for protesting against the abolition of the Holy Days. On 23 April 1941 the Bavarian Education Minister Adolf Wagner published a decree on the practice of religions in state institutions. In it, school prayers were to be replaced by Nazi songs, and crucifixes and religious pictures were to be removed from school walls. Wagner

withdrew it after 2 weeks, due to protests of the communities, and after a powerful pastoral letter from Cardinal Faulhaber was read from the pulpits on 17 August 1941.

Hitler, Goebbels, Bormann realised that the final solution of the Church question would have to wait until the war was over. Yet, Nazi indoctrination and education were taking the younger generation away from religion. Throughout the war years, Catholic bishops shared little concern publicly for the mass murders of the Jews or of the Soviet POWs. Even Clemens von Galen remained silent. Conrad Count Reysing, Bishop of Berlin, was perhaps the most persistent advocate in the Catholic Church of a policy condemning the regime's maltreatment of the Jews. The other bishops refused his petition.

As the war went on, Pope Pius XII came to regard the German *Reich* as Europe's only defence against Communism. He worked for a compromise peace that would leave an anti-Communist Germany intact. In pursuit of this goal, he considered it best not to raise his voice against the extermination of the Jews, for fears of compromising the Vatican's neutrality. The Pope feared that public protests would lead to renewed persecution of the Catholic Church in Germany. He was not willing to intervene to help the Jews. By April 1943, the Pope was well aware that the Jews were being murdered in vast numbers by the Germans. In November 1941, Bishop Theophil Wurm, a Protestant bishop, wrote to Goebbels, warning him that the campaign against the Jews was helping enemy propaganda. He sent 3 letters to Goebbels, and 1 directly to Hitler. Wurm was banned from writing or speaking in public for the rest of the war, though he ignored this edict.

Knowledge of the mass killings of the Jews, Poles and others in the east was hard to come by. But it could indeed be obtained from a variety of sources. Some Germans reacted with open enthusiasm to discrimination against the Jews. In October 1941, the Reich Security Head Office ordered the arrest of any German who demonstrated any friendliness towards a Jew in public.

The public advertisement of the Jews' persecuted status produced feelings of shame and guilt when it was attached to visible, living human beings. Popular reactions to the introduction of the Jewish star were overwhelmingly negative. Older Germans in particular found the deportations shocking. The religiously inclined were particularly critical of the deportations too. An 'Organisation for rescuing Children and protecting the Health of Jewish populations' was founded in Russia in 1912. The French branch hid several hundred Jewish children.

There were several sources to bring to the public information on what was happening in the concentration camps. For instance, a man called Kurt Gerstein told what he had seen at Belzec to a Swedish diplomat, Göran von Otter. He wrote several reports, which he made public only after the war.

The Polish resistance had been sending reports of the mass murders to the exiled Polish government in London. Jan Karski's report had a dramatic effect in England. The mass murders of the Jews in Germany were known in the west certainly as of mid-1942. The propaganda of Goebbels only served to reveal deep-seated feelings of guilt in the Germans that they had done nothing to prevent the Jews being killed.

When the Köln cathedral was bombed, people said it was in retribution for the burning of the synagogues in 1938. Fear and guilt were driving the great mass of Germans to dread the retribution of the Allies. From 1943 on, they were mentally preparing themselves to deflect



this retribution as far as they were able, by denying all knowledge of the genocide once the war was lost.

### Nazi Propaganda, Radio and Film

Nazi propaganda in Germany in those times was all-pervasive and inescapable. It was moving a supine nation into believing in the adulation of Hitler, the unconditional enthusiasm for the Nazi ideology and into giving unquestioning support for the military conquest, in total agreement with the racial supremacy. The purpose of Nazi propaganda during the war was to keep people fighting and make sure they conformed to the demands of the regime.

Otto Dietrich was the Head of the *Reich Press Office* of the Nazi Party from 1931 on. In 1938, he became President of the *Reich Press Chamber*. He had frequent clashes with Goebbels. Goebbels won the duel with Dietrich only at the end of the war. He persuaded Hitler to sack the man on 30 March 1945.

The Propaganda Ministry pumped out enormous amounts of material in every medium of communication as part of its effort to boost morale. Picture posters, speeches, leaflets, photographs of Hitler, etc. The Nazi Party as of 1944, controlled almost the entirety of the German press. The need to ration paper supplies led the *Reich Press Chamber* to close down 500 newspapers in May 1941, a further 950 about 2 years later, also the Frankfurt Newspaper. Main newspapers in Germany were then the 'Racial Observer' with about 1.2 million copies in 1941, the *Das Reich* founded by Goebbels in 1940 at 1.5 million copies. There was the *Black Corps* of the SS, founded in 1935 with 750,000 copies. Illustrated magazines and weeklies were printed in from 11.9 to 20.8 million copies between 1939 and 1944.

Schiller's 'Wilhelm Tell', Margaret Mitchell's 'Gone with the Wind', A.S. Cronin's 'The Citadel', Sven Hedin's 'Fifty Years of Germany', 'We fly against England', and anti-Soviet books sold well. Erich Ludendorff's 'The total War' on WWI and *Mein Kampf* of Hitler sold with 6 million copies by 1940. Also, Karl May's Wild West novels were popular. Werner Bergengruen's 'Heaven as it is on Earth' was a success, though banned in 1941.

There were 240 theatres in Germany. In 1940, 40 million tickets were sold. Theatre plays were in high demand! In theatre, there was a ban on foreign authors. What was found in the theatre was above all escape from reality. In August 1944, Goebbels ordered the closure of all theatres, music hall and cabarets. Many theatres were destroyed by bombings anyway, and the actors and stagehands were drafted into the Armed Forces or into munitions work.

Cinema increased dramatically in popularity in the early part of the war. Young people's attendance was particularly high. 70% of the 10-17 year olds went to the cinema at least once a month. There were even mobile cinemas in the countryside. From 1939 to 1944, German studios produced about 60 new films per year, shown everywhere in Europe where German troops were stationed. Most popular were the newsreels! The *Deutsche Wochenschau*, the German Weekly review, were 40-minutes newsreels. Up to 3,000 copies were made of each newsreel, then seen by about 20 million people. Shots of Russian atrocities and of German heroes were popular. In 1941, Goebbels commissioned 4 anti-Bolshevik films, including 'GPU'. These films put emphasis on the machinations of the supposed Jewish conspiracy

behind the atrocities of the Soviet police. Also, the films ‘Rothschilds’, ‘Shares in Waterloo’, ‘My Life for Ireland’, ‘Carl Peters’, and ‘Uncle Kruger’ attacked the British colonial record. ‘Uncle Kruger’ was a film about the Boer War.

Two major antisemitic films as soon as the war began were *Der Jude Süß* and ‘The eternal Jew’. Süß was a film on a book by Lion Feuchtwanger, directed by Veit Harlan. The Jews Süß got hanged at the end. It was a great success! ‘The eternal Jew’ was directed by Fritz Hippler. Both were antisemitic films. Yet, they also were a comparative failure, as they were abhorred outside Germany. Other films had an implicit ideological content. In 1943 were made 74 movies in Germany, of which 41 were comedies. People liked lavishly costumed operettas, revues, detective films and melodramas. But no film could hide the fact that the war was going badly. In 1943, propaganda began to lose touch with reality.

In mid-1943 was made a colour film by Veit Harlan on the siege of the German town of Kolberg on the Baltic, besieged by Napoleon’s armies in 1806. These were Nazi propaganda themes! Many speeches in the film had been written by Goebbels himself. Goebbels requisitioned 4,000 sailors and 187,000 soldiers from the Army to play the battle scenes. The film was shown in Berlin on 30 January 1945, shown for the anniversary of Hitler’s appointment as *Reich* Chancellor, 12 years earlier. But by August 1943 already, 237 cinemas had been destroyed! And breakdown of the railway communications held back copies of it being distributed. ‘Kolberg’ was taken and dropped less than 2 months after the première.

Radio too was used for propaganda. In August 1939, the *Reich* Propaganda Ministry took over all radio stations in Germany. As from July 1942, the *Reich* Radio Society, the main broadcaster, was directly run by the Ministry. Radio was mostly used for providing practical advice on how to cope with the wartime conditions.

1944 for radio provided 190 hours of broadcasts a week, 71 devoted to popular music, 55 to general entertainment, 24 to classical music, 32 hours to political broadcasts, 5 for a mixture of words and music, 3 hours for culture in general. Programs with a mixture of humour and popular music were especially successful. Songs of Zarah Leander, such as ‘I know one day a miracle will come’ were *schlagers*, hits. A popular singer also was Lale Andersen. Andersen’s hit song was *Lili Marleen*. The words were those of a man, but sung by an attractive woman. At the end of September 1942, Goebbels had Andersen arrested for undermining the troops’ morale. Her correspondence, also with Jewish friends, was intercepted. She refused to visit the Warsaw ghetto. In August 1944, the song *Lilli Marleen* was finally banned altogether. It was translated in English and sung by Marlene Dietrich and Vera Lynn in English and by Edith Piaf in French.

In the search for reliable information, the Germans began to listen to the BBC. But the popular *People’s Receivers* sold cheaply before the war, could only receive short-wave broadcasts, so it was difficult to hear foreign stations. Yet, they accounted for only 40% of radios in Germany in 1943. In August 1944, the BBC reckoned that up to 15 million Germans were listening to the BBC on a daily basis.

When the war broke out, tuning in to foreign radio-stations was a criminal offence punishable by death. In the first year of this law, 4,000 people were arrested and prosecuted for ‘radio

crime'. Ordinary offenders were seldom punished harshly! In 1943, came only 11 death sentences. Especially popular was the 6 p.m. BBC News. William Joyce was a British and American pro-German with Fascist beliefs. His nickname was *Lord Haw-Haw*. People tired of his sarcasm and contempt.

On 2 March 1940, 40 *Gestapo* agents raided a youth dance in the Curio-Haus in the University quarter of Berlin. They controlled and noted the identities of 408 dancers, who were swinging, listening to English lyrics, etc. Further on, public dances were cancelled in Germany. Until December 1941, the younger people gathered in the Waterloo Cinema of Hamburg, near the Dammtor railway station to watch American films. The projectionist there was one Axel Springer. Finally, such demonstrations were forbidden. On 26 January 1942, Himmler and Heydrich ordered to arrest the youth, to have them beaten and put to work. In one week, 70 swingers were arrested and sent to camps such as Ravensbrück and Sachsenhausen. They were classified as political prisoners. Many of the younger Swing Boys were conscripted in the army.

Escapist operas were popular on the stage and on the cinema screens. Most notable was Richard Strauss' *Capriccio* of 1942. Hitler developed a passion for Anton Bruckner's music. Bruckner was buried in Hitler's favourite town of Linz. But in Hitler's view, he was no substitute for Wagner.

In 1940, Hitler saw the *Twilight of the Gods* at Bayreuth. He was immersed in the war, and increasingly reluctant to appear in public. Hitler established a *War Festival* in Bayreuth, for specially chosen guests: 142,000 of them in the 5-years of the festival. But Hitler's favourite operetta was *The merry Widow* by Franz Lehar. He disregarded that the libretto was Jewish, as was Lehar's own wife.

Hungary was an ally of Germany. The Munich Philharmonic under Osvald Kabarta played Béla Bartok's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celeste* in 1942, although Bartok had never wanted his music to be performed in Nazi Germany and Bartok was already in exile in the USA.

The Nazis preferred the music of Richard Strauss and Hans Pfitzner. Conductors in Germany were then Eugen Jochum, Hans Knappertsbusch, the younger Herbert von Karajan and Karl Böhm. Böhm gave the Nazi salute from the podium at the start of his concerts. Karajan was a Nazi member as of 1933. He was considered more politically reliable than his rival now, Wilhelm Furtwängler. Nevertheless, Furtwängler became a kind of court conductor to the Nazi elite. In 1942, he conducted Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony for Hitler's birthday. He did this voluntarily. In 1945, Speer suggested Furtwängler had better move to Switzerland and not come back. Furtwängler took the hint and did not return.

Richard Strauss used as librettist Stefan Zweig! The second most popular composer of Germany was Hans Pfitzner. He received not much sympathy in Germany. He survived the war, and died in the old people's home of Salzburg. Well-known too was the composer Werner Eyk. He became the head of the composers' division of the Reich Music Chamber. His works were the opera *Peer Gynt*, and *Columbus*. Another main figure was Carl Orff. The *Carmina Burana* was a sensational success in 1937. But his Opera *The Wise Woman* was greeted with a chorus of whistling.

Little music of any value was composed in Germany during the war years. Most powerful compositions came from the Jewish composers imprisoned in Theresienstadt: Viktor Uhlmann, Kurt Gerzon, Ilse Weber. The popular songs of Zarah Leander and Lale Andersen were very popular. Ilse Weber went with her son Tommy to the gas chamber of Auschwitz on 6 October 1944.

### *Painting and Sculpture*

In 1940, the Nazi Propaganda Ministry opened the Fourth Great German Exhibition, a number of rooms on war art, battle scenes, etc. About 1,400 works by 751 artists were presented. The names of the artists were, among others, Franz Junghaus, Olaf Jordan, Wolfgang Willerich, and Elke Eber. The leading German artist of the war years was Arno Breker. He sculpted monumental, aggressive and militaristic figures. He enjoyed a considerable, European reputation. Breker held later a major retrospective, not in Berlin, but in occupied Paris, in April 1942. Even Jean Cocteau praised him! In April 1941, Hitler appointed Breker as President of the *Reich Chamber for the Visual Arts*. He played a role in Speer's plans for the reconstruction of Berlin. He was a favourite of Hitler.

Hitler and Göring were wealthy men when the war broke out. Göring owned 10 houses, castles and hunting lodges. These had been provided and were maintained at the taxpayer's expense. Göring's principal lodge was the *Carinhall*, called after his first wife. Hitler had great plans for the Austrian city of Linz, which he could consider as his hometown. He wanted to build a large, grand museum there on German, and Austrian Aryan art.

On 26 June 1939, Hitler hired the services of the art historian Hans Posse, a museum director in Dresden, to amass the collection he needed for his Linz museum. Posse amassed about 8,000 artworks by 1942. Posse died of cancer in December 1942. He was followed up by Hermann Voss, director of the Wiesbaden Museum. Voss spent 70 million *Reichsmark* on buying for the Linz collection. Dealers such as Karl Haberstock made large profits by presenting artworks for the Hitler Collection. Artworks had already been confiscated from German-Jewish collectors in large quantities after the pogrom of 9 to 10 November 1938. Also, Jewish emigrants from Austria had to leave their assets behind when they emigrated, to be taken over by the Reich. The artworks were funnelled into the planned Hitler museum. It was, of course, never built!

Moreover, the German troops looted far beyond the expropriation of the Jews, when they invaded countries inhabited by people they regarded as subhumans, uncultured Slavs. The Germans ransacked country houses and Polish palaces. The main leader of this looting was Kajetan Mühlmann. Mühlmann did not hesitate to ransack private collections, as well as the Polish State Museums. For instance, the Germans expropriated from the Czartoryski Family, who were systematically despoiled. Looting in the Soviet Union happened on an even grander scale, after the German invasion of 22 June 1941. Ethnic cleansing went together with cultural cleansing. 279 paintings were carried off from Kharkov alone by the Germans. Some of the paintings came to decorate the SS headquarters at the Wewelsburg.

The greatest Nazi art collections were assembled from museums of Western Europe. On 5 July 1940, Hitler commissioned a subsection of Alfred Rosenberg's Foreign Policy Office of the

Nazi Party, the Task Staff of *Reich* Leader Rosenberg, to collect art works from Jewish owners. Rosenberg's unit collected for the Linz Museum and for other new German collections.

Hermann Göring's art curator was Walter Andreas Hofer. Hitler allowed Posse to go to Holland on 13 June 1940. Hence, in a frenzy of competitive buying, Hofer and Posse also confiscated works from Jews who had fled from Germany.

On 30 June 1940, Hitler ordered that French art objects, owned by the state, were to be put under German guard. Ambassador Abetz prepared to seize artworks in large quantities.

The Art historian of the Army Command was the Francophile Count Franz-Wolff-Metternich. The property of 15 major Jewish art dealers were confiscated. The artworks were stored in Paris, in the *Jeu de Paumes*, used by the Louvre. Göring came to the museum to select 27 works by Rembrandt, Van Dyck and others. Hans Posse took 53 artworks, and sent them off to Germany. More works were transferred to museums in Germany.

### *Nazism and Science*

The decline in educational standards in Germany had begun long before the war affected schools as well as universities.

In 1937, the 9 years of secondary education had been reduced to 8. The influence of the *Hitler Youth* had reduced the authority of many teachers. The emphasis on Nazi educations and sports and physical exercise had curtailed the time for academic study. Some of the time devoted to the knowledge they had acquired, they were now obliged to spend in the labour service and serving in the Armed Forces before they were allowed to inscribe at a university. Textbooks became increasingly difficult to obtain. School buildings were requisitioned for use as military hospitals, or they were destroyed in bombing raids, especially from 1942 on. Teachers went off to the front and were not replaced.

In February 1943, the *National Socialist teachers' League* was closed down for lack of activity and funds. Classes in Berlin schools took place only in the mornings, as the afternoons were filled by military drill and education. Students of 15 years and older were called in to man the anti-aircraft batteries! The last school exams were held in 1943! In the last months of the war, schools ceased teaching altogether. Elite schools were as badly affected, even the *Napolas*, the *National Political Educational Institutions*. By March 1944, 143 Napola students or graduates had been decorated for bravery and 1,226 had been killed. Educational standards in universities suffered as well. Universities registered a dramatic fall in student numbers: from 41,000 to 29,000. Then to 38,000 in 1942, and again 52,000 in 1943. In higher education institutions of all kinds, the students increased from 1940 of 52,000 to 65,000 in 1944. The students now included war-wounded soldiers, men certified as unfit for service, and increasingly women. Women were at 14% in higher education in 1939, 30% in 1941, and 48% in 1943!

Medicinal studies came in a position of absolute dominance: 60% of all university students were enrolled in the medical faculties in 1940. All of these had to serve 6 months at the front as ordinary soldiers to prepare for service as army medics when they qualified.

The perception amongst some Nazi activists of the young men who went to university during the war were as of 'slackers', men trying to avoid military service. That opinion was, of course,

incorrect. Almost all male students were members of the Armed Forces in one capacity or other.

Students were obliged to spend increasing amounts of their time on work duties such as helping with the harvest, etc. In 1941, the Ministry of Education did recognise that the 3-semester year, in combination with labour service during the vacations, was imposing an impossible strain on the students. It restored the 2-semester year. The Nazi Party's open contempt for learning lowered the respect of the students for their teachers. The performance levels of students fell continuously. Many students didn't even show the simplest, most elementary knowledge. Knowledge of foreign languages was very poor. Professors began to lower the standards. The *National Socialist German Students' League* went into a decline. It persuaded to avoid duels. One could prove one's valour by fighting in a real battle.

By July 1944, 25 out of 61 higher education institutions in the *Reich* had been damaged in bombing raids. There happened now frequent false alarms, further disruption. In 1945, bombing brought an end to higher learning almost everywhere in Germany. Only Erlangen, Göttingen, Halle, Heidelberg, Marburg and Tübingen were undamaged. University libraries had been moved to coal mines or salt mines for safekeeping.

Goebbels was appointed as Reich Plenipotentiary for the Total War Effort in 1944. University education had come effectively to an end! 16,000 students were drafted to the front, and 30,000 were conscripted for service in the war industries. Germany was organising economic and intellectual suicide. Nevertheless, by end 1944, there were still 38,000 German students in the universities. Disillusion with the regime was by then widespread. The Hitler greeting had virtually ceased.

Research and publication were extremely difficult for university teachers. Research got priority only if it could be shown to be of direct benefit to the war effort. The Freiburg historian Gerhard Ritter showed moral revulsion for Nazism and his patriotic commitment to the German cause. Increasingly, Ritter spoke of appeals of moderation and showed implicit criticism of what he saw as Nazi extremism. The importance of retaining a pure conscience and a strong legal order he found important. He wrote about the need to re-establish a moral order after the war was over. In November 1944, the Gestapo arrested him, but he was not badly treated in prison. He became a prominent member of the West-German historical establishment in the 1950s. On the other hand, Theodor Schieder, Werner Conze, Hermann Aubin and Albert Brackmann offered their services in the identification of historically 'German' parts of the regions, as a prelude to the expulsion of the rest of the population in Hitler's view of the concept of 'living space'.

More scholars in non-university institutes were funded by, for instance, the German research Community and the Kaiser Wilhelm Society. These survived, as nobody in power paid very much attention to them. Only when matters began to go badly, did Nazi leaders turn to scientists for help. Albert Speer was particularly keen on coordinating scientific research and focusing it on war-relevant projects. In the summer of 1943, a *Reich Research Council* was established to coordinate and focus scientific efforts for delivering new weapons and new technologies. Yet, no coherent strategy could be defined.

1942 saw the creation of a ‘*Reich Institute for Psychological Research and Psychotherapy*’, on efforts of Matthias Göring, a cousin of the Reich Marshal. It was established to gain recognition for the theories of Jewish doctors such as Sigmund Freud. They investigated the reasons for neuroses and breakdowns among the soldiers, and also, on homosexuality in the Army.

Racial-biological research was also done by the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes, and by Himmler’s ‘Ancestral Heritage’ organisation, the research arm of the SS. Expeditions to gather data were sent to all over the world.

In the medical sciences, researchers focused on how to combat typhus more effectively, how to stop wounds from becoming infected, how to improve the chances of survival for seamen drifting in lifeboats, etc. In Germany, medical science felt able to use experimentation on concentration camp inmates in search for answers to these problems. The doctors took part in this willingly or even asked to do so. For some years, doctors had been among the most committed supporters of the Nazi cause. The inmates in the concentration camps were all either racially inferior subhumans, or vicious criminals, or traitors to the German cause, or some of these together, as defined by the Nazis. The Nazi doctors, members of the Nazi Party, formed 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the medical profession in the *Third Reich*.

The first use of camp inmates for medical experimentation began at Dachau, by the ambitious young SS doctor Sigmund Rascher. He worked in Himmler’s Ancestral Heritage Research Organisation. His 16-year older partner was Karoline Diehl. Diehl was an old, personal friend of Himmler. 70 to 80 prisoners were killed by Rascher’s work. In the summer 1942, Himmler set up the *Applied Research in Defence Science*, as part of the Ancestral heritage division of the SS. Rascher moved in. In October 1942, 15 to 18 inmates died by Rascher’s work for how best to promote the survival of pilots who came down in the icy waters of the North Sea. Karoline Diehl and Rascher wanted to marry. For that they had to steal children to simulate being a family. Himmler was furious, had her arrested and sent to Ravensbrück and executed. Rascher was sent to Buchenwald and then back to Dachau and shot 3 days before the camp’s liberation.

Professor Oskar Schröder, leading Air Force doctor, asked Himmler on 7 June 1944 for 40 inmates of concentration camps. He selected them out of 1,000 gypsies at Buchenwald. Doctor in charge of the experiments was Wilhelm Beiglböck. The prisoners were put on a diet of seawater. In another example, Reich physician SS Ernst Robert Grawitz sought to know when a variety of sulphonamides could be effective on infections of septicaemia. In July 1942, Karl Gerhardt, Himmler’s personal SS physician, had experimented on 15 male and 42 young female prisoners from Poland: the sulphonamides failed! He had worked also on 10 people at Dachau. Gerhardt now took 24 women, injected gangrenous tissue into them. Then, he treated them unsuccessfully. Similar work was effectuated at Dachau, on 40 mostly Polish Catholic priests, of which 12 died.

In seeking for medicines to cure typhus, Polish researchers had developed a vaccine in the early 1930s, but its production was difficult, costly, and time-consuming. More research was done at I.G. Farben. Experiments took place at Buchenwald on 145 inmates. 127 of the 537 inmates subjected to the procedures died.

Soldiers at Stalingrad had died of malnutrition. Hitler's doctor Karl Brandt, and others, thought a sort of artificial pathé called 'Eastern Nutrition' or *Östliche Kostform*, developed of cellulose remnants, could help. It was fed to 450 prisoners at Mauthausen. It had a revolting taste. Later, 150 persons were made to live on it for 6 months. 116 died.

Kurt Gutzeit at Breslau, a medical professor, did research on hepatitis. He wanted to show it was infectious. June 1943, his assistant, with the backing of Karl Brandt and Heinrich Himmler, Arnold Dohmen went to Auschwitz and chose young Jews. On 10 August at Sachsenhausen, he injected the subjects with hepatitis and performed liver punctures.

In another project, doctors sought ways of treating phosphorous burns caused by incendiary bombs. Ernst Grawitz and an SS doctor experimented on 5 inmates of Buchenwald in November 1943. The ointments developed had no effect, and some of the subjects died.

In mustard gas experiments, 3 inmates died. In phosgene gas experiments, 4 Russian prisoners were killed, more later at Neuengamme Camp. Dangerous, often painful and sometimes fatal experiments were inflicted on people who had no choice about undergoing them. None of this research ever brought any benefit to the German soldiers it was intended to help.

Doctor Josef Mengele was a camp doctor at Auschwitz. He was assistant to the prominent racial eugenicist Otmar Baron von Verschuer at the University of Frankfurt am Main. He was youthful, of handsome appearance, wore well-tailored uniforms, highly polished boots, was polite and elegant. Mengele did research on Noma: a disease caused by severe malnutrition. He treated a large number of children. For him, these were only experimental subjects, not medical patients. He did experiments on twins. Many of his patients, children, died. Josef Mengele came to stand in the decades since the *Third Reich* as a symbol for the perversion of the medical science. Yet, his experiments were only a few among a much greater number carried out by a variety of doctors on the inmates of the camps.

Dr Kurt Heissmeyer at Neuengamme did tuberculosis experiments. At Auschwitz, doctors working for Himmler did experiments on female inmates with injections and X-rays in search of a quick means of mass sterilisation. Medical scientists at the Kaiser-Wilhelm Institutes carried out research on the brains of hundreds of patients killed in the 'euthanasia' action. Some experiments were clearly scientifically flawed. Other had no defensible medical application. Such as Sigmund Rascher's invention of small cyanide capsules for suicides. The Bayer Pharmaceutical Company experimented on women inmates of Auschwitz, purchased from the SS at 700 Reichsmark each. The examples could go on!

In many cases, medical research of this kind was unethical, because it caused pain and often death in people who had no choice but to participate in it. The fundamental moral commitment of medicine is to preserve life, not to end it.

On 4 October 1943, at Posen, Heinrich Himmler gave a speech at a seminar for SS officers. He said the Jews were a threat to the *Reich*. Therefore, they should be killed, not just the men, but also the women and children. Killing the women and children was his own interpretation of Hitler's orders. The extermination of the Jews was a necessary crime. The senior Party figures and the generals were in their actions performing complicity in the genocide.



On 4 May 1944, Hitler held a speech to the SS leaders. He told the extermination of the Jews had to continue. Himmler told the SS-men who carried out the murders, he was aware that what they were doing went against the wishes of the great majority of Germans. Still, it was necessary.

## The Bombing of Germany

In May 1940, the British had decided to attack Germany by aerial bombing. They selected targets east of the Rhine. Hamburg became a favourite target.

First attack on any large German town was indeed on the port and large city of Hamburg. It happened on 18 May 1940. Then followed no less than 69 air raids, and 123 alarms of air raids to the end of 1940. The attacks caused only 125 deaths, and 567 injuries. By mid-1942, the city had suffered 137 attacks, costing 1,431 lives, and 4,657 injured. Over 240,000 people were made homeless in a city of 2 million people. But who had bombed Great Britain first?

The destruction wrought on German cities came from British and American bombers, not from Russian ones. Stalin thought of bombing as useful mainly to help immobilise front-line troops. The British Air Force found night bombing was necessary, due to the heavy losses in day-time bombing. The British night bombings became the worst nightmares of the German people.

Bombing could not be precise. In late 1941, only very large targets, in practice entire towns and cities, were likely to be hit by airplanes flying high. Yet, this was the strategy chosen by Churchill and the British leadership, and the only possible. Arthur Harris was the leader of Bomber Command. He was an energetic and determined officer. The destructions wrought by Harris's raids on German cities gave a boost to British military and civilian morale. But few British people saw in the bombing of Germany an opportunity for avenging the destruction of Coventry and the *Blitz* on London. Unlike the Germans and the Russians, the British and Americans had already decided in the late 1930s that heavy bombers were the strategic weapon of the future.

The British bombers sent off were the Avro Lancaster, and the Handley Page Halifax. When Harris took office, there were only 69 heavy bombers in his Air Force. But by the end of 1942, he had nearly 2,000! Lighter bombers, like the Wellington were used too. More than 7,000 Lancasters and 6,000 Halifaxes were produced to replace the less successful 4-engined Stirling.

Among the successful American bombers was the B-17 Flying Fortress, of which 12,000 had been produced. There was also the lighter, more vulnerable Liberator, with 18,000 produced.

On 28 and 29 March 1942, the British bombed Lübeck. Then Rostock. The German *Baedecker Raids*, called after a series of tourist books, were carried out with small numbers of airplanes, of about 30 fighter-bombers in day-time, 130 bombers at night. The Germans tried to stop the bombers from coming. The German General Josef Kammhuber, an Air Force General, was appointed to organise a national radar system of air-raid defences. The Germans installed Radar stations from Paris to Denmark. Me110 night-fighters, directed by a central control room were

sent out to stop the British bombers from coming. Ground-based searchlights and anti-aircraft guns completed the defence. But the British bombers swamped the German defences! They too had by then Airborne Radar and radio target-finders to fly in poor visibility. As of mid-1943, the British bombers used a device known as *Window*: packets of strips of aluminium foil to drop out of bomb-bays to confuse enemy radar. The shining strips became popular in Belgium and in Germany to decorate Christmas trees with!

As anti-aircraft batteries, Germany had installed 39,000 pieces in all. The death-rate of British Bomber Command was as high as 50% overall! More than 55,000 British and Allied airmen were killed in bombers in the war.

On 30 May 1942, Harris staged a 1,000-bomber attack on Köln! Over 3,300 buildings were destroyed, 45,000 people got homeless. In all, 474 people were killed and 5,000 people injured. In the summer of 1942, another 1,000 bomber-raid on Essen was organised by the British Royal Air Force. Then, not repeated anymore. The defence of Essen was particularly well organised. Indeed, this was a centre of German heavy industry.

In January 1943 took place a meeting at Casablanca between Churchill and Roosevelt. The decision was made there to begin the strategic bombing campaign in earnest. The aim of the operation was the progressive destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial and economic system, and the undermining of German morale.

New bombing offensives started. Such as on 5 March 1943 on Essen (Krupp). Further attacks came on Duisburg, Bochum, Krefeld, Düsseldorf, Dortmund, Wuppertal, Mülheim, Gelsenkirchen, and Köln.

As of 16 May 1943, were launched the *Dam-Buster Squadrons* to destroy dams on the Oder and Möhne rivers. These destructions severely disrupted water supplies in the Ruhr area. About 1,500 people were killed. Such attacks stopped the growth of armament production in Germany. Steel production fell by 200,000 tons in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 1943, ammunition quotas to the Armies had to be cut. From July 1943 to March 1944, production of aircraft stagnated in Germany, though needed very much on all fronts.

On 17 August 1943, a raid by American bombers happened on Schweinfurt. The bomber airplanes badly damaged ball-bearings factories, which led to a fall of 38% in the production of aircraft by Germany!

On 24 and 25 July 1941, new attacks on Hamburg followed, on Germany's leading shipbuilding and industrial centre. For the first time, the Window aluminium shining strips, were used. A series of successive raids was launched to destroy the city in stages. Great fires broke out in Hamburg, with hurricane force sucking-in air, a firestorm! The terrible firestorms would soon be noticed in other German cities. On 29 and 30 July 1941, the British Strategic Air Command launched a new raid on Hamburg. Again, with about 800 bombers. They flew in a storm, an electrical storm, that turned their propellers into giant fire-wheels. In all, 4 such great raids flew in all on Hamburg! The city was left in staggering devastation. The Germans suffered great losses in their war production. And 56% of all Hamburg houses were destroyed, 256,000 houses. More than, 900,000 people were left homeless and 40,000 people had been

killed. 125,000 people required medical treatment, many of them for burns. In Hamburg then, more than 840,000 homeless people walked out of the centre. Nazi Party regional Leader Karl Kaufmann arranged for them to be evacuated north and east. The Germans used 625 trains to bring people to new, temporary houses. Hamburg lay in rubble. All in ruins. Strangely, there was not much hatred in Hamburg for the enemy. People did feel great despair and much anxiety. The British strikes delivered a severe blow to civilian morale.

On 17 June 1943 happened raids on the Wuppertal and Düsseldorf. Every major attack on a German city now led to an exodus.

*Die Kinderlandverschickung* was a German plan for city children to be evacuated to the countryside, to camps in South Germany, Saxony, East Prussia, and also to Poland, Denmark, Bohemia and Moravia, the Baltic States. More than 300,000 children were sent to nearly 2,000 camps. In 1943, 5,000 of such camps existed, and the children stayed longer. It was organised with the help of Hitler Youth Leader Baldur von Schirach. The scheme ran up against considerable hostility from countryfolk. Self-help remained far more important than the state or party direction in the removal of children from bombed-out areas of Germany.

In 1944 and early 1945: the bombing raids intensified. The number of evacuees and refugees increased to more than 8 million. Then, the protests came, as 200 women staged a public demonstration in Witten, an industrial town near Dortmund on 11 October 1943. The called-in Police refused to do anything. They were persuaded the women had a right and a reason to protest.

In March 1944, the official estimate stood at 1.9 million people being homeless. 657,000 new dwellings were needed, though only 53,000 were built. In January 1943, Goebbels was appointed Chairman of the Inter-Ministerial Bomb Damage Committee. He was to send emergency aid into stricken cities. Goebbels was up against overwhelming needs. On 22 October 1943, for instance, in an air raid on Kassel, where a firestorm developed, 63% of all houses were uninhabitable after the ordeal. On 10 December 1943, the Nazis installed a *Reich Inspectorate for Civil Air War Measures*, with Goebbels in charge. He could override party officials he didn't like. He never truly achieved control over this area. Göring controlled the civil defence, and Himmler was in charge of Police and Justice. The Reich Ministry of Justice was for instance in charge of unexploded bombs.

Prisoners from state penal institutions were sent to try to defuse the unexploded bombs. Their death rate was about 50%! Aid came from several institutions, such as of the Red Cross women's institutions. Bunker building overall remained inadequate. By early 1943, a vast extension programme of bunkers under the *Reich Chancellery* in Berlin was begun. It had 2 floors at 40 feet below the surface, and a reinforced concrete roof of 12 feet thick. It had its own diesel generator. An underground headquarters complex at Ohrdruf in Thuringia demanded labour of 28,000 men.

The more the fabric of Germany's cities was destroyed, the more the fabric of German society began to fall apart. In 1943 began the transition from a people's community to a 'society of ruins'. It ended in 1945 with a state of almost complete dissolution. Hans Jeschonnek was the Chief of Staff of the German Air Force. He fell in a deep depression. On 18 August 1943, he

committed suicide. He did not want Göring to attend to his funeral. Göring's sublime complacency was driving his subordinates to despair. He buried his head in the sand, his only way to survive.

For the Berlin attacks, even high-flying bombers could not see the city lying at the horizon, as the city was hidden from England by the curvature of the earth. Nevertheless, the airplanes and bombers did reach their targets in Brandenburg! The first air raid on Berlin came on 22 and 23 November 1943, executed with more than 700 bombers. In the next months, 18 more raids were sent to Berlin. About 9,000 people were killed, 812,000 people rendered homeless. More than 3,300 British pilots and crews were killed, about 1,000 led into captivity. About 10% of the bombers was hit and destroyed. On 24 March 1944 came the last raid on the city. The Americans executed daylight attacks, which they continued through April and May 1944. More raids on Schweinfurt and Nürnberg meant unsustainable losses of bombers.

The P-51 Mustang airplane bomber, had an American frame and a British Rolls-Royce Merlin engine with extra fuel tanks to let it fly up to 1,800 miles. In November 1943, German fighter-plane losses began to mount because of this new tactic, which combined the versatility of a fighter airplane with bombing capabilities. By December 1943, nearly 25% of the German fighter fleet was lost.

In April 1944, The German *Luftwaffe* had only 2,500 airplanes left to confront more than 13,000 Soviet airplanes. By June 1944, the *Luftwaffe* had been defeated and destroyed. The skies were open for a further escalation of the British-American strategic bombing offensives. In March of 1945, 7,000 American bombers and fighter planes were in action in the European sky. The British continually deployed 1,500 heavy bombers over Germany.

By the end of January 1945, Speer calculated the economy had produced 25% less tanks than planned, 31% new aircraft less and 42% less lorries. All because of the bombing. In all by bombing, about 400,000 to 500,000 deaths had to be suffered in Germany. By the end of 1942, 11,000 people had been killed on the ground. For 1943: 100,000 people killed, 1944: 200,000 killed. 1945: 50,000 to 100,000 killed in the last months of the war. On Allied side, 80,000 airmen had been killed in the bombing raids, plus 60,000 British civilians in German raids. About 40% of all rolling stock in German towns of more than 20,00 inhabitants was destroyed. Hamburg and Köln suffered 70% of destruction. It is at least arguable that the bombing was larger than strictly necessary and conducted especially in the final year of the war, in a manner that was too indiscriminate to be totally justifiable. But the bombings of course contributed to spreading popular disillusion with the Nazi Party.

## Malou and Maxim Vincius

Malou Vincius, the first and oldest child of Julian and Charlotte Vincius-Baraine had grown into a fine, elegant young woman in 1942. She was born in 1917, at the end of the First World War and her parents had to smuggle her out of Longwy, France at the end of the war, with her parents returning to Germany and Berlin. She had studied in Berlin, and had finally become a nurse at the times her parents moved to Luxemburg. She was twenty at that time, ready to live on her own. She already worked as a nurse at the *Charité* Hospital of Berlin, the hospital where her father had been a director but had been dismissed because he had been branded as a Jew by the Nürnberg Racial Laws of 1936. Her father had given her under the good care of Dorothea von Gomolenski, then 50 years old and his very private love for over twenty years. But Malou was now twenty years of age, and quite ready to live on her own. Or better said, never on her own. Dorothea was the head nurse of the largest part of the *Charité nurses*, a doctor in her own right. When Julian Vincius had to leave Berlin because he was a Jew again according to the Nazi Racial laws, applied from the end of 1936, Julian had asked Dorothea to keep an eye on his turbulent daughter.

Malou had grown out to a beauty, though an odd beauty. She had not entirely inherited the elegant looks and the generous figure of her mother. Whereas Charlotte Baraine had been well in the flesh, Malou remained very slim of body, though also with the forms which appealed to men. She had not inherited the ample, blond hair of her mother. She was a redhead from birth. She was not tall, though of the same height as her mother and father. She burst of energy since always, and could throw herself in any conversation and become the dominant figure of it. Young men admired her for her fire and intelligence. She could have been a doctor, or she could have won any other university-grade diploma, had she been more focused. None of the university-grade studies interested her enough. She had too many interests, and was too buoyantly filled with ideas to be able to dedicate herself to one such disciplines. All discipline was impossible to her. If she focused on anything, it was on men. She was no KKK *Mädel*, no *Kirche, Küche, Kinder* girl, no ‘Church, Children, Kitchen’ woman, as the Nazis would have liked.

Malou Vincius did like what she did at the *Charité*, though, and Dorothea Gomolenski soon saw in Malou what she had been herself when she was young. Dorothea and Malou even reflected on whether Malou would be able to follow up on Dorothea at the *Charité*. Dorothea would have welcomed that, and she had come to give advice to Malou, but the advent of the war had seriously disturbed their secret plans. Nevertheless, Malou undeniably liked what she did at the *Charité*. There could only be one obstacle to her ambitions of reaching out to a leading position at the *Charité*, and that was that she loved men too much to be well considered by the doctors who had to decide on such careers at the university.

Malou was a very lusty girl, who had as many adventures with boys, young men, mature men, and even with imposing, greying, important men she met at the university, as she had pearls hanging on her slim neck. It was hard to remain a sweetheart and lover of a woman like Malou for more than 6 months! She smoked, could drink wine and schnapps as easily as any man. She was therefore extremely glad her parents had left Berlin and her, with her in full property of the grand villa of the Vincius at the Storkower Lake. Malou still had a French passport and had

not particularly asked for a German one, though she obtained such one easily enough when she had become twenty. She was a Frenchwoman in Berlin during the war, and remained so. She was Catholic of religion, but did not particularly believe in a god. Everyone among the people she frequented or met in Berlin knew she was French, which added some particular spice to her figure for any German man. Among her lovers, she had professors of the Berlin university, married or not, businessmen of the factories in and around the capital, and then also officers, some of high rank in the *Wehrmacht* or in the SS. She did avoid *Gestapo* men, who might have information on her father at hand. Her many male friends could have protected her from harassment by the Nazis in Berlin, but she avoided bringing trouble in her relationships. Discreetness she had learnt from her father and mother since very young. Still, many knew she was the daughter of a Jewish doctor who had escaped from Germany a few years ago.

What did Malou seek in her life? She wasn't sure herself whether she was seeking something. She just lived and enjoyed herself. She was truly interested in learning to know other people, even if that meant she had to jump in bed with the more exciting ones. She liked bedding men, of course, a lot even! Was she really looking for a nice lover, one who did not try to dominate her, or thought he could? No, she didn't really know what she wanted, and had among her relations also some men who were real bastards, with weird tastes in bed, which she did not always appreciate. Malou didn't really know what she was after, and she didn't worry about that either! Anyway, now, in the middle of a ferocious war, she hesitated even more binding herself to one man in particular. Some of her friends among the officers had not come back from the war, either because they liked war too much, and could have any woman they wanted, because they were brilliant and ruthless men in the war, or because they had been killed, fallen in action on one or other front. Malou decided to have a good time with the most interesting men, until after the war.

Yes, she surmised, this war would end one or other way, and then she would choose the best catch, a wealthy and interesting man who would adore her and remain at her feet, admiring her. They would travel together, and drink much Champagne! With such a man, she would then have a family, like her parents had. The only issue with that image was that she had begun to doubt she would ever find a man like that. Could she also truly love a man for a lifetime? Had she not met too many men already and seen the hidden flaws in her image of men? She would have to win back an innocent, naïve sense of men, however, for she wanted her future family to be a loving and stable one. The doubts about ever being able to reach such a goal haunted her sleep in nightmares. She realised she was far more moments very lonely, rather than with men on her back pushing in her. Would she just remain a whore forever, a seducer, a lost woman? Her upbringing, her feelings screamed against the way she was living currently!

Her younger brother Maxim seemed to have reached some sort of balance between the two tendencies of character that tortured the thinking of Malou. Maxim was 3 years younger than Malou. He was now, in 1942, just 22 years old. He seemed to have even made less of his life than Malou had, with one notable difference, a difference that probably had saved him from being a new sort of Malou. Malou envied him for that. Maxim had met his soul-mate, Malou not. In fact, she would never.

Maxim had a stable relationship with a girl of his age, one Francine Neuville of Luxemburg city. Malou and Maxim had never been very close before the start of the war. They even now

seldom saw each other, but they recognised they resembled each other much. Malou lived in Berlin and rarely travelled far, if not at all. Maxim had a more adventurous hanging. He had lived the last years in Paris.

Maxim Vincius had first studied at a private school, a Gymnasium of Berlin Mitte. Then, in 1937, he had followed courses at the technical and private lycée Emile Metz. Just before the war broke out, the war that had enveloped Luxemburg, his father had sent him to Paris, to a university, to study for a university-degree engineer. That separated him from Francine Neuville, the girl he had met not so long ago, and adored. Maxim, quite the contrary of Malou, had found his stable, permanent partner. He fell in love with Francine at end 1936 and both almost instantly knew they would remain together for the rest of their lives. Maxim took this for a certainty, and Francine did not object to his vision. It didn't mean Maxim refused side-adventures with women, especially after his father had found it too dangerous for Maxim to remain in Luxemburg, and had sent his son to study in Paris. Maxim inscribed in a university, and he did attend a few courses. University was nothing for him, though. He had a much more practical mind, not a theoretical one. Like Malou, his life was lost on other matters than studies. Moreover, as Maxim was now living in exciting Paris, and also returned extremely rarely to Luxemburg, he was on his own, with nobody to point out what his duties were and where his true interests beckoned. For the moment, he didn't think much of anything but drinking and flirting. He didn't even stay calm at the fact he would get no university title whatsoever, not win any distinguished diploma, the dearest wish of his parents. He knew he could not live thus forever, but constantly postponed any decision to change his ways. He but always told himself, as his current year was going to end once more in a flop, a failure, he would soon change his ways and begin a more sober life next year of schooling.

On the other hand, Maxim had his future all drawn out for him. He had talked about his intentions with Francine. They would sit out the war, even considering it lost years of their youth, and immediately after the war sail to the United States of America. Anybody smart enough, could make a good life there and win much money. Was that not the American dream? He had already talked his intentions over with Francine Neuville. They would sit out the war, and after the war travel to California. They would live a pioneering life in a state that promised to become the wealthiest of the United States! Maxim also wanted a life of warmth, not anymore a life of cold and rain, as European life was, everywhere, even around the Mediterranean. Francine had enthusiastically agreed on that prospect.

Francine would have accepted anything Maxim proposed. She wanted to keep him for her, and spend her life with him at her side. Maxim was the man for her! Also, the times were hard for her in Luxemburg. She was a child, born in a well-to-do family of Luxemburg, but she would have to win her own money. And she had been brought up in some ease. She wanted the same or more. Her parents would not help her with that. They had other children, and they would hold on their fortune for fear of old age. Francine liked adventures. She was not a conventual, traditional girl! As soon as Maxim had told her about his own dream, she joined him in expecting a bright future in California. So, she was about as enthusiast with the prospect of leaving the old, decadent, violent, degenerate, complex Europe behind, and move to a place where it was easier to make new money, such as California. California was warm and shiny, priding in fine beaches everywhere. She loved Maxim the more for presenting her a fine

opportunity. She did not doubt they would make their way and become well-to-do American citizens.

Maxim was in Paris. He studied some and feasted more. Maxim needed more money in Paris than he could get from his father. A friend showed him the way. He took Maxim in the late afternoon of a rainy day to a French *brasserie* in Paris. Downstairs, in what was in other houses the cellar, had been installed a dance room, decorated in the finest *fin-de-siècle* way. There, enterprising and especially poorer young men could find rich, elderly single women, often widows, to invite to a dance. A dance was worth some money to the ladies. If one had a bit of luck, one could drink a glass of Champagne with the lady or ladies, and be invited to a late dinner upstairs, with that same pass the night in bed, or with her and her friends, usually ladies in the same state as she, lonely and a little lost in life. Later, one could pass the night agreeably with one of the ladies. Maxim quickly learned to pick well. The more melancholic such a lady looked, the more eager she was to have a young man as her friend, and more. Maxim discarded the truly old and ugly ones, even though more money came forward from any of these women. With 2 or 3 dances and ladies a week, he could live at ease in Paris. He thus even lived with one such ladies for almost a year. She was rich, lived in a very large house in Paris, and took Maxim wherever he wished, merely to not be alone with her sorrows.

Maxim, of course, did not advance much in his studies, but his father was already glad his son did not beg him for more money, didn't get involved in troubles, and – most importantly- was out of Luxemburg, hidden in the chaos that was Paris even in the middle of a war. Julian did not want his son to be called into the German Army, which would have been particularly hateful to him and to Maxim's mother to go through. Maxim profited during the war. Rarely, not more than 2 or 3 times a year, he returned to Luxemburg. He then spent most of the time with Francine Neuville, conjuring her to continue waiting for him. She promised so, as she loved him truly.

When the war was finally over, in 1945, Maxim married Francine in Luxemburg, and received from his father enough money to emigrate with her to San Francisco. They lived happily there, stayed indeed together for the rest of their life, lived well, won good money, and had in their turn three children, three sons.

The year 1942 otherwise proved to be a terrible year for the Family Vincius. In one of the first bombings of Berlin perished the entire family of the brother of Julian Vincius. Johann Vincius had moved to Berlin from Thorn too, with his father and mother, his children and his wife. They all lived in two apartments of the same building in Berlin. In one of the first night attacks on Berlin by the British Avro Lancaster bombers, the bombs almost obliterated the street they lived in. Johann Vincius, his children and parents did not survive the bombings. Their 3 sons were not yet of forty years of age. Their wives too, and Johann's grandchildren died.

About the same, though in a bombardment by canon, died the other Julian Vincius and his wife Hanne Altman. It was war. Poland and Lithuania were out of reach for Julian and Charlotte Vincius of Luxemburg. They could only weep at the catastrophe and continue living.

Europe and Africa after Stalingrad



The effect of the fall of the Russian city of Stalingrad and the surrenders of so many German soldiers there, the sudden annihilation of the hope and the believe in the unrelenting discipline of the German armies was devastating. The Axis allies of Germany began to understand the Germans and their own troops that had been defeated in Russia and in Africa would never advance again. To this bad news added the terrible bombings of the RAF on German towns and sites of industry. In the long nights of winter, the RAF had also sent massive raids also on cities such as Torino and Milano and on the industrial centres of northern Italy. The *Luftwaffe* could not intervene anymore and try to stop the air raids. The German leaders could only react with acts of terror. They exercised a ferocious repression on the peoples and soldiers they had defeated, and on all people still in their grip, yet opposing them. The image of the German troops changed from triumphant and undefeatable units to tyrant forces.

From the 14<sup>th</sup> of January 1942 to the 24<sup>th</sup>, President Roosevelt and Winston Churchill met at Casablanca in Morocco to discuss plans of actions for the future. The Allies would concentrate their efforts on the crushing of Germany. Once Germany out of the war, the British and the Americans would turn against Japan. They considered the *Afrika Korps* almost eliminated in Africa. They would attack Hitler's Fortress Europe next. They would only accept the unconditional surrender of Germany.

In Africa, in the beginning of 1943, the Allies concentrated and prepared for the next offensive. The first action came from the German troops of General von Arnheim against Oued Khebi on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 1943. The Germans pushed back the French troops. But on the 27<sup>th</sup> already, the Allied forces retook the initiative and were back at Sidi Bou Zid.

The second attack of the Germans was harder. Rommel wanted to destroy the American forces established at Kasserine and at Gafsa, to diminish the danger on the flank of his defences at Mareth. Then, he would take Tebessa and encircle the Allied troops at the front of Tunisia, to finally turn against Montgomery.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 1943, two German tank divisions left Faid Sidi to rush to Sbeitla and Feriana. The American soldiers evacuated Gafsa, Metlaoui and Tozeur, to seek refuge in the mountains. The French retreated to the west. The German troops took Sbeitla and Feriana on the 17<sup>th</sup> of January. They tried to move on to Sbiba. Rommel forced the passage over the hill of Chambi, drove on to Thala and Tebessa. Had this manoeuvre succeeded, Rommel would have surrounded the British and French forces of the south and isolated the American troops there.

But on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January, the British tanks, supported by the RAF, counter-attacked energetically. The German troops suffered so many losses they had to retreat. Two last attacks of General von Arnheim on Mejez-el-Bab and of Rommel on Matmata sounded the end of the German effort. The German troops had been thrown back. The plan then of the Allies was to destroy the German units of Mareth by a combined manoeuvre of the 8<sup>th</sup> British Army coming from Tripoli and the 1<sup>st</sup> Army stationed west of Metbaori. Rommel had predicted this movement, so on the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 1943, he attacked Montgomery's defences with 80 tanks. When 30 of those were destroyed in the fierce fights, he abandoned the party.

The Battle for Mareth began on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 1943. The largest part of the Allied Armies attacked the German defences frontally. The 10<sup>th</sup> British Corps and the Division Leclerc,

which had taken Ksar Khilome, began a movement around the west of Matmata. In the north, the mission of the American troops was to cut off the retreat of the *Afrika Korps*, operating in the direction of the coast by Gafsa and Maknassy.

The battles lasted for 2 days. The German troops counter-attacked against the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army in the region of Mareth and the Americans attacked the Germans at El Guettar. The German resistance was very strong. In the evening, the American troops occupied Maknassy. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of March, the 10<sup>th</sup> British Corps and the Division Leclerc took El Hamma. As this advance threatened to encircle the German troops, Rommel ordered his men to retreat to Gabès and occupy it on the 28<sup>th</sup>. After a last and hard fight on the Oued Akari, the Allied Armies met and joined together. Rommel's troops fled! On the 10<sup>th</sup> of April 1943, Montgomery was at Sfax. The High Allied Command would have liked to cut the road of the north to the rests of the *Afrika Korps*, so that these could not join the forces of General von Arnheim to resist in the region of Tunis. The 1<sup>st</sup> British Army therefore tried to attack the German flank. These forces took Kairouan, but for the second time Rommel escaped and joined von Arnheim. The Allied troops moved to the bridge of Taks, the south access to Tunis. This manoeuvre didn't succeed, so the Allies started a general offensive on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April. The German soldiers resisted tenaciously. The Generals Alexander and Montgomery then proceeded to take Tunis, not by the south, but in front, at Mezez-el-Bab, where Rommel had concentrated most of his tanks. In their plan, they wanted to draw the largest part of the Axis forces to the 8<sup>th</sup> British Army massed north of Enfidaville, and perform a large assault on Tunis and Bizerte. The preparations for this movement were made in the greatest secret. Rommel could not see what was being prepared. The British commanders knew where the mass of the German tanks had concentrated. Their own tanks would move to Tunis and take the town.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 1943, the French 10<sup>th</sup> Corps attacked terribly in the south, to occupy 8 kilometres of the road from Souaft to the bridge of Taks. Zaghuan, the centre of the German front, got threatened. Rommel feared a tank attack of the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army, which he didn't know had no tanks at all. Rommel assembled his tanks in the north. This movement was what the Allies had expected. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 1943, at dawn, 4 British and American divisions of tanks, helped by the powerful British Air Force, crushed the defences of the German troops and sped to the sea. Nothing could resist them. When Rommel reacted, it was too late. His tanks rode against three British divisions, which annihilated his forces.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> May 1943, the British tanks entered Tunis. A few hours later, the American tanks took Bizerte. The Battle for Tunis had been won in a few hours, due to the brilliant manoeuvres of the Allies. The British and American troops immediately took the rest of Tunisia. The Cap Bon got isolated from the rest of the province of Tunis, already cut in two pieces. A few skirmishes continued with isolated German forces. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of May, all German resistance had ceased! The larger part of the Italian-German Army fled, hoping to re-embark. But a few airplanes and ships, which tried to flee to Sicily, were pitilessly sunk by the British Navy and the RAF. The campaign in Africa of the German troops thus ended in an immense disaster for the Axis troops. More than 300,000 German soldiers were made prisoners, among which their Field-Marshal von Arnheim.

Rommel had been able to flee in time. In March 1943, Rommel had turned the supreme command in North Africa over to General Hans-Jürgen von Arnheim. The US units had suffered 6,500 casualties by then and about 200 tanks, destroyed by German anti-tank guns. Rommel flew home in March. He hoped to obtain more reinforcements from Berlin, a decision to evacuate. But he never returned to North Africa!

On 13 May 1943, the Axis armies surrendered about 250,000 soldiers, a loss comparable to Stalingrad. Tens of thousands of Germany's best troops had needlessly been left and abandoned in North Africa to fend for themselves! The *Afrika Korps* then sent Colonel Hans von Luck to Berlin, to beg Hitler for at least a withdrawal of the last forces to Sicily. General Alfred Jodl told him the Führer would not hear of a retreat. Jodl showed him a map of Stalingrad. In North Africa and in Stalingrad, the German Army had lost over 500,000 of their best soldiers. The country never recovered from these losses!

At that time, the German Admiral von Lützow had to declare the failure of the submarine campaigns. The Nazis had lost in Russia and in Africa, and the seas were open to the Allies! The Nazi leaders then tried diplomacy to split the Allies. The effort didn't succeed. Hitler even approached his former Spanish Allies to mediate for a peace. These overtures remained in vain! Germany was being surrounded, and it had lost all initiative west, south and east! The Allies were now out for blood, for total victory on the Axis. The German people could not but understand the war was lost for them. It was only a matter of time until Germany would have to surrender unconditionally. The invasion of the Allies into Italy would be the first breach of the Fortress Europe. The march to victory of the Allies was under way.

The sharp decline of morale amongst the German population started already in 1943, because of a series of dramatic reverses in the war.

In the summer of 1942, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel captured Tobruk, drove the British back into Egypt. But, because of weaknesses in supplies, the British stood their ground at El Alamein with deep defensive positions, forces manned and ready for counter-attacks. On 23 October 1942, under General Bernard Montgomery, a very meticulous man, the British attacked the German forces with twice the number of tanks and infantry than Rommel had. It was a 12-days battle. The British defeated Rommel. Rommel lost 30,000 men in his retreat across the desert.

The Allies landed 2 weeks later with 63,000 men and 430 tanks in Morocco and Algeria. Rommel returned to Germany on sick leave. This was in March 1943. In mid-May 1943, 250,000 Axis troops, half of them German, surrendered to the Allies. It practically ended the war in North Africa. The *Third Reich* thus was denied key sources of oil in the Middle east. Rommel's defeat confirmed the massive strength of the British Empire, backed by the material resources of the USA. What could Rommel do with limited resources, limited forces and ammunitions? In November 1942, the British Armies recaptured Tobruk. And the Third Reich was beginning to lose allies.

One who had fully understood the German débâcle in these battles was the Minister of Armaments, Fritz Todt. He had already concluded during the Battle for Moscow on November-December of 1941, that Germany could not win the war. British and USA industrial resources were much stronger than Germany's, and the Soviet Industry was

producing better equipment on a larger scale. German supplies were running short. Hitler wouldn't listen!

### The diplomatic Conferences of the Allies, 1940-1944.

At the end of 1941, Great Britain seemed alone in its battle against Germany. No other great force supported the country. It was not already foreseeable that the Soviet Union and the USA would soon join forces with her. After all, the Soviet Union was the greatest Communist power in the world, the USA the greatest Capitalist and Democratic power. The British Empire was still a moral value, to be cherished by the countries Germany had forced by arms to subdue to the Axis. Winston Churchill was the light in the darkness.

The first important document of mutual assistance against the Axis Armies was the *Joint Declaration of mutual Assistance and Resistance* signed in the St James Palace of London on the 12<sup>th</sup> of June 1941. This document may have been the first constituent charter of the later United Nations. Great Britain, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Yugoslavia and Free France signed it, 10 nations in all declaring to want to fight together against Germany and Italy until the final victory, with all the means of their respective resources. They were to be called the Allies at first. They declared the solidarity of the powers of their countries, together, in the British politics, to fight for peace.

The links and relations of the USA and of Europe tightened. The USA politicians understood the freedom of all the peoples of the world were now at stake, not just of the countries of Europe. The great instrument of this change of views of the USA was the *Lend-Lease Agreement* of the 11<sup>th</sup> of April of 1941. The organiser of this program was the American Edward Stettinius, who had the name of his Pomeranian forefathers. The Lend-Lease Program was a weapon for victory. It was no official document of cooperation, but it has been called so after the war. It was concluded on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June of 1940 in Washington, between the Governments of Great Britain and France on the one side and the *US Steel Export Corporation* on the other. This company of private enterprise, was led until the 4<sup>th</sup> of June of 1940 by Edward Stettinius. The US Government ceded its surplus of war materials for a value of 37.5 million of dollars to this company. The exchanges of the countries involved would be held exclusively with this private company, not with the USA Government. The USA was still neutral at that time.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> September of 1940, the Government of Washington entered more directly into the agreement for aid to the remaining democratic nations in Europe. An agreement was signed between Great Britain and Washington somewhat later. The US Government ceded to Great Britain 50 destroyers of 1,200 tons, for, on the other hand, the permission to use the facilities of naval and aerial bases on certain British territories in the seas. This was to reinforce the capacity of the United States of America to cooperate non-officially with other nations of the Americas at the defence of the western hemisphere. Although a former treaty of 1871 withheld a neutral country from equipping with arms, or purvey a belligerent state, any ship destined to be used in the war against another state with which the USA was not at war, the

understanding was signed! At that moment, Cordell Hull was Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the USA. He saw the agreement through.

The American Congress voted for the Lend-Lease scheme on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February of 1941. It allowed the US Government to produce, buy or deliver to a government of a nation for which the USA deemed it necessary for the vital defence of the USA, all the goods it deemed necessary, within the limits of credits annually voted by Congress. The declaration was for arms, munitions, ships, airplanes, materials, agricultural and industrial machines, food and intelligence services necessary for the defence, brevets, etc. This authorisation was given, under the reserve that the acquiring country could not communicate the intelligence to another country without authorisation.

The Lend-Lease Agreement did not suppose immediate payments by the usual means. The war industry of the USA could thus work for the Allies. The cooperation was a result of the politics of President Roosevelt. Roosevelt had been elected for the first time on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November 1932. He was re-elected in 1936, and in total became 4 times president, a feat without precedents in the history of the USA. Moreover, a law was voted in Congress for the establishment of obligatory military service on the 2<sup>nd</sup> September of 1940. The USA was still neutral then, but in April 1941 it concluded an agreement with Denmark to allow the US armed Forces to assure the defences of Greenland. US troops disembarked on the 11<sup>th</sup> in that same month of April.

The USSR observed to its oriental neighbour Japan the same attitude as to its occidental neighbour Germany. The USSR concluded with the *Third Reich* a neutrality pact, concluded on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 1941. It signed the same with Japan. Germany, Italy and Japan signed on the 17<sup>th</sup> of September of 1940 a pact to define their zones of influence, reserved to them, at the end of a war in which victory then seemed already certain to them.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of August 1941, the President of the USA and the British Prime Minister met somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean to discuss certain common principles of international politics they would follow.

The resulting *Charter of the Atlantic* was the first document that fixed the unity of action and the absolute cohesion of the American and British forces. It contained 8 articles. Article 1 declared neither of both countries sought territorial expansion. Article 2 declared they also wanted no territorial modification that was not conformant to the wishes of the interested population. In article 3, they would enforce their current obligations to ensure for all states the access and the participation of all countries to the commerce and the raw materials necessary for their economic prosperity. They would ensure for all the nations complete collaboration, the best working conditions, the progress of their economy and the social security. They expressed the hope, after the crushing of the Nazi tyranny, to establish a peace that would offer to all nations the means to remain secure within their proper frontiers, and to ensure to all people of all states the possibility to live until the end of their days without fear and need.

The last article declared they were convinced each nation, for motives as well spiritual as realistic, had to renounce to the use of violence. It was necessary to disarm the nations. They wanted to facilitate and encourage all practical measures to lighten for all peace-loving nations, measures to lighten for all peace-loving nations the weight of armaments. This

Atlantic Charter brought great hope to the countries of Europe. The charter showed the entry in the war of the USA to be inevitable, against the spirit of Germany and Italy.

The *Atlantic Charter* soon became the Charter of the 10 *United Nations* that signed a declaration of mutual aid on the 12<sup>th</sup> of June of 1941. The official date of adherence to the pact was of the 24<sup>th</sup> of September of 1941.

Between the 27<sup>th</sup> of October and the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 1941, met a Congress of the *Bureau of International Work*, BIW, to organise the planning of the tasks for after the war and the assistance of the BIW in the effort.

The charters and agreements formed the basis for worldwide cooperation for peace, the ending of the World Wars and for the collaboration to fight against the Axis forces.

Japan attacked the US Naval base of Pearl Harbor in the Pacific Ocean. On the 8<sup>th</sup> December of 1941 therefore, the USA and Great Britain declared war to Japan. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of December 1941, Germany and Italy declared war on the USA. As of the end of 1941, the war in Europe thus had evolved to a total world war.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> January of 1942, the delegates of the 10 United Nations adopted a collective declaration by which they expressed their conviction the complete victory was indispensable for the defence of life, of the independence, of the religious liberty, at the preservation of the rights of man and on justice in their countries, as well as in the other countries. Each country engaged itself to put its military and economic resources at the service of the battle against the members of the *Tripartite Pact* of Germany, Italy and Japan, and to conclude with this enemy no separate armistice or peace treaty. More nations joined this declaration, beyond the first 10: the USSR, China, the USA, Canada, South Africa, Australia and other republics such as Nicaragua, the Dominican republic and El Salvador. All these countries engaged themselves to fight together against Germany and Italy until the final victory, and within the limits of their respective resources.

From the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 1942 was held a conference of 21 Northern and Southern American countries for a declaration issued on the 23<sup>th</sup> of January 1942. The republics present affirmed an act of aggression against one of them would be an act of aggression against all. It would mean an immediate danger to the liberty and the independence of the American continent as a whole. This was the principle of American solidarity! The conference recommended all the powers of the Americas who were not at war to suspend all diplomatic relations with the 3 countries of Germany, Italy and Japan. The conference took place in Rio de Janeiro. Only 2 nations remained neutral, Argentina and Chile, 10 republics declared for war. In 1942, the number of states at war against the Axis lands were thus in all 42! On the 28<sup>th</sup> of May 1942, Mexico declared war on the Axis countries too, and on the 22<sup>th</sup> of August also Brazil.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of May 1942, Sir Anthony Eden for Great Britain and Molotov for the USSR signed a declaration, ratified on the 18<sup>th</sup> of June 1942 by the Council of the USSR and on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June by the king of Great Britain, of the collaboration between the USSR and Great Britain for mutual assistance to work towards victory and to organise the peace. They were willing to contribute to the peace with Germany and her associated countries. They expressed their intentions to aim for and also work with other nations to establish world peace on the basis of the declaration of the 14<sup>th</sup> of August 1941 by the President of the USA to which the

Government of the USSR had adhered. They would lend mutual military assistance and not separately conclude armistice or a peace treaty with Germany or any of its associated states. The second part of the treaty held the measures to safeguard the peace and to resist aggressions after the war. This second part was signed for a period of 20 years, and then to be continued, until one party had notified the other of its will to stop the treaty after a period of 12 months.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of January 1943 began the *Conference of Casablanca*, which lasted for 12 days. The USA, Great Britain and France, this last country represented by the Generals de Gaulle and Giraud, participated. Stalin was retained in Russia because of the great offensive he led at that moment. It was mainly a military conference. The delegates met 3 times a day to study, coordinate and work on the plans for the future operations of war in the entire world. Churchill and Roosevelt declared the principal objective of the conference was to help as much as possible the Russian armies on the Russian fronts.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of July 1943, the British troops disembarked in Sicily from about 2,000 ships. Canadian and USA forces accompanied them. Italian towns were bombed. In Italy, the High Council of Fascism met. The Council caused a great sensation. By 19 votes to 7, among which Ciano and the leaders he had considered as his most faithful, the Duce Mussolini was put in the minority as the supreme leader of fascism!

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of October of 1943, Sir Anthony Eden for Great Britain met Cordell Hull, the Secretary of State of the USA for Foreign Affairs, and Foreign Minister Molotov in Russia, in Moscow. It was a meeting of the 3 Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the most powerful countries. The meeting aimed at talking about how the war could be made shorter. China brought its support. A common declaration was published on the 28<sup>th</sup> of December 1943. The final declaration was short.

It signalled the parties shared the same views on the matters of conduct of the war and on the necessity to assure the final, definite defeat of Hitlerian Germany. Measures to adopt after the war to ensure new German aggressions to be impossible, were discussed. The men examined the methods to obtain the disarmament of the enemy and to prepare the future peace as a system of cooperation and organisation of the free world. The Moscow conference took a resolution to found in London a European consultative commission charged with studying the Italian questions, with the participation of France. A Council would be organised for the study of the restauration of Austria as an independent country. Another question discussed in Moscow was that of the judgement of the war criminals. The conference published in the names of Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin, a declaration concerning the punishing of authors and their accomplices of atrocities and arbitrary executions in the occupied countries. This declaration had a very large repercussion in Germany, causing great anger and fear among the Nazis.

### Other important Conferences

From the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 24<sup>th</sup> of August 1943, Churchill and Roosevelt met in Quebec. This too was a military conference, so the results were not published. Yet, the subject was the war

against Japan and the aid to be brought to China. That was why a M. Soong, the representative of the Supreme General Tchang Kai-Shek had taken part.

From the 22<sup>nd</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 1943 too, happened a conference in Cairo where Tchang Kai-Shek himself participated. The subject here was particularly the pressure on Japan. The British-Americans and the Chinese would take all the islands in the Pacific Ocean that Japan had conquered from China since 1918, give those back to China, and restitute all other territories occupied by Japan such as Mandshuria, the islands of Formosa and Pescadores, back to China.

When Churchill and Roosevelt left China, they attended the larger *Conference of Teheran*, from the 26<sup>th</sup> of November to the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December of 1943. The USA and Great Britain would work together not only during the war, but also in the peace that would follow. The 2 countries would cooperate completely and effectively with all nations large and small, which would be willing to consecrate efforts to suppress the tyranny, the oppression and the intolerance of the Axis lands. They wanted to assure after the war the independence, territorial integrity and the material aid to Iran.

After the end of this meeting, Churchill and Roosevelt returned to western Europe. They stopped in Cairo once more, to meet M. Inonu, the President of the Turkish Republic. Turkey wanted to remain neutral, but nevertheless would orient its politics favourably to the views of the USA and Great Britain. These last powers continued to send arms and other necessities to Turkey.

At that time of end 1943, the Germans had been defeated in Russia, in Africa and even in Italy, with the Japanese in retreat in the Pacific Ocean and feeling the defeat coming to them with great strides. The next movement, the disembarkments of Allied troops in Normandy, and the strong Allied offensive from there to Germany, was in the making. The war in the air, on the ground, in the seas, of the Axis countries, had failed everywhere!



## Part III. The March to Victory. 1943-1945

## The March to Victory. May 1943 – May 1945

### The Attack on the European Fortress, on Italy.

After the great battles in Russia and in Africa, followed a pause to the hostilities. The final assault on the Axis countries had to be prepared. The enemy had to be attacked on its own territory, Europe.

The battles in North Africa had been terminated on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May 1943. The Mediterranean had suddenly and once more become an Allied lake. Millions of tons of Allied shipping could again without opposition also reach Great Britain forces unhindered, from the Indian Ocean through the much shorter route via the Suez Canal, with far less worries for German aircrafts and U-boat threats. The Allies knew Germany had Mark III and Mark IV tanks in Italy, no better than the Allies. The German forces had no *Tiger* and *Panther* tanks yet there.

The Allies decided to invade Sicily. From Cape Boeo in Sicily to Cape Bon in Tunisia, was only about 120 km over the Mediterranean, shorter even than from Marsala in Sicily to the Straits of Messina. The US Command saw Sicily as a way to ensure an open Mediterranean for shipping. They would be able to use air bases in Sicily to bomb the southern and eastern regions of the *Third Reich*. A landing in Sicily would be the first amphibious operation in Europe on a hostile coast, a fine rehearsal for the anticipated invasion of France in the spring of 1944.

It was only 2 months later that the victorious armies of General Eisenhower disembarked in Europe. In the meantime, the Allied troops occupied the smaller islands that formed advanced positions of Sicily. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of June 1943, Pantellaria and its garrison of 15,000 Italian soldiers capitulated. The next day, Lampedusa fell and the day after, the garrison of the small island of Linosa surrendered to the British destroyer *Nubian*.

The Allies had some experience with disembarkments in enemy territory. Now, they had to construct specific machines, tools, tactics, to put on land in very difficult circumstances considerable numbers of men, arms, tanks, and so on. In the Mediterranean, the Allies had by then obtained a large superiority in ships. The British Navy was present in part, and also American war ships, Dutch, Polish, Greek ships and also the French free fleet that had remained since the armistice of 1940 in the port of Alexandria, was present. The French fleet had entered the war together with the Free French forces of North Africa. The Italian fleet alone, already heavily damaged at the attacks of Tarentum and at Cap Mattapan, could not confront such power at sea. The fleet remained at anchor in its ports.

The immense fleet of transport vessels and escort ships of the Allies consisted in total of over 3,000 boats! The ships came from Bizerte and Malta, Alexandria and Gibraltar. Other ships sailed in directly from the USA and Great Britain.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, the Allies launched massive air force attacks against the Axis airfields of Sicily. Quite many Axis airplanes were caught on the ground and destroyed. Then, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of July, the Allied Armada arrived at Sicily. General Eisenhower held the supreme command. On the left wing, the 7<sup>th</sup> American Army ran on the beaches. It had to move west and to the

centre of the island. The 8<sup>th</sup> British Army disembarked at the extreme south-east, to move to Syracuse and the other forts of the Straits of Messina. With her came a Canadian division.

The enemy on Sicily were 5 Italian divisions of coastal defence, 5 more Italian divisions of inland defence, 3 German divisions of which one was a tank division, and other supporting troops, including air force troops. Three US divisions left from Tunisia, a 4<sup>th</sup> from Oran in Algeria. They came together as the 7<sup>th</sup> Army of Major General George Patton, and landed on the southern shores of Sicily.

The Allies felt little resistance. Syracuse already fell into British hands the first day.

American bombers destroyed the Italian-German headquarters at Taormina. The next day, the Allies had built a front of more than 150 kilometres, consolidated their positions on the coast, brought in reinforcements, and they had taken 3 airfields. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of July 1943, they had captured about 10 towns. The American troops penetrated rapidly to the heart of Sicily. The British and Canadian troops met heavy resistance on their route along the coast to Catana. This strategic port only fell completely on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August. The American troops advanced more rapidly. From the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July, they moved from Agrigento to Palermo, traversing Sicily from south to north. They cut all the escape routes of the enemy in the west of the island.

In fact, *Operation Husky*, from 9 July 1943 to 17 August 1943, was conceptually flawed from the start. The landings were too sophisticated, and Montgomery and Patton worked almost like rivals instead of as partners. Airdrops were plagued by high, strong winds. Paratroopers got scattered well beyond their targets. No amphibious troops were sent to Messina, to block the escape of Axis troops to the Italian mainland. Omar Bradley and British generals deprecated Patton's use of small amphibious operations to outflank the German resistance. Nevertheless, after 5 weeks of tough fighting, the British and US soldiers came together at Messina. Half of the defending German force, about 100,000 German and Italian soldiers, succeeded in crossing in time to safety in Italy. German armies had an uncanny ability to escape out of encirclements!

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of August, General Alexander, commanding the 15<sup>th</sup> Army Group started a general offensive against the German troops still in the east of the island. Under his orders fought General Montgomery at the head of his legendary 8<sup>th</sup> Army, as well as General Patton heading the 7<sup>th</sup> American Army.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August, the troops of General Patton entered Troina and the 78<sup>th</sup> division took Centuripe after violent combats. To his right, the 51<sup>st</sup> division progressed with the help of Canadian troops that had taken Regalbuto. The battle in the zone between the Etna volcano and the sea was very violent. The Italian and German troops destroyed bridges, roads and railroads. They retreated to the mainland of Italy. The American troops in the north joined the British columns. They took Taormina on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August. Messina was taken on the 17<sup>th</sup> of August. The Italian and the Germans had evacuated their troops then from Messina to the mainland of Italy.

The Allies made 7,000 German prisoners, more Italians, and 1,000 airplanes were taken or destroyed. It had taken 2 months to prepare the operation for the American and British military, 38 days to capture the island! The Allies paused for 17 days, and then began to pass the Straits of Messina and the Canal of Otranto. Important political events in Italy modified the situation in the country. The Italians signed a secret armistice with the Allies!

Italy had lost the Graziani Army in North Africa. The British troops had entered Cairo victoriously. Abyssinia was lost to Italy. The Duke of Aosta had capitulated there. The Italians had to leave Libya. Already at the end of 1940, Count Dino Grandi and Count Ciano had wanted to negotiate with Great Britain. The Italian leaders began to resent the presence of the German troops in their land. The American soldiers were welcomed as liberators by the population of Palermo, Catana and Messina! The Italian Royal Court had supported the dictatorship of Mussolini with growing impatience and, as defeats accumulated, and military disasters multiplied, had become more and more hostile to the policies of Mussolini.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of July, Mussolini met Hitler in Verona. The *Duce* asked for military support, troops, airplanes and artillery. The German generals considered the defence of Italy difficult. They proposed to retreat to the River Po. Mussolini could only delay the retreat of the German troops! On the 24<sup>th</sup> of July 1943, Mussolini convoked the Great Fascist Council. Mussolini blamed the Military General Staff for the defeats of so far. But then, Count Grandi stood up and presented a motion in which he proposed to form a national union around the person of the king. He also proposed the Government to ask the sovereign to take the effective command of all the armed forces. A discussion followed, which lasted for 10 hours. This *Night of the Grand Council* ended with a vote.

The proposal of Dino Grandi received 19 votes against seven. Among the adversaries of Mussolini were Count Marshal de Bono, Bastrianini, the ambassador to Berlin, Alfieri, and the son-in-law of the Duce, Count Galazzo Ciano. When the next day, Mussolini went to see the king, he heard he had already a successor, Marshal Badoglio. Badoglio would be the new head of the Italian Government.

A few hours later, the Italian military arrested Mussolini and brought him to the island of Ponza, then to the island of Maddalena near Corsica, and then to the Gran Sasso, at about 2,000 meters of altitude, north of Rome. There, a commando of German soldiers liberated him. His role in Italy had ended. He formed a neo-Fascist government in the north of Italy, but had no authority anymore in Italy. He would be killed by Milanese patriots on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April of 1945. Mussolini had been pushed out of power in Italy by a coup.

As Marshal Badoglio confirmed in his proclamation of the 26<sup>th</sup> of July, the war continued, though under new leaders. Badoglio arrested the leaders of the Fascist Party. Count Grandi fled to Portugal. In secret, Marshal Badoglio, affirming to the Germans Italy continued the war, sent a superior officer in Spain and then to Portugal, where the envoy could talk to Sir Samuel Hoare and Sir Ronald Campbell, to hear at which conditions the Allies would consent to an armistice in Italy. A second envoy, accompanied by General Carton de Wiart, liberated for the occasion by the Italians, added to the discussions in more detail. He insisted to keep the discussions secret to not endanger the positions of King Victor-Emmanuel and of the Badoglio Government.

Hitler assumed control over the Axis defences, thus ensuring a civil war inside Italy! The Italians had liberated themselves from Mussolini's Fascism, to be subjugated by Hitler's ideology. The war on the grounds of Italy continued with a frightening, new intensity. The Nazi zealot and Hitler favourite Field Marshal Albert Kesselring was as skilled as the more famous German generals Walter Model and Gotthard Heinrici when on the defence, yet he never became as well-known as the forenamed.

The British-American troops lost an initial opportunity for a breakout from the shores of the amphibious landing at Anzio on 22 January 1944.

In early August 1943, General Patton slapped two US soldiers on separate visits to evacuation hospitals. General Eisenhower removed him from combat commands for 11 months. Putting the best US combat general aside caused setbacks in Italy and even some of the US troops' immobility in Normandy.

On the last minute, General Matthew Ridgway wisely cancelled ill-considered airborne drops of parachutists on Rome.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 1943 was signed the unconditional surrender of Italy at Syracuse in Sicily, signed by the Italian General Castellano in the presence of the Generals Eisenhower and Alexander. The Italian Government would provide all possible help to the Allied Forces in their war against Germany. Italy declared it would oppose any other attack, from whatever place that attack would come. This last clause would result on the 13<sup>th</sup> of October of 1943 in the declaration of war of Italy to Germany! The Allies only announced the capitulation of Italy on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September. The same day, they invaded Italy.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September, at 04h30 in the morning, a powerful artillery barrage of 434 heavy canons shot over the Straits of Messina. With the support of many war ships, the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian division and the 5<sup>th</sup> British Division, disembarked in Italy north of Reggio di Calabria. Then started the conquest of the peninsula of Calabria. The Allies advanced along the 2 coasts. The German troops retreated slowly. They blew up bridges and demolished roads to slow down the Allied progression. The Canadian troops moved along the east coast, passing Cape Spartivento, into the direction of Cortone. After about a week, the Canadians had reached Catanzaro and the British Nicastro.

In the north-east, the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne British Division occupied Tarento. The 5<sup>th</sup> Anglo-American Army disembarked at Salerno. General Mark Clark led these troops. The operation was difficult and risky. The troops got stuck, backs to the sea. The disembarkments had started the 9<sup>th</sup> of September at 03h30 in the night, shortly before the announcement of the Italian capitulation. The 46<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> British Divisions and the 36<sup>th</sup> American Division disembarked at Amalfi, supported by American Rangers. They could hold their positions. The immediate aim was the capture of nearby Naples, of which the strategic importance was large. From Naples emanated several roads, which allowed the Allies to occupy the full breadth of Italy. The beaches of Salerno were difficult to defend by the Allied troops, as they had no national defences and in the hinterland of Salerno ran very many irrigation canals, which formed a barrier to the heavy Allied tanks. The Allies had no airfields in the region. Their air cover had to come from Sicily!

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of September, the German troops counter-attacked. They repeated their efforts during the three following days. The Allied positions came in danger! Would Montgomery's 8<sup>th</sup> Army, marching fast in their direction, arrive in time? The 5<sup>th</sup> Army had to face 7 German divisions with very superior armament! The effort of the Germans aimed specifically at separating the American and British forces. For a moment, they succeeded in doing just that. General Mark Clark then threw all his troops in the battle. The fight reached its toughest moment on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September. But the Allied Air Force could intervene, dispersing the

enemy formations. The fleet artillery shot on the Germany artillery batteries, hidden in the mountains. The 7<sup>th</sup> Tank Division disembarked, and pushed back the German troops. Then, the commando troopers and the Rangers of Amalfi attacked the Germans on their north flank. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of September, Montgomery's front guards ran over the German troops and joined the 5<sup>th</sup> Army. The leading general of the German troops, Marshal Kesselring, had lost his wager. He had to retreat his troops north, to the German defences of the *Gustav Line*.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Army of Montgomery then occupied the region from Reggio to Tarento. They took Brindisi, Bari on the Adriatic coast and the German defences still of the interior. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of September, they took Foggia and the airfields of that region. The RAF could from then on launch important aerial offensives, to far behind the enemy lines. A continuous front ran now through Italy from east to west, by Bari, Potenza, Aulitta, Battepaglio, Salerno and Amalfi. A new Allied offensive launched from Salerno brought the 5<sup>th</sup> Army to near Naples, where the Anglo-American troops entered on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 1943.

At about the same time, the French Free troops liberated Corsica, the first French *département* to be liberated. The partisans had attacked Bastia right after the 8<sup>th</sup> September, when the capitulation of Italy had been announced. They asked for help from Algiers. The submarine *Casablanca*, commanded by Captain Lherminier, took off on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September with munitions and 109 fusiliers. Although the situation at Salerno was then still difficult, Admiral Cunningham sent 2 fast British cruisers, the *Fantasque* and the *Terrible*, which navigated to Algiers to take on board about 500 soldiers and 5,000 pairs of heavy shoes for the Corsican partisans, more weapons and British and American liaison officers. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of September at 22h00, these 2 ships boarded at Ajaccio. Other units followed, such as the *Montcalm* and the auxiliary cruiser *Quercy*, the school-cruiser *Jeanne d'Arc* that had just arrived from Fort-de-France and left for Corsica with oil on board. Thus, reinforcements and arms arrived for the partisans, to liberate the island. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of October, these French forces won a victory over forces 5 times their superior. The last German forces had to leave from Bastia.

The aim of the Allies then was Rome. But the German troops had formed west-east lines of defence over the peninsula, the *Gustav Line* and the Line Adolf *Hitler*. Reinforcements had arrived for the troops of General Kesselring.

In Naples, the Allies had found a devastated town! The installations in the harbour had been destroyed. The distribution of water and the lighting had been sabotaged. The Allies built a fortified position at Sargano and pushed on towards Termini. Heavy fighting happened when the Allied troops passed the Rivers Volturno and Sangro. The 8<sup>th</sup> Army needed 3 weeks to pass them! On the 8<sup>th</sup> of December, the Canadian troops forced the passage of the Moro. The German soldiers defended the line of the Garigliano River and its affluents with much obstinacy during the winter. Progress went slowly. The French Expeditionary Army under General Juin participated in the efforts. The army consisted of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Moroccan Division under General Montsabert. The French troops arrived at Naples on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November. They went to occupy a very mountainous region in the Abruzzi, between the 5<sup>th</sup> American Army, to which they were detached, and the 8<sup>th</sup> British Army in the west. They faced the *Gustav Line* near the massif of Monte Cassino. Cassino was a fortified abbey, famous in the history of Catholic monasteries, and dominating the region.

From the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup> of December, the Moroccan troops, used to fight in the mountains, took a series of front places. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of December, they reached the first objective, the mountain chain of the Menarde. From the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> of January, hard skirmishes were fought for the possession of the *Monna Casale* the Germans had fortified. On the 13<sup>th</sup> January 1944, around noon, an Algerian battalion, all its officers killed, and out of ammunition, fought man to man with merely rocks in their hands. Thanks to these hard fights, the 5<sup>th</sup> Army of the Allies established a new position forward at Anzio and one at Nettuno, 50 kilometres from Rome.

The Germans reacted rapidly. They formed no less than 9 divisions to throw the disembarked British-Americans back into the sea at Anzio. Anzio developed into a very hard battlefield along the entire month of February. The Allies managed to enforce their positions and to threaten thus the right wing of the German troops established at Monte Cassino.

On the day of their disembarkments at Anzio, General Mark Clark, commanding the 5<sup>th</sup> American Army, tried to take Monte Cassino. He gave the order to General Juin, to the French soldiers, to take the strong German division of the Belvedere. Tunisian soldiers, led by Colonel Roux, went into the attack. He passed the Rapido on the night of the 24<sup>th</sup> to the 25<sup>th</sup> of January. On the 25<sup>th</sup>, he took one after the other of the fortifications by throwing grenades into the defences. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of January, the combats continued. The German troops then closed the circle on the Allied units. The trapped regiment suffered from German bombings from the air, and from counter-attacks on land. It doggedly stayed in its position, though it received no provisions anymore, no food, no new munitions. Allied troops tried to open the German circle to reach them. This manoeuvre succeeded on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of February, the Allies won the Belvedere position!

In that winter, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army reached the region of Ortona, and the 5<sup>th</sup> American Army faced the German defence line of the *Volturmo*. They tried to chase the German troops from the banks of the Garigliano. But Marshal Kesselring could stop the advance. He established new positions in the Liri Valley from out of Monte Cassino. On the Adriatic Coast, the 8<sup>th</sup> American Army, now commanded by General Leese, progressed slowly towards Pescara. There also, each small river was an almost unsurmountable obstacle.

When the Allies finally broke out from Anzio in May 1944, General Clark's forces headed for Rome. They entered Rome on 4 June, two days before D-Day in Normandy. The German 10<sup>th</sup> Army could escape encirclement.

Marshal Alexander had been promoted to this title and rank. He was now the commander-in-chief of the armies of Italy. He used the winter to prepare a great offensive that had to open the road to Rome. As soon as spring started, 2,000 artillery pieces bombed night and day the enemy positions. The first assault was given on the 11<sup>th</sup> of May 1944 by French troops reinforced by the 4<sup>th</sup> Moroccan Mountain Division under General Sevez, and by the 1<sup>st</sup> Division of Free France under General Brasset. The first came from the liberation of Corsica, the second had fought in Africa.

The German troops had formed a new defence line called the *Adolf Hitler Line* between the two mountain groups of Ausonia and Avrunci. The tactics employed by the General Juin were simple: attack frontally, break through the lines, and deploy the troops in fan form behind the German defences. Nevertheless, the German defence proved to be very tough! The

defence held lines of barbed wire, bunkers and blockhouses on the flanks of the mountains, minefields, anti-tank canon batteries, traps of hidden canons, and many camouflaged machinegun posts. The French troops were stopped in their progression. Only on the 12<sup>th</sup> May in the evening, did the Division Montsabert reach Castelforte. On the 13<sup>th</sup>, the Allied troops assaulted once more. They took the defences, launched bayonet attacks, passed the obstacles, and reduced the German defences. In the evening, the French took the Monte Majo and realised a breakthrough! General Juin launched other troops at the pursuit of the retreating enemy.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of May, Marshal Alexander ordered the general offensive. Six days later, the impregnable position of Monte Cassino fell to the Allies. British and Polish troops had attacked the mountain flanks. At the same time, along the coast, the 5<sup>th</sup> American Army pushed northwards, in the direction of Minturne, Gaëte and Ferracine. On the 23<sup>th</sup> of May, the British and the Americans, coming from Anzio and Nettuno, broke violently through the enemy flank. They cut the Via Appia at Cisterna. In the evening, they reached the railway Rome-Naples. The German troops retreated to Rome over the Albano Mountains. The Allied troops then drew forward in good discipline. They had heavy weapons and their airplanes dominated the skies. The Navy still supported the Allied troops with heavy artillery bombings. The German troops could only retreat on, northwards, to their *Gothic Line* of defence north of Firenze, where they could regroup, and hold a new defence. Marshal Kesselring once more had to leave behind much of his weaponry, trucks, and so on. He was limited to defending North Italy.

General Mark Clark entered Rome on the 4<sup>th</sup> of June of 1944, with General Juin. The 5<sup>th</sup> Army made more than 20,000 German prisoners around Rome. Rome was liberated! The city was largely intact. The German Army had to leave in a hurry.

An Allied offensive on 20 to 22 January of 1944, a frontal assault on German troops at the Rapido River, proved only a rapid pathway into German minefields and artillery barrages. On 15 February, the area bombing of Monte Cassino brought a military and cultural nightmare for the Allied divisions. While this happened, Mussolini's northern Fascist new Government, the *Repubblica Sociale Italiana*, brought more civil strife to Italy. The war in Italy was becoming a very controversial war theatre. The Allies lost 312,000 casualties, for 435,000 German casualties. It was hard to justify such costs of human lives. Many wondered whether a major invasion of Italy was really necessary. The Americans were right to believe the quickest way to end the war was to land in France and drive eastward, to Berlin! And the British had correctly warned that the Allies were not up to such a task before mid-1944. The war in Italy has seemed later as a senseless campaign of destruction, fought with inadequate means, without strategic goals and with no political foundations.

After Stalingrad, the Russian advance to Odessa

Stalingrad had fallen on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 1943. For the first time until then, the *Wehrmacht* had suffered a decisive defeat. The German troops had to leave the territory it had taken them 6 months to conquer.



On the 12<sup>th</sup> of February 1943, the Russian Soviet troops took Krasnovar. The Soviet troops pressed the Germans past Voronej. The Germans retreated to the front line of from Kursk to Rostov.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of February, the Soviet troops re-occupied Lugansk and Rostov on the Lower Donetz and on the Don. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of February, they entered Kharkov. The German troops had then already retreated for 600 kilometres.

Further northwards, Marshal Timoshenko, commanding the centre front, began an offensive to break the enemy troops around Leningrad and Moscow. From now on, the German soldiers would be limited to a war of defence, a war of retreats. The armies of von Manstein retook Kharkov on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 1943. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of June, a new Soviet offensive began from around Kuban. The Germans announced the Soviet attacks in the regions of Bielgorod and Belev had been fended off. On the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> June happened massive attacks in the region of Orel. The Russian troops continued to attack along the entire front line.

In the summer of 1943, the Soviet campaigns began again in full power. Marshal Vassilewski had been charged with the organisation of the summer assaults. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of July, his adversary, General von Manstein, took the initiative of operations near Kursk, between Orel and Bielgorod. The offensive was to be called *Operation Citadel*. The result, as mentioned earlier, was a gigantic battle of tanks and armoured cars. German *Tiger* tanks fought in huge numbers against the T34 Russian tanks. As of the 12<sup>th</sup> of July, the German offensive came to a halt.

More German and Russian soldiers were killed in tanks at this *Battle of Kursk*, than in any other battle of armoured divisions in history. Over 2,000 tanks were lost. Hitler later remarked, that had he been made aware of the enormous Russian tank production, and specifically about the capabilities of the T34 tank, against which the German anti-tank weapons were ineffective, he would never have invaded the Soviet Union. But he had, so now he had to take the consequences of his decision. He had no idea the Soviet Union had vastly more airplanes, tanks and infantry divisions than he had. Well, such information was what one needed to start a war. The entire *Operation Barbarossa* had been foolishly launched without sufficient information, but that had not seemed necessary to Hitler, who regarded himself as invincible.

Meanwhile, Marshal Timoshenko attacked north, east of the River Tula, between Orel and Moscow, from Kuban. The battle on the Russian front thus raged from Murmansk in the far north to the Black Sea, passing by the sector of Donetz.

Stalin sought, like Foch in 1918, by a series of attacks, to find the weaker spots of the enemy defences. The heaviest fights happened near Orel and Sukhinitchi, where the Soviet soldiers tried hard to break through. The Soviets launched ever new troops in the assaults. The Germans had to leave from the region by the 28<sup>th</sup> of July. The German troops left Orel by the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 1943.

After 14 days of fights, the *Wehrmacht* equally left Bielgorod. In the meantime, the young General Vatantine began the encirclement of Kharkov. He could enter the city on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August. Kharkov had been turned into nothing but ruins. The next Soviet offensive was launched in the region of Izium on the Donetz, south-east of Kharkov. It was led in the direction of Dnepropetrovsk. Vatantine pushed the Germans in front of him into the plains of

the Ukraine. His troops reached on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August the towns of Yelma and Doragobouy, at less than 80 kilometres from Smolensk. The Red Army pushed on to Briansk and Poltava, past the middle of the line Izium-Voroshilovgrad on the Middle Donetz and towards Mariupol on the Lake of Azov.

From then on, there were no fixed front lines anymore, just a large band of terrains in which German and Soviet soldiers fought each other in perpetual skirmishes. The Soviet divisions liberated Stalino on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September, Mariupol on the 10<sup>th</sup> of that month. Briansk fell on the 14<sup>th</sup>, Poltava on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, Smolensk on the 25<sup>th</sup>. The entire heavily defended region of the Donetz fell to the Soviet troops. This left the region only to the garrisons of the Crimea. The roads of the Dniepr were free! There, behind the great river, the German troops hoped to hold the Soviet soldiers during the winter.

As soon as at the beginning of October, however, the Soviet troops set up three major attack thrusts on the Dniepr, north of Kiev, for attacks towards Pereyoslav and towards Kremenchug. Thus began the great battle of the Dniepr. The German leaders learned as of the 6<sup>th</sup> of October of the preparations for these massive assaults.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of October, Germany had to recognise that under the pressure of men and material, the German armies had to retreat from Kuban, Taman, from the straits of Kerteh, Saporye and Kremenchug on the east bank of the Dniepr. Gomel and Kiev were threatened. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October, the Soviet troops passed the Dniepr between Kremenchug and Dniepropetrovsk. From there, the Soviet tanks rolled on towards Krivoi-Rog. Melitopol fell on the 24<sup>th</sup> of October, isolating the Crimea from the theatre of operations.

Dniepropetrovsk fell in the hands of the Russians on the 5<sup>th</sup> of November. General Vatoutine liberated Kiev from the Germans. The German Army had occupied the city since September of 1941! The Soviet troops took Fitomir on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November, Korosten on the 19<sup>th</sup>. Germany risked to lose its granary of the Ukraine. The German leaders and Hitler then constituted a new army, of which General von Manstein obtained the command, with the mission to throw back the Red Army beyond the Dniepr.

In the German counter-offensive, the German troops retook Jitomir on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November, and they reached the outskirts of Korosten. But General von Manstein lost Jitomir again on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November, and Korosten by the end of December. Von Manstein's flank was threatened on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November, when the Red Army retook Gomel, north of Kiev, as the Soviets advanced through the now famous marshes of Pripet. The rain fell in powerful showers, slowing the operations. The Soviet troops would have to wait for the frost of winter to advance in new offensives.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of November, the Allied leaders met at the Conference of Teheran. Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill proclaimed their common will to continue the war with all their energy until the final defeat of Germany. The *Wehrmacht* was on the run, and awaiting the winter campaign of from 1944 to 1945 of the Red Army, the offensive that was to be decisive east of Germany.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of January, the Red Army stood once more on the line from Novograd to Volynsk and to Oresk, at 10 kilometres north-east of Jitomir and at 50 kilometres from the former Polish border. As of the 6<sup>th</sup> of January 1944, the battles raged over hundreds of kilometres

between Vitebsk and Krivoi-Rog. The *Wehrmacht* had abandoned Berdichev. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of January, the Red Army had reached the Polish frontier. The Soviet offensive fought on a front of 1,300 kilometres long, in the region of the marshes of Pripet, in the turn of the Dniepr between Krivoi-Rog, Saporozje and Nikopol. This immense front extended on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January to the north in the region of Leningrad to the Lake Ilmen. The Red Army passed the Polish border at the marshes of Pripet and pushed on to the west, to past Sarny.

General von Manstein tried his best to multiply his efforts in the region of Uman, to attack the Soviet flanks of the River Bug and the Polish and Rumanian frontiers. But the Red Army remained in the initiative on the 3,000 kilometres front from Leningrad to the Black Sea. The German troops would have to retreat to their own frontiers, but that seemed impossible, for it would mean a great defeat of Hitler and Nazism. The Soviet troops liberated Nikopol on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 1944, and then Luga, south of Leningrad. In the northeast, the German troops withdrew to Pskov and to the borders of Estonia and Latvia. The Red Army pushed on between the Berezina and the marshes of Pripet, in the direction of Pinsk.

The Soviet leaders addressed ultimatums to Finland, Hungary and Rumania, ordering them to lay down arms. Finland asked for the conditions of an armistice. These were the halt of all relations between Helsinki and Berlin, the retreat of Finland to behind its borders fixed in 1940, the liberation of all prisoners without reciprocity, and the demobilisation of the Finnish Army. The Finnish Parliament rejected these conditions on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March 1944, under German pressure.

The German retreat continued. They left north of the Bug on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March, Kherson on the 13<sup>th</sup>. The Red Army stood at the railway Lwów-Odessa on the 19<sup>th</sup>, at Vinnitsa on the 20<sup>th</sup>. A large offensive was on between Lutsk and Chepetovka, in the direction of Tarnopol.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of March, Hitler fortified all the strategic places of Hungary be occupied by tank divisions. But by the end of March of 1944, all the eastern fronts of the German Army fell! The Russian troops progressed in Bessarabia of Rumania. Cernauti fell on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March. In Poland, the Red Army threatened Lwów, Lemberg. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of April, after a counter-attack of several days, the war stalled on the Dniestr. Then, the battles began around the Black Sea. The German troops evacuated Odessa on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April. The Red Army broke the German defences of the Crimea. Kertch, at the extremity of the Crimea, was liberated by Russian troops from the north and the east. The Soviet troops attacked Sevastopol on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April. The large port fell on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May.

### From June 1944 to the Tragic Pause

The bombing of German towns and of industrial centres continued unabatedly in 1944. In France, acts of sabotage multiplied. At the head of the *Maquis*, the resistance in France, stood the French General Koenig, the victor of Bir Akim. His headquarter was in Upper Grosvenor Street in London. The *Maquis* represented the French resurrection. For each action, the German Army executed men, women and children.

For the moment, the Soviet troops were annihilating the *Wehrmacht*, less the other Allies.

In Great Britain, the British and the Americans and other Allied leaders were preparing the disembarkments of their soldiers in Normandy. The great offensive was launched on the 6<sup>th</sup> June of 1944 in Normandy, on D-Day. The Battle for France had started. The German Army had dispersed its soldiers. The *Wehrmacht* occupied Finland and Norway with 15 divisions. Five German divisions defended the Pomeranian corridor to the Baltic Sea.

Hitler and his Nazi leaders had to accept the Battle for Normandy with insufficient forces. Hitler assigned to the defence of the Western front in total 64 divisions, organised in 4 armies. The 15<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> defended the Atlantic coasts of the North Sea, of Normandy and Brittany. The 1<sup>st</sup> was stationed between Bordeaux and Spain. The 19<sup>th</sup> stood at the coasts of the Languedoc and of the Provence, from Perpignan to the Cap d'Antibes. Hitler held on to all the lands the Army had conquered, from the Balkan to the Black Sea. There, armies too were dispersed. General Gerd von Rundstedt was the leader of the defence forces of the coasts of France. But the High Command of Germany added to him as Inspector General of the Defences of the West General Erwin Rommel. Von Rundstedt remained the commander-in-chief, but two different ways of fighting now confronted themselves within the same German powers.

In June 1944, Gerd von Rundstedt was 69 years old. As he was the oldest general, he was also the delegate of the Army at official burial ceremonies. He was a man of the grandeur of von Moltke, von Schlieffen, and even of Ludendorff. He was an aristocrat from Brandenburg, who served even before 1914 at the 83<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment at Cassel and at the 171<sup>st</sup> at Colmar. Von Rundstedt preferred to start his career at minor regiments. Soon however, he was sent to Turkey, where he met the Military Attaché von Papen and von Papen's assistant Joachim von Ribbentrop, the impoverished lieutenant. Colonel von Rundstedt even asked for justification of von Ribbentrop for some failures and negligence in his service! Von Rundstedt was the typical German officer: massive front, lips drawn in together, short hair, sad look, energy as vivid as Ludendorff's. In 1923, he was chief of staff of a cavalry division in Thüringen. He crushed quickly and efficiently a Communist uprising there. He was attached to Kurt von Schleicher. He had done nothing to advance the career of Hitler; he was a general who didn't indulge in politics. Von Rundstedt fought at Sedan and at Kiev. He was a German general. He obeyed. Discipline was the basic and main force of an army!

Everything in von Rundstedt was the anti-thesis of Rommel. Rommel was the son of a mechanic, easy to attack and easy to flee, the desert fox and a non-conformist, an adventurer, an officer of fortune. Out of the military academy, Rommel also had joined the 83<sup>rd</sup> infantry regiment at Cassel. Von Rundstedt could not bring together more than 50 divisions on the front in Normandy.

Facing von Rundstedt was Montgomery. Montgomery was an Irishman from Ulster, son of a bishop who had been a missionary in Tasmania. He was an intellectual, a falcon as well as a fox, a non-drinker and very ambitious. Montgomery was the commander of the embarkment until the 30<sup>th</sup> of August, when Dwight Eisenhower arrived as the Supreme Commander.

The 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group of the British forces was composed of the 2<sup>nd</sup> British Army and the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Army, the two figures placed one next to the other. It was born out of the 8<sup>th</sup> British Army, put together by Alexander and Montgomery. Montgomery had learned how to win with that army!

The Allied landing in Normandy was the largest land and sea operation ever planned. It would be the model for subsequent American landings at Iwo Jima in February 1945, of Okinawa in April of 1945 and of Inchon in September 1945. D-Day or Disembarkment Day began with 5-months of preparations bombing. At least 35,000 French inhabitants were killed during this operation, equal about to the fatalities of all US and British ground forces in the Normandy Campaign of from 6 June to 25 August 1944 together. The total number of French civilians killed then and later was about 70,000 people killed. This number was larger than the number of French Jews rounded up by the Germans and sent to extermination camps! On D-Day, about 150,000 Allied soldiers landed, and 25,000 airborne parachutist soldiers were dropped behind the German lines. Even the most distant beaches of Normandy were only about 200 km away from Portsmouth and the British supplies. *Operation Overlord*, the name of the landings, had been planned for over a year. New inventions for the landing were fuel pipelines under the ocean, called *Pluto*, mulberry harbours, *Sherman* and *Churchill* tanks modified to uncover mines, to cut barbed wire defences, and to provide pathways over the soft beaches and bridge obstacles.

The German war leaders introduced no new arms in Normandy. The Allies produced many new weapons, among which amphibian tanks. Another novelty were the amphibian Jeeps, the DUKW in initials, or ducks. They came with flame-throwers and transport-armoured tanks. The Allies had also produced an immense system of ports, of gulf-breakers to place in the sea, and special, artificial landing sites. In less than a month, they could build an entire new harbour, larger than Dover! The work on the plan began immediately after the Conference of Québec of September 1943. More than 800 tons of munitions and oil would be brought to the invasion of France a day, as well as entire brigades. The parachute divisions received from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> of June more than 2,300 tons of food and munition, also to be parachuted.

The landings got support from a powerful fleet, called *Operation Neptune*. This was an armada of British and Canadian fleets with more than 1,000 war ships and 6,000 supply ships and landing craft. These were operated by over 100,000 sailors.

The first two Army Groups to be disembarked were the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group of the British of General Dempsey, with the Canadians, Polish, Belgian and Dutch troops, under the name of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Army. The second, called the 12<sup>th</sup>, was under the command of the American General Omar Bradley. It consisted of the 1<sup>st</sup> US Army under General Holmes and the 3<sup>rd</sup> of General Patton. With them fought the 2<sup>nd</sup> French Tank group of General Leclerc. General Montgomery remained the supreme commander of all these troops, until he received the title of marshal on the 1<sup>st</sup> September of 1944.

The Germans had fortified the coast of Europe from Trondheim to the Basque Coast. They had assembled anything that could kill. The sea had been infested with mines. The beaches were jungles of barbed wire. In only 4 fields of 5 hectares, the Allied pioneers discovered over 12,000 mines! There were anti-tank defences, the famous Rommel asparagus, and defences against parachutists. The 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade of the Royal Engineers had to disembark right after the paratroopers had jumped.

The 21<sup>st</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> Army Groups had been assembled in West-Hampshire and in East Sussex. The New Forest and the Forest of Bere filled with troops. The ports of Southampton and Portsmouth were the rallying points from which the soldiers would go aboard the landing

ships. The soldiers knew the departure point, never the landing place. The German intelligence crews knew well of these concentrations. The Germans thought the invasion would come at Le Havre or at Cherbourg. Montgomery disembarked between Honfleur and Barfleur however, supported by 640 heavy canons of the Royal Navy, which threw on the German Atlantic Wall more than 12,000 tons of projectiles per hour. Montgomery thus obliged von Rundstedt to concentrate his forces between the Loire and the Seine. The German Armies could only pass these streams at the widest points, allowing the Allied airplanes to pound at their communications by day and by the night. Montgomery could use reinforcements, later brought in at the Cotentin peninsula and at Avranches. He built his own port, and roads to transport the heaviest material. Nets of metal fixed the soil also in bad weather.

Before dawn, Allied parachutists wreaked havoc in the German defences. The Allied used gliders to bring many troops to the ground. Man-high puppets dressed in khaki combat-gear parachuted as well, confused the Germans. Rommel had counted on the chaos and defeat of the parachutists, but they contributed well to the success of D-Day. The 6<sup>th</sup> Parachute Division immediately occupied the important bridges on the Orne River and on the Canal of Caen. They took the bridges of Benonville and of Ranville. The German troops tried several attacks to take these bridges and strong points, and failed. The 21<sup>st</sup> Panzer was immediately brought in to fight against the parachutist groups. But the Allied soldiers held against the shock! From these positions on, as of the 18<sup>th</sup> of July, the 2<sup>nd</sup> US Army launched a violent attack inland that would decide on the fate of the final breakthrough of the Allied forces.

The Red Berets of the parachutists came down in the night. The Green Berets of the Royal Marines and of the special commandos fell on the beaches of Bernières-sur-Mer, Courcelles-Saint-Ambin, Ouistreham and Langrune. Then followed the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> British divisions and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadians. In the west, the American airborne troops took the coasts of the Cotentin, east and west of the estuary of the Carentan region.

Before the landing in Normandy, von Rundstedt had 7 infantry divisions and his 21<sup>st</sup> Tank Division. The 12<sup>th</sup> Tank Division followed this last one close by. Other tank divisions stayed west of Paris. General Rommel's wiser advice was to commit the Panzer reserves immediately against the beachheads. Von Rundstedt and Guderian however, wanted to keep the armour back to cut off the invaders once they broke out. In the end, the German commanders did something of both, and succeeded in neither option. The counter-attacks of their reserve Panzer units against the beaches were too small and fragmented, and remained under constant air attacks. Within a week, the Allies had secured nearly 150 km of contiguous beachhead. And within a month, a million Allied soldiers had landed! The landings continued under the leadership of the SHAEF, the *Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force*.

Allied troops quickly took Bayeux. In the evening, the road of Caen to Bayeux, parallel to the coast, was cut. The enemy troops in the Cotentin peninsula lost communications with Cherbourg and the Seine Valley. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of June, Isigny, on this road, fell to the Allies. On the 10<sup>th</sup>, General Omar Bradley prepared for more advances. Montgomery and Dempsey set up their headquarters there.

In the first two weeks, the British and the Canadian troops disembarked 390,000 men, 70,000 vehicles and 230,000 tons of material. It was a technical and organisational exploit! On the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1944, the Allied Army moved without horses and railways. A pipeline was installed to transport oil, from the *Mulberry* transport ships at Arromanches to the mainland. The nephew of the King of England, Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, proposed the idea of the pipeline. He was a far descendant of the German von Battenberg Family. The pipeline held from the ship to the beach, kept in place by floating drums, or *conundrums*. The two projects were realised by a ship captain, 100 officers and 1,000 men. The project was called the 'Pipe Line under the Ocean', or *Pluto*. After the submarine mines had been taken away, 3 weeks after D-Day, the Isle-of-Wight to Cherbourg line was established. *Operation Pluto* later continued between Dungeness and Boulogne, then from Boulogne to Antwerp. The Royal Army Service Corps, the RASC, pumped up to 5 million gallons of gasoil under the sea! The conundrums never caught the attention of the German Army. One had to have a bit of luck, too.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> German *Panzer Division* had joined the 21<sup>st</sup>. The 12<sup>th</sup> *Panzer Division* and the *Panzer Lehr Division* attacked the bridges over the Orne without great success. But take Caen would be difficult for the Allied troops! The American units occupied the road to Cherbourg. Montgomery moved on the attack left. His British-Canadian troops and his Americans operated on the right flank because they were faster. On Wednesday morning, the British held 54 kilometres of the coast line from the estuary of the Orne to the north-west of Bayeux. Omar Bradley consolidated and enlarged his bridgehead in the direction of Sainte-Mère-Église. On the 9<sup>th</sup>, the American troops had cut the route of Carentan to Valogne and the railways of Carentan to Cherbourg, even though the German troops had broken the dikes to inundate the region. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of June, the front guards of the American soldiers were at the Merderet and joined with the British by Isigny and Lison.

In fact, it did by then not matter anymore from where the German tank reserves were deployed. The Allied superiority in the air attacked them anywhere they moved! Among he airplanes that harassed the German troops were the American P47 Thunderbolt, a heavy, fast fighter plane with considerable firepower and a robust air-cooled engine. Also with the British Hawker Typhoon, used as ground-support fighter-bomber, very effective destroyers of German columns.

Stalin, in the Soviet Union, had no interest and little ability in helping the British and American troops against the Japanese forces in Asia and the Pacific by opening a second front. He certainly did not wish to end his agreements with Japan, who were allowing American Lend-Lease merchant ships free access to Vladivostok. The period was in February 1943, Stalin's victory at Stalingrad, and from July 4 to 23 August the key and enormous *Battle for Kursk*.

On the same day, Waffen-SS troops moving north from the south of France killed all the French inhabitants of a small town called Oradour-sur-Glanes.

In Normandy, Carentan fell in the hands of the Allies. Further, hard combats raged in the forests of Cérisey. The Allies won considerable stocks of oil. A little later, Pont-Abbé, Picarville and Le Havre fell. The British troops pushed on to Troarn and south-west of Bailleux to Balleroy. The Allies controlled a beachhead of 20 kilometres deep and 80

kilometres long. The Americans took Caumont. That was after 10 days of battle in Normandy.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of June 1944, the first V1 German rocket, the *Vergeltungswaffe 1*, fell on London. It was not much more than an automatic airplane without a pilot, driven by a jet reaction motor. It was not extremely accurate, but it flew so fast it was very hard to shoot it down by canon or airplane. The launching pads of the V1 around Calais and in the Netherlands, were found and bombed by the RAF, but the V1 launching sites drew many British bombers to them, bombers that could have been used elsewhere, as well as much attention.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of June, the American troops reached Cherbourg. Heavy fighting took place between Caen and Tilly-sur-Seulles. Cherbourg fell on the 21<sup>st</sup> day after D-Day. General Omar Bradley took the large port. American engineers started repairing the destructions of the Germans. The Allies took 37,000 prisoners, totalling the German losses to 75,000 men. The Allied lost about 40,500 men from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> of June.

The battle around Caen continued. General von Rundstedt left the battle, handing over the German command to General von Kluge. Von Rundstedt had been promoted to Field Marshal. On the Odon River, 7 German tank divisions and 4 infantry divisions, with an elite tank division brought over in urgency from Russia, waited for the Allied troops. The encirclement of Caen began on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1944. Caen fell on the 9<sup>th</sup>.

General von Kluge expected a next attack to come on the road of Caen to Paris by Lisieux. He moved his tank divisions to there. The British troops took to Errecy, up to the Orne River. The British airplanes bombed the German positions day and night. A British-Canadian force arrived then at the Orne on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July. The British commander on the front of Normandy, Montgomery, pushed Omar Bradley on, beyond Saint-Lô, supported by the 3<sup>rd</sup> of General Patton, who moved south to Rennes.

The German command did not feel defeated yet. They did not draw back their troops to defend Paris. General Von Kluge counter-attacked, throwing his reserves into the battle, into the region of Mortain to Sourdeval, against the provisioning lines of General Patton. Several tank groups of the Allies, having reached Alençon, came to a halt by lack of fuel. Von Kluge sent elements of 4 divisions to that southern point in the advance of the Allies. Montgomery used the manoeuvre to enlarge a bulge with his troops at Falaise. Vauxcelles, Duvigny and Fleury fell in Allied hands. His tanks advanced then to Bourquebus, Bras and Saint-André-sur-Orne. Again, the Allied forces heavily bombed the German positions.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of June, Polish and American troops met at Chambois. The 7<sup>th</sup> German Army had ceased to exist. Nobody heard of to where Rommel and von Rundstedt had disappeared.

In reality, the Allies did not progress very fast in the west. Montgomery stalled around Caen, tying down the bulk of the German tanks, while the US 1<sup>st</sup> Army was bogged down in the hedges of the Normandy bocage. The bocages were kilometres of hedgerows with thickets, sunken woods, berms and narrow roads that were ideal for German defence. These resulted in a deadlock for the US troops behind the Omaha Beach. Finally, the US troops had to equip their tanks with metal bumper teeth to break up the hedgerows. The US used 1,500 B17 and B24 heavy bombers to smash the German fixed defence positions around Saint-Lô. From 25 July to 31 July 1944 raged the Operation Cobra, the Allied breakout through the German lines, followed by the rapid advancement of their soldiers from 1 August to early September.



As result, the German 7<sup>th</sup> Army got caught in vast encirclement in the so-called *Falaise Pocket*. The German resistance in the west of France by the German Army Group B was trapped and destroyed by US and British pincher movements.

General Patton had divided his army in two wings. One advanced northward, at about 75 kilometres per day! The other pushed inland of Normandy to Chartres, Dreux and Rambouillet, menacing Paris. Brittany seemed entirely liberated. The fighting lasted at Mortain. But the Allied air strikes bore the German defence into the ground. The fighting raged particularly hard around Argentan. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of August, Argentan had ceased to exist and the Canadian troops could enter Falaise. Meanwhile, General Patton's tanks cut off the retreat of German troops. They liberated Orléans, Chartres and Dreux. Patton's tanks moved very fast to the Seine. He launched the French General Leclerc on Paris!

The general approach was an attack on a broad front. Montgomery cried out his smaller forces should be given priority on a shorter route through Belgium and the Netherlands, into the Ruhr Region, rather than have the Allies privilege the advance of the US 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to lead into Bavaria and Czechoslovakia. Montgomery was very systematic in his planning, methodical and careful. He wanted to take few risks, and low casualties. Both ideas seemed have value, the troops proceeded simultaneously and the Allied line advanced everywhere, led by General Courtney's 1<sup>st</sup> Army.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of August, Allied troops landed in the south of France, at Saint Tropez. They were the troops of General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, with the 1<sup>st</sup> French Army and the American General Patch with his 7<sup>th</sup> American Army. De Lattre de Tassigny brought 5 divisions, among which 2 Moroccan divisions, one Algerian, one Free French and the 9<sup>th</sup> Senegalese division. With them rode the 1<sup>st</sup> French tank division. These troops passed the Durance River and liberated Aix-en-Provence. In 5 days, they made 14,000 prisoners, among which 3 German generals. The force pushed on to Burgundy to protect its wings. De Lattre sent units to Narbonne, Montpellier and Béziers.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of August 1944, the Allied troops had been at Argentan. But the American troops drove on to Dreux and Chartres, and sent its reconnaissance units to Rambouillet. From Dreux, the 15<sup>th</sup> American Army Corps moved north, occupying the Seine at Meulan. In the south, American troops pushed on to Fontainebleau. The American troops rolled on past Rouen, to Paris.

General Leclerc advanced by Sens, Mortagne, La Loupe and Maintenon, to Paris. In the evening of the 23<sup>rd</sup>, he reached Rambouillet. At 18h00 in the evening, the General de Gaulle arrived. A number of German tanks still held the region. Leclerc separated his troops in two columns, commanded by the Colonels de Langlade and Billotte. Billotte had to fight skirmishes at Longjumeau and Antony. The troops stopped for the night at Croix-du-Berny. In the next afternoon, a small Piper-Cub reconnaissance airplane noticed Paris practically deserted by the enemy. Captain Dionne, with three tanks, sneaked in the night in to the *Préfecture* of Paris. The day after, General Leclerc and his troops rode into Paris by the *Porte d'Orléans*, Denfert-Rochereau and the railway station of Montparnasse, where he set up his headquarters. Before noon, Leclerc was at the *Préfecture* of Paris, at the Town Hall. The Squadron-Chief de la Horie took prisoner the German General von Choltitz, the Governor of *Gross-Paris*, and brought him to Leclerc. General von Choltitz and the Consul-General of

Sweden, Nordling, accepted to surrender Paris to the Allies, after a token last skirmish of an hour and a half.

Von Choltitz accepted to hand over a letter signed by him, brought by a French and a German officer, ordering the German garrison of Paris to depose arms. The letter was brought in a jeep, with a driver and a guide. Von Choltitz had received the order to explode the bridges of Paris, as well as the possible entry roads to the city before evacuating his services. Von Choltitz did nothing of the sort. Paris fell into Allied hands, to General Leclerc, unscathed.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of August 1944, General Eisenhower relieved Montgomery of his General Command of the 12<sup>th</sup> Army group. The American troops received orders by General Eisenhower to drive around Paris and to push to Liège and Aachen in the north, towards the Saar in the east.

The 11<sup>th</sup> British Army had to pass the Somme. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of August, General Patton was on the Seine. The British and Canadian troops joined with these on the 30<sup>th</sup>. In all, the *Wehrmacht* had lost 400,000 soldiers and about 1,300 tanks in France. The Canadian troops passed the Seine at Elbeuf on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August and Rouen was liberated on the 29<sup>th</sup>. The 11<sup>th</sup> British Army also passed the Seine by Louviers and Vernon. On the 31<sup>st</sup>, they stood at the cathedral of Chartres.

A Scottish division took Abbeville after 2 days of hard combat. General Elberbach, commanding the 7<sup>th</sup> German Army, disappeared and was taken prisoner near Amiens. Also, General Mirow, who was charged with the defence of the Somme, was taken prisoner. The Allied troops, the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Army and the 2<sup>nd</sup> British, preceded by the Guards and the 11<sup>th</sup> Tank Division, hurried in the Pas-de-Calais; after Amiens, Arras fell, then Douai, Lens and Saint-Pol.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September, elements of the tank divisions of the Guards entered Brussels. General Horrock, commanding the 30<sup>th</sup> Army Corps, had called the brigade of the Belgian Lieutenant-Colonel Piron, commissioned as a Brigadier-General in the British Army, from Normandy. This Belgian unit was brought to Lyons-la-Forêt near Gounay-en-Bray, and then to Amiens, from there to Brussels. The *Brigade Piron* was welcomed in Brussels with cheers and flowers. Rome, Paris and Brussels were in Allied hands! Antwerp was liberated on the 4<sup>th</sup> of September. Ghent and Antwerp remained under enemy fire for long days yet. The beautiful medieval town of Bruges was spared, but German units were still at Damme. Other German troops remained at Leopoldsburg, fighting against the *Piron Brigade*.

Then, the Allied Front stopped, because of provisioning issues of oil. The front stabilised for about 2 months. The Allied troops could have entered Germany sooner, but they halted because they lacked the fuel for tanks and trucks. The final assault on the German Army and its defences, stalled for a while. When the Allies had finally entered and taken all the key French port cities, they found the towns generally ruined. Because of this, supply shortages stopped them temporarily in their rapid advance. Their units competed in their claims for scarce fuel. This lasted until the capture of the approaches to the key large harbour of Antwerp.

The advance of the Allies on the new Western front was rather erratic in 2-to-3 month cycles of rapid advance and almost immobility. By late August 1944, however, the close of the Normandy campaign could be decided. About 500,000 German soldiers had been killed, fallen casualty, or been captured. Yet, still about 1 million German soldiers regrouped around

the Rhine Stream. By mid-September 1944, the war in the west had stalled once more. Rapid advances ceased to happen; progress went slower.

#### The Eastern and Western Fronts move

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of June of 1944, the Soviet troops were once more on the offensive. First, they attacked Finland, and then, more to the south, the Baltic States. The Germans did what they esteemed necessary to stop the onslaught, but in vain. The German High Command kept most of the German troops in France then, and in East Prussia. For lack of resources, soon, the German military leaders had to accept the city of Riga to be surrounded.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 1944, fell the 3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the invasion of the Soviet Union by the German *Wehrmacht*. So far, the Germans had lost in the east about 7,800,000 soldiers, died or made prisoners. They had lost 70,000 tanks, 60,000 airplanes and more than 90,000 canons. More than 30 German generals and more than 6,000 officers had fallen. The Soviet troops had derailed 3,000 German railway convoys and destroyed over 2,200 bridges. But who could verify such figures?

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1944, the Soviets began a 150 kilometre long offensive on the front between Vitebsk and Moghilev, with gigantic resources in men and weapons. The Soviet operation was called *Operation Bagration*. It had to be a knockout blow against the German Army Group Centre by the Red Army. It proved indeed the largest and most successful Soviet offensive of the war. It lasted until 19 August of 1944. More than 2 million Soviet soldiers with 200,000 mostly US-supplied trucks, destroyed in less than a month the German Army Group Centre. The gap in the German Front allowed the Soviet troops a clear path to Warsaw!

The German *Wehrmacht* retreated almost everywhere, and rather fast. The Lakes Onega and Ladoga near Finland fell. The USA broke their diplomatic relations with Finland, which had remained allied to Nazi Germany. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of June, the date at which von Rundstedt had to leave the Cotentin peninsula in France, von Ribbentrop signed a new agreement in Helsinki. This was a step too far for the US President.

The Soviet troops continued their offensive as of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1944. The German troops had to step back on a front of over 400 kilometres. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of July, the Soviet soldiers were at Polotsk, Molodeczno, Minsk, Baranovici and Kovel. On the 12<sup>th</sup>, The German troops evacuated Vilna in Lithuania. Dünaburg was surrounded. The German soldiers continued to retreat, past Baranovici and Bialystok. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of July, the Soviet troops stood on the Niemen, the river over which earlier invasions of Russia had started. The Russians took Grodno. At the same time, at Lwów, they rode south.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of July, a dangerous attempt to murder Hitler took place in a bunker. Colonel Stauffenberg blew up a bomb during a meeting. The attempt did not succeed, Hitler survived. The new Chief of the German General Staff became General Ernst Guderian, the tank specialist.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of July, the Russian troops entered Lwów. The same day, they drew into Poland, the frontiers of which they had established themselves in 1940. The German Command called this the *General Government of Warsaw*. Each successive day then, the Soviet troops could announce new victories. They took Lublin after hard fights. Kaunas, the old capital of Lithuania was surrounded and surrendered. The same day, Turkey broke its diplomatic relations with Germany. In Finland, the President Rysto Ryti fell. The Finnish Marshal Mannerheim, a former Guard of the Russian tzars, replaced him. At the beginning of August, the Soviet troops passed the Bug, and began their march on Warsaw. The Polish partisans under their General Bor-Romanovski, took the suburbs of their capital. Meanwhile, the Russian troops threatened Latvia.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1944, nevertheless, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Russian Tank Corps had ventured a little too far to the east of Warsaw. After 6 days and 6 nights of hard battle, it had been obliged to surrender. The German troops then stepped back nowhere. Between the Rivers Vistula and the Niemen, the Soviets needed continuous reinforcements to overwhelm the German resistance. As of the 8<sup>th</sup> of August, the Soviet advance stalled everywhere. The Polish patriots fighting desperately at Warsaw, received provisioning only from British airplanes. Political disputes complicated the situation around Warsaw. The Polish Committee at Lublin, pressed by the Soviets, accused their General Bor of having unnecessarily pressed the events and thus having sabotaged the Soviet plans. The Germans held the town of Praga on the east bank of the Vistula, in front of Warsaw. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of August 1944, the day on which the German garrison of Paris surrendered, the Soviet troops advanced west of Bialystok. They entered only man after man in Praga. On the 21<sup>st</sup>, General Bor and his men neared exhaustion. The Soviet troops and Soviet politics had abandoned the Polish troops to be the sole conquerors and liberators of Poland, to the USSR.

In the south of the Soviet Union and in the Balkans, the entering of Allied troops in Paris coincided with a brilliant Soviet offensive in Rumania. Jassey, the main university town of Rumania, fell.

King Michael of Rumania accepted the conditions of surrender to the Russian troops. Rumania recuperated in the agreement of surrender the lands of Transylvania from Hungary. The Soviet troops recuperated Bessarabia with its capital Kishinev. The Soviet troops advanced to Bucarest and to the oil fields of Ploesti. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of August, the Luftwaffe still bombed Bucarest and the Ploesti oilfields.

The Bulgarians had always been pro-Russian. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of August, Bulgaria turned its allegiances. The fortress of Ismail on the Dozan fell on the 27<sup>th</sup> of that month. The armistice with Bulgaria was discussed with the British at Ankara and accepted in Cairo, Egypt, on the 30<sup>th</sup>. Bulgaria was actually not at war with the Soviet Union. It was at war with all the other Allied countries, though. The Soviets halted their negotiations with Bulgaria, to throw the soldiers of the land immediately against Germany and Hungary. Hence, Bulgaria was at war with all the belligerents, except the Russians! The Soviet troops did not stop. They passed the Danube, invaded all of Bulgaria, built defences and moved from Silistria to the coasts of the Aegean. The *Wehrmacht* soon abandoned the islands of Chios, Lemnos and Mytilene. A revolt started in Greece. Transylvania, Sibriv, at 50 kilometres of the borders with Hungary, fell to the Soviets.

The Allies disembarked only on the 27<sup>th</sup> of September on the Dalmatian coast, where they found the partisans of Tito already infeudated to the Soviet influence. The Bulgarian troops fought against Hungarian units. The Soviet commander of the armies on the front of the Ukraine and Hungary was Marshal Malinovsky. The German and Hungarian forces were soon pushed out of Szeged. It sufficed for Malinovsky and Petrov to conclude their junction, and Hungary would fall.

Finally, the Allies could reach Berlin at about the same time as the Soviets, although they had only been fighting in northern Europe since less than a year, whereas the Soviets had been warring for 4 years in the east. The Allies could take Germany's wealthiest ground, the Soviet armies its poorest. The Allies stalled in their advance, and the Soviets arrived first in Berlin.

## Rome and Italy

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> June of 1944, the German troops left Rome. They would have been totally surrounded in the city. Hitler decided to save the treasures of Rome. The same day, King Victor-Emmanuel abdicated in favour of his son, Prince Umberto. Marshal Badoglio resigned. A former Socialist leader, Bonomi, formed a new cabinet of ministers of democratic inclination.

How did the Allies flood over Italy? On 10 July 1943, the Anglo-American forces landed in Sicily, occupied by Italian and German soldiers. The debarkation was not very perfectly executed, for the landing forces fired even on their own airplanes flying overhead. Montgomery split his forces in the east into a coastal and an inland column, and this made but slow progress against heavy German resistance. The British captured Syracuse, but because of British delays, the German troops managed to evacuate most of their troops to the mainland. The citizens of Palermo waved white flags at the invading Americans. Ordinary Italians no longer wanted to continue the fighting!

On 18 July 1943, Hitler visited Mussolini, but the Italian dictator lacked the will to carry on. His prestige had never recovered from the catastrophic defeats of 1941, most notably in Greece. The new nickname for Mussolini became then, 'the Regional Leader for Italy'. Hitler indeed distrusted the ability of the Italians to carry on fighting. He had already made plans to take over Italy and the territories it occupied in southern France, in Yugoslavia, Greece and Albania. German forces moved into the Italian peninsula, indicating by their presence whose cause the Italians were now fighting for. The German forces, commanded by General Kesselring, thus fought the troops of the British General Commander Alexander. Alexander had a very cosmopolitan assembly of troops, constituted of Americans, British, Indian, French, Moroccan, and even Polish units. Kesselring held on at the banks of Lake Bolsena. The towns of Viterba, Terni, Spoleto, Aquila, Assisi, and others, fell to the Allies.

French General de Gaulle replaced General Juin, who led the French troops in Italy, to make of Juin the Chief of the General Staff of the French troops. His successor for Italy became

General de Lattre de Tassigny. De Lattre took the Island of Elba, then Piombino. Perugia fell to the 8<sup>th</sup> British Army. Siena was liberated on the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 1944.

At the end of July, General Kesselring got wounded. Hitler called him to Berlin. At the same time, Livorno and Ancona fell and Firenze came under threat of the Allied troops.

In February 1943, Mussolini had carried out a purge of leading figures in the discontented Fascist Party. He felt disoriented and demoralised, and suffered from stomach pains that sapped his energy. The sacked party bosses began to intrigue against him. On 25 July 1943, a 10-hour meeting began of the bosses of the Fascist Party's *Grand Council*. The leading Fascist then, though a moderate man, was Dino Grandi. The *Grand Council's* vote prompted to get the king to dismiss Mussolini as Prime Minister. The non-Fascist Italian Army arrested Mussolini the next day. Mussolini's successor was Marshal Pietro Badoglio.

The king swiftly declared the Italian Fascist Party illegal. The new government allowed the Germans to occupy key Alpine passes. The Germans poured large numbers of troops and equipment into Italy. They withdrew their forces from Sardinia and Corsica.

Badoglio secretly began negotiating an armistice with the Allies. He signed it on 3 September 1943.

On 3 September 1943, Allied soldiers landed in Calabria. On 9 September, the Allied troops landed at Salerno, higher up the coast. On 8 September, the Italian Government announced its surrender to the Allies. Badoglio, the king and their Government fled south, into Allied protection. Italian soldiers now threw down their weapons, and their uniforms, and simply surrendered to the Allies.

The Italian soldiers on Cephalonia, a Greek but Italian-controlled island, kept on fighting for a week against the Germans. The Germans executed these more than 6,000 Italian soldiers and sailors. But half a million Italian soldiers were already in areas under Allied control.

The German troops took as prisoners 650,000 Italian soldiers and deported them in December 1943 as forced labourers to Germany. Hitler thought they were utterly decadent. The Germans were bitter over the betrayal of the Italians. They even hated the Italians now. The Italian prisoners were treated harshly by the Germans, on the same footing as the Soviet workers. Death rates were about as high. Up to 50,000 Italian POWs died in Germany. This amounted to 77 deaths/thousand, 5 times the death rate of British POWs, and the highest rate of all western prisoners of war in Germany.

On 16 September 1943, The German military burned the university library of Naples, destroying 50,000 books and manuscripts. Two days later, the Germans found 80,000 more in Nola, burned them here too, with 45 paintings of the Civic Museum and the rest of its contents.

The German military Commander of Italy was now the Air Force Field Marshal Albert Kesselring. He organised in a hurry the evacuation of art treasures from the museum of Florence and other cities, in theory to save them. Soldiers and SS men looted houses for jewellery, furs and silver from the country houses.

In September 1943, Mussolini had been taken to the Island of Ponza on orders of the new Italian Government, and then to an isolated ski-hotel in the Apennine Mountains of central Italy. On 12 September 1943, an SS Paratroopers Unit led by Otto Skorzeny, an Austrian officer, were parachuted on the hotel. A small Stork reconnaissance and liaison aircraft landed on a sloping meadow in front of the hotel. Mussolini was taken to Rome, and then to Hitler's headquarters at Rastenburg. Mussolini was a broken man at that moment.

Mussolini set up a puppet regime in Northern Italy, at the Alpine town of Saló. Five of the leading Fascists who had voted against Mussolini in the Italian Fascist *Grand Council*, including his son-in-law and former Foreign Minister Count Galeazzo Ciano, were tried for treason and executed there.

Because of the puppet regime of Mussolini, Italy's 43,000 Jews, of which still 34,000 remained in the German-occupied zone of Italy, were plunged into a serious crisis. Antisemitism had never been very intense or widespread in Italy. The Italian Army had even protected them from worse in the lands they occupied, in Greece, Albania, and Croatia. Herbert Kappler, the SS Security Chief in Rome had ordered the Jewish community to deliver 50kg gold within 36 hours, so that they would not be deported, although Himmler had phoned him on 12 September 1943 to organise the deportation of the Jews. The gold was indeed delivered at the *Reich Security Head Office* in Berlin on 7 October 1943.

Alfred Rosenberg's staff arrived in Rome and loaded the Jewish Community's library in 2 railway wagons for transportation to Germany. That was sheer robbery! Then, 54 Jews were murdered by SS Troops in the area of Lake Maggiore. Deportations of Jews began from Merano and Trieste.

On 6 October 1943, Theodor Dannecker arrived in Rome under orders from Berlin, to override Kappler and organise the arrest and transport of the Jews for Auschwitz, for extermination. The acting representative of the German Foreign Office, Eitel Möllhausen, and the head of the German armed forces in Italy, Field Marshal Alfred Kesselring, worked with Kappler to press the Foreign Office in Berlin to use the Jews on fortification works instead of being liquidated. The German ambassador to the Vatican, Ernst von Weizsäcker warned the German Foreign Office for protests of Pope Pius XII.

On 9 October 1943, the German Foreign Office told Möllhausen, that Ribbentrop insisted, on instructions of Hitler, to take the Jews away. On 16 October 1943, Dannecker's SS men arrested 1,259 Roman Jews, including 200 children under ten and the majority being women. He released 23 because they were not Italian, or of mixed race, or married to non-Jews. Dannecker sent them to Auschwitz. Only 15 of these prisoners survived the war.

Many other Jews went in hiding. Several thousand found refuge in the Vatican and in monasteries and convents of Rome. No official protest from the Pope came.

In December 1943, in August 1944, and in October 1944, in Northern Italy, the government of Mussolini ordered all Jews to be interned in concentration camps. After these raids, the weakest were killed, the rest deported to Auschwitz. In 1944, another 4,000 Jews and partisans were taken to Auschwitz. A further 4,000 Jews and partisans were rounded up by Odilo Globocnik on the Adriatic Coast and killed at a concentration camp near Trieste, some killed in a mobile gas van. About 80% of the Italian Jews nevertheless survived the war.

The Italian partisans were 10,000 at end 1943, and 100,000 by October 1944. About half of them were Communists. The Italian organisations that abhorred of the Saló Regime led counterattacks against German reprisals and against the SS Units. On 24 March 1944, 335 people, among which 72 Jews were rounded up in Rome and killed in reprisals for a daring partisan attack the day before. Other massacres happened at Marzabollo, where 771 people were shot. In all, 45,000 partisans were killed in skirmishes with the Fascists or the Germans, and about 10,000 people were killed in reprisals.

The Germans set up the destruction of the dried-out Pontine Marshes to slow the Allied advance. They turned off the pumps that left the marshes dry, then they pumped sea-water in. They aimed water in the area to slow the advance of the Allies. But this way, ever-lasting damage was done to the area. The purpose of it was to re-introduce malaria into the marshes. It was a truly diabolic, inhumanly, shameful act. Also, the available stocks of quinine were hidden by the German troops to a secret location in Tuscany. Cases of malaria were 1,200 in 1943, but 55,000 in 1944 and 43,000 in 1945. Actual figures may have been double these numbers! It was an act of general biological warfare! About 250,000 Italians lived in the Pontine Marshes at that time.

## The German Navy

Most of the German Navy's battleships under the command of Grand Admiral Raeder were sunk or severely damaged. The British Royal Fleet had obliterated the German Navy. The ships Bismarck, Lützow, Scharnhorst, Gneisenau, and the Tirpitz, all these battleships were sunk or severely damaged.

On 30 January 1943, Hitler dismissed Grand Admiral Raeder and replaced him by Admiral Karl Dönitz, commander of the submarine fleet. Dönitz' ambitions to build 600 new U-boats were not realised. In the summer of 1940, only 25 U-boats of Germany were still in the Atlantic. These German U-boats had no reconnaissance support, one of their main weaknesses. The British Navy installed the convoy system, so that even the submarines formed no longer a major threat. German submarines still won successes in the Caribbean. By end May 1942, they had sunk 485 ships. Germany could decipher the British radio codes, while it changed its own codes regularly.

In November 1942, more than 100 German U-boats sailed in the Atlantic, up from 22 in January 1942. The British failed in their attempts to bomb the shipyards where the U-boats were built. The 'Battle of the Atlantic' raged in early 1943. From December 1942 on, the British broke once more the German codes. In June 1943, a new British code was introduced. As of February 1943, the Allies and the US Navy were building more ship tonnage than the Germans were sinking.

On 24 May 1943, Admiral Dönitz conceded defeat. He ordered the submarine fleet out of the Atlantic Ocean. The threat of the German *Kriegsmarine* was never again significant.



## The Allied Conquest of Europe

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of August, the same day as the disembarkments of de Lattre's troops at Saint-Tropez, the German troops passed the Arno by the Ponte Vecchio of Firenze. The town remained largely intact. On the northern front, 14 days later, the Allied troops also encircled Bruges. Both cities remained undamaged when the Allied troops rode into their streets. The German troops of Italy once more retreated to behind a new defence line, the *Gothic Line*. Marshal Alexander had merely received a minor mission there. The High Allied Command regularly took its better troops away to serve in France and the Netherlands.

In the meantime, the Soviet troops had advanced once more. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of September, they had reached Yugoslavia. They passed the Rumanian-Bulgarian border and took the port of Varna. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of September, they entered Sofia. They formed a junction with the forces of Marshal Tito.

In France, the *Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur* under the command of General de Larminat, were in charge of liberating the estuary of the Schelde, l'Escaut in French, from the remaining German troops. However, in their rear, German SS-garrisons still held Dunkirk, Saint Nazaire and La Rochelle. These German bastions were still well defended.

A complex operation was the Allied *Operation Market Garden* in September 1944, to take various Dutch bridges near the delta of the Rhine, to be able from there to push into the Ruhr. It was a Montgomery offensive to leap over the Rhine, executed from 17 to 25 September 1944. Montgomery, in early September, had failed to secure the approaches to Antwerp. The ensuing *Battle of the Schelde* cost the British and the Canadian troops about 12,000 casualties. The Allies could not fully use the port of Antwerp until end November 1944! *Operation Market Garden* proved to be an unfortunate waste of resources. It especially ensured the war would continue into 1945. It was flawed from the onset by bad intelligence, poor weather forecasting, and poor planning. For instance, an armoured column driving over a narrow, exposed road on which lay at least 6 major enemy-held bridges, was assured to be rescued only by light airborne troops! More Allied disasters happened in the Netherlands, and later in the *Hürtgen Forest*.

The *Hürtgen Forest* was a small area near Aachen, with densely wooded hills and ravines on the border of Belgium and Germany. The battle for the forest lasted for months. It was a forest of about 1,000 square kilometres. It took 33,000 casualties, dead, wounded and missing, among the Allied soldiers, to annihilate the German forces inside it. The Allies outnumbered Field Marshal Model's troops by five to one, but he was a specialist in defence. Air support was very difficult for the Allies and the Allies could not rely on mechanised mobility. The German forces had excellent artillery.

The result for the Allies was, that the Red Army would be met in Germany, not somewhere in eastern Europe, and that another million Jews and Russian and eastern European prisoners would die in Nazi concentration camps. The Allied demand for unconditional surrender of Germany would require the utter collapse of the German resistance by arms to end the war. Nevertheless, the destruction of the German resistance in the west took only 11 months after the landings in Normandy. The Western Allies accomplished this at about 5% of the Soviet losses in infantry during the Soviet breakthrough in Germany.

Marshal Montgomery wanted to turn around by the north the German *Siegfried Defence Line*. He had to pass the three wide streams or rivers of the Schelde, the Waal and the Lek of the Maas basin and of the Rhine. A parachutist division was dropped on the 17<sup>th</sup> of September north of the Dutch town of Arnhem. This feat distracted the German attention. Montgomery profited by the occasion to take the bridge of Nijmegen. When the 1<sup>st</sup> British Parachutist Division fell from the skies at Arnhem, the 82<sup>nd</sup> and the 101<sup>st</sup> Americans did the same at Nijmegen and Eindhoven. It took the two 9 days to join, for the German commanders sent the better of their remaining divisions to stop the Allies. The losses of the British were terrible. But meanwhile, the Americans had advanced on Aachen and entered the ancient town. This happened while the British and Canadian troops still moved in the Schelde estuary. To take the provinces of Zeeland, the Allies had to suffer many more casualties.

During this period too, the German troops organised an aggressive defence in front of their large factories and rich industrial regions, from Basel to Eschweiler, along Luxemburg and Aachen. The Allies always continued their advance. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 1944, they took Breskens and the Island of Walcheren. Vlissingen fell on the 3<sup>th</sup> of November. Vere and Middelburg in Zeeland were liberated on the 7<sup>th</sup> of November. The port of Antwerp was open again on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of November 1944, after a heavy barrage of canon fire, the British General Dempsey launched an attack against what was called the Venlo Bulge, west of the Maas. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of November, American troops occupied Weerdt and surrounded Roermond, only 8 kilometres from the border with Germany. Together with the 9<sup>th</sup> American Army of General Hodges, General Dempsey took Kassel. The turning around the *Siegfried Line* seemed complete. Yet, on this section of the front, from Gelsenkirchen to Jülich, Marshal Montgomery and General Hodges found themselves up against 3 German tank divisions and 3 infantry divisions. Those had been brought there by General von Rundstedt. Beyond these forces longed north of the Ruhr the great plains of Germany, from the Rhine to Berlin! Roermond fell only on the 24<sup>th</sup> of November and on the 4<sup>th</sup> of December only the German rear-guard left the western banks of the Maas in front of Venlo. The winter campaign of from 1944 to 1945 started then. The Allies had fully forced their superiority on the German armies.

Germany and Goebbels with them, could only live in despair. Hitler had almost disappeared. Göring too, stayed silenced. Only Himmler still commanded the German people. Goebbels continued talking to them with empty slogans. The Germans would hold on to the last man! The German military were being overwhelmed in the west as in the east, their armies destroyed in large numbers. Yet, they did not surrender.

In February of 1945, Germany's last reserves were depleted. In March, the Allies crossed the Rhine. In April, mobile Allied divisions drove through the *Third Reich*, after the failed *Wacht am Rhein* offensive in the Ardennes. The Allies captured hundreds of thousands of German prisoners in vast encirclements, and they met with the Soviet forces on the Elbe. In August, Omar Bradley and Montgomery were responsible for the delay of closing *the Falaise Pocket*. They allowed thousands of trapped German soldiers to escape.

At the beginning of November 1944, The German Army still had from 26 to 27 divisions under weapons to fight against the Allied onslaught in Germany proper. They kept 10 divisions in Norway and in Denmark, less than 30 in the Alps and the Apennines, dispersed

over a front of 600 kilometres. Of these 65, about 12 to 15 only were tank divisions and 3 parachutist ones. The Germans still held 5 divisions in Lapland, 20 in the Balkans and 130 to 140 divisions in Poland and Hungary. Many of these divisions were reduced to mere skeleton troops! The last called in, *Volkssturm* troops, appeared in the ranks of the *Wehrmacht*, but were not trained for the war of movement that was on. The Allies won sensational victories in Lorraine and in the Alsace regions. In the north, Eisenhower prodded Montgomery and his American generals on towards Düsseldorf and Köln. The region of the Eifel and the Hunsrück remained a sector rather passive.

General Patton threw his troops beyond the mountains of the Haardt Region to the valley of the Main. On his right wing, under the command of General Devers, the 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group began the conquest of the Vosges Mountains. In these fought the 7<sup>th</sup> American Army of General Patch and the 1<sup>st</sup> French Army of General de Lattre de Tassigny.

The 7<sup>th</sup> American Army and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armoured division Leclerc pierced the German lines at Cirey-sur-Vezouse and at Blamont. They advanced to Saverne and then to Strasbourg. General Devers, by de Lattre de Tassigny's furor, advanced on Belfort. The invasion of the north-east of France thus began via Belfort and Saverne. The 1<sup>st</sup> armoured division of Vigier advanced along the Swiss border to Delle and Sepois, and took Mulhouse. The Alsace was conquered soon afterwards. General de Montsabert took Gerardmer and menaced the Valley of the Schlucht. The Americans showed up over the mountain of the Saale and pushed the Germans back into the plains. Thus formed the bulge of Colmar. Meanwhile, the frantic thrust of Patton to Bavaria left the Germans confused and scarcely able to regroup to offer resistance.

## The Ardennes and the Battle of the Bulge

Von Rundstedt felt the threat of the Allied troops mounting north of Aachen. He had assembled the last of his tank divisions at the point he thought was the most menaced. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1944, fighting from in the autumn fog, he launched these troops in a new offensive against the Allied, dispersed troops from the small town of Monschau in the north of the Ardennes to Echternach in Luxemburg, in the south. The Allied troops had indeed neglected this quiet stretch, which soon turned into a nightmarish hell of steel and fire. The last *Battle of the Ardennes* thus started. Von Rundstedt sent no less than 10 tank divisions in the battle! The *Luftwaffe* also was very active in the region. More than 17 infantry divisions followed the tanks. Von Rundstedt's offensive pierced through the lines of the 1<sup>st</sup> American Army. The Allied troops were on the defence, and they slowly retreated. Montgomery and Patton conferred on how to respond. Their intelligence group had failed to warn them. Montgomery received under his command the 1<sup>st</sup> American Army. It was the 20<sup>th</sup> of December 1944.

Montgomery threw British and Canadian troops in the engagement. General Patch, to relieve on his left General Patton, helped Patton's move northwards.

Von Rundstedt commanded 3 armies: the 5<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division under General von Manteuffel, the 6<sup>th</sup> under General Sepp Dietrich and the new 7<sup>th</sup> Army. Their front guards rode past

Rochefort on the 20<sup>th</sup> of December, reached Celles and Ciney and threatened Dinant. The 6<sup>th</sup> Parachute Division was sent to south of Rochefort.

The German assault stopped when Montgomery's troops arrived at Monschau and Malmedy, and Patton at Bastogne and Echternach. The pincher movement of the Allies closed in. Von Rundstedt's positions became untenable. It took some time, but the American troops liberated Bastogne. The British Air Force had 3 extraordinary corridors created by the forced evaporation of the fog, from which their heavy Lancaster bombers could harass the enemy. In the formidable confrontation that followed, the Allied lost 55,000 soldiers, of which 18,000 were made prisoners, and the Germans lost half their tanks and armoured vehicles. Von Rundstedt later told the British bombers had made the difference. Nevertheless, from the beginning, it had been a desperate attack.

The loss of so many tanks in the *Battle for the Ardennes*, was a boon for the Soviet troops. The Soviets launched a new offensive on the 12<sup>th</sup> of January 1945, the day the *Battle of the Ardennes* had practically stopped. Thus, from 16 December 1944 to 25 January 1945, the German Army leaders tried their last trump card. They launched their offensive through the Ardennes, in theory directed towards Antwerp, later called the *Battle of the Bulge*. The German offensive came as a complete and needless surprise to the Allies. The attack was executed by about 250,000 soldiers of Hitler's last reserves. The retreat from this battle cost the Allies about 100,000 casualties! It was a true Allied miscalculation, but also the last real offensive of the German forces.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 1945, the 7<sup>th</sup> American Army of General Patch captured Colonel Otto Skorzeny. Skorzeny was an Austrian officer. Himmler had admired the extraordinary way in which he had liberated the Italian dictator Mussolini in Italy. Skorzeny had also liberated the Hungarian Regent Horthy. American patrols, actually men of Skorzeny disguised as American soldiers, had worked behind the Allied lines, as far west as the small town of Wavre. Among them, some wore German uniforms, so that when caught, these could explain they brought German prisoners to behind the lines.

At the end of 1944, the Soviet troops had arrived at the Vistula. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of January 1945, they were at Warsaw. The next day, Cracovia and Lodz fell. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of January, Soviet troops took Tannenberg, a symbol of German armed superiority. The Russian troops also captured Guurbinen. East Prussia fell in Soviet hands. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of January, Soviet troops were at the Gulf of Danzig. The fall of Katowice and Beuthen sounded the end of the German defence of the coal mines of Donbrowa and of the High-Silesian industry.

On the 31<sup>st</sup> of January of 1945, the first Red Army soldiers penetrated in Brandenburg. They captured Landsburg, at 100 kilometres from Berlin. Four days later, Soviet troops passed the Oder at Kustrin. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of February, both banks of the Oder were Soviet, south-east of Breslau. The Germans had evacuated Kurland. The Soviet troops continued to push forward, to Berlin.

The greatest loss of civilians and soldiers in a single ship, in all 9,400 people dead among which 5,000 children, occurred when a Soviet submarine, the S-13, torpedoed the German transport ship *Wilhelm Gustloff* in the Baltic Sea in January of 1945. Wilhelm Gustloff was a pre-war Swiss Nazi. It evacuated about 10,500 German civilians and military personnel from Gotenhafen (now Gdynia in Poland) to Germany, just days ahead of the arrival of the Red Army in western Poland. It had no escort of warships, was only lightly armed and was not armoured. The ship sank in a mere 45 minutes in the Baltic Sea.

On the western front, the Canadian soldiers in the Netherlands rode into the open land east of the Dutch-German border. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of February, these troops clashed with the better reserves of the German Army. The Germans stopped the Canadians for about a month. The town of Cleves fell on the 12<sup>th</sup> of February, and with them a stretch of the *Siegfried Line*, the forest of Reichwald. The crossroads of Goch and Kalkar too were hard to take for the Allies. The British troops reached the Rhine at Millengeule on the 12<sup>th</sup> of February. They took Uden, so that the Germans could not regroup in the forest of Gelderen. Then, they came to the positions of Wesch. By then, the prisoners made by the Allies amounted to about 70,000 men. Since the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1944, the German command had lost about one million soldiers. The 9<sup>th</sup> American Army, marching on from the River Roer, which threw itself in the Maas at Roermond, had supported these advances. They had to wait until the 10<sup>th</sup> of March before getting the upper hand on the Wesel.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 1945 at 21h00, the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group passed the Rhine, after an entire day of battery fire preparation. Churchill and Montgomery were present. The great Horrock, commanding the 30<sup>th</sup> Corps was there too. He passed the first! Present too was General Ritchie of Tobruk, commanding the 12<sup>th</sup> Corps. The 9<sup>th</sup> American Army was still under the operations command of Montgomery. Two divisions of parachutists came down north of the Wesel, in the region of Bocholt. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, this passage was 45 kilometres large and 10 kilometres deep. 21 hours after the passage of the infantry to the right bank, 10,000 engineers and 1,100 trucks of the allies were already organising the defence and further offensives. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of March, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army had 8 reinforced passages over the Rhine at its disposal. And on the 26<sup>th</sup>, the Generals Patch and de Lattre de Tassigny had passed the Rhine in the Alsace.

In Italy, the army of General Alexander had used September to attack the German *Gothic Defence Line*. Heavy fighting had to happen, before Alexander could break through the region of Rimini, near Forli, the homeland of Mussolini. Alexander succeeded in this on the 25<sup>th</sup> of September 1944. The roads to the Po Valley lay open. The Allied troops took Ravenna on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 1945, Faenza on the 27<sup>th</sup> of December. This was now a hard campaign, led in terrible cold. It was only in April that Alexander's troops arrived at 20 kilometres from Venice. Then, the American tanks took in one raid Brescia, Bergamo, and Como. Additionally, Allied troops arrived from France over the Alps. Genoa, Piacenza, Milano marked the taking of all the lands south of Switzerland. Mussolini was arrested at Como. Venice finally fell. Marshal Tito and General Alexander met with their troops at Trieste. General Kesselring tried to hold on to the passes of the Brenner.

In Germany, already, General Patton gave the assault in the region of Trier. His men also destroyed all the resistance around Köln, Aachen and Trier, the Mosel and the Rhine. His troops rode to Koblenz, about 110 kilometres taken in 18 hours. The German Armies fled in front of his assault. General Hodges found and could take an entirely intact bridge over the Rhine at Remagen. The German Air Force bombed Remagen, but Hodges had already occupied the zone, and he stayed there.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 1945, the American troops of General Patton cut the highway of from Köln to Frankfurt. Patton entered Mainz. He then waited, to join General Patch, who broke through the *Siegfried Line* north of Hagenau to invade the Palatinate. The Allied troops then

threatened the Saarland and the entire zone of the Rhine from Köln to Strasbourg. In 5 days, Patton pushed his soldiers on to Ludwigshafen. His right wing could join Patch's troops! In all, 25 German divisions were then encircled, and tried to escape. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, the Allied Armies occupied Coblenz and Speier. The Lands between the Mosel and the Rhine were cleared of resistance, except for a corridor of 30 by 16 kilometres along the Rhine. The Allied advance was from then on systematic. Montgomery threw 40,000 soldiers on the right banks of the Rhine between Arnhem and the Ruhr, to reach Münster. The immense Prussian plains lay open. General Hodges enlarged his occupied zone of Remagen.

To the south, General Patton threw his tanks on. He broke through German defences south of Mainz, threatened Frankfurt and the Main Valley. On the 30<sup>rd</sup> of March, Montgomery's troops stood in front of Münster.

On German side, Marshal von Rundstedt had been replaced by General Kesselring. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April, the British General Dempsey rode past Münster, together with the 9<sup>th</sup> American Army led by General Simpson, and they joined General Hodges' troops at Paderborn. In the Ruhr Basin, 3 German Armies waited still, in some confusion. They were only the rests of past glories. One assault of the Allies could destroy them. But the Allies drove on relentlessly. Dempsey advanced to Saarbrücken and Bielefeld. Hodges' troops arrived at the highway from Kassel to Berlin. General Patton had already driven to beyond Fulda. On his right, General Patch passed the River Main and threatened Nürnberg. On his right, General de Lattre de Tassigny passed the stream north of Speier and took Karlsruhe. General Patch threatened Nürnberg, but he ran into heavy resistance near Würzburg. De Lattre promptly encircled Stuttgart. He marched to Konstanz from the north to the south.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of April died Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the President of the USA.

General Montgomery ran into stubborn resistance near Deventer. Canadian troops reached the Zuiderzee. Dempsey was at Emden, General Simpson arrived on the Elbe south of Magdeburg. Between his troops and those of the Soviet General Zhukov lay only 200 kilometres. The German resistance lasted only on the front in the Netherlands and in the Bavarian Alps. As of the 19<sup>th</sup> of April, American and Russian troops fraternised at Thorgau, on the banks of the Elbe, about 150 kilometres south of Berlin.

## The unconditional Surrender of Germany

Major General Reinhardt, commanding the 69<sup>th</sup> American Division, passed the Elbe in a small boat to meet the commanding general of the 58<sup>th</sup> Russian Guard Division of Koniev. The day before, an American lieutenant called Kotzebue had already passed to the right bank. The two generals met on the 26<sup>th</sup> of April 1945. A little later, on the 30<sup>th</sup> of April, General Hodges met General Boklanov on the left bank. The meeting happened at Thorgau, over a bridge. General Zhukov welcomed General Hodges! The headquarters of the 5<sup>th</sup> Russian Army was then at a grand German castle of two floors. General Hodges advanced over a road, flanked by masts on which hung the Soviet flags. A banquet had been prepared. General Hodges presented to Zhukov a standard brought from the USA by Normandy, France and Belgium. Champagne and vodka were served.

Benito Mussolini had been executed at Como in Italy at the end of April 1945. 17 of his accomplices had been executed with him. Roberto Farinacci too, a war veteran and delegate of the Duce to the German command in Italy, former secretary of the Fascist Party, had been arrested, judged and shot. His predecessor, Achille Starace, had been executed too on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April in Milano. Marshal Graziani, commanding the Army of Liguria, had been handed over by the partisans to the Allied powers. Fascism died thus in Italy! The Duce had called still his sympathizers to join him at Como. About 20,000 men did so, and about 15,000 still were around him in arms at Como. The Allies informed them they should leave. If not, Como would be bombed and erased from the earth. Allied aeroplanes already circled above the town. Mussolini refused to give orders for the evacuation of the town. He remained for 2 more days with his ministers. He stayed with his mistress Clara Petacci in the Villa Materno, near Como. His faithful followers then abandoned him. The Communist guards of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Brigade Garibaldi recognised him and made prisoners of his ministers. The Liberation Committee of Como and Milano had ordered to capture the Duce alive. The Communist Colonel Moscatelli, commanding the Garibaldi Division, disobeyed these orders. He organised a tribunal at Giulao di Mezzegra near Como and executed Mussolini and his mistress. Their bodies were brought from Como to Milano. The Duce had with him a treasure of 20 million Lire in precious stones, furs, and so on. Benito Mussolini and his ministers were hung, by their feet, in a piazza of Milano, for all to see. His minister of the Interior, Basile, too, was found with a treasure of 375,000 Pound Sterling in gold. He was executed.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 1945, Count Bernadotte, President of the Swedish Red Cross Organisation, received a call from Himmler. Count Bernadotte flew to Copenhagen in Denmark. He met Himmler there. Himmler handed over to him the text of the German surrender. Bernadotte gave the text in Stockholm to the Ministers of Great Britain Sir Victor Mallet and to the Minister of the USA Johnson. The same day, the German troops still fought in the metro tunnels of Berlin, and General Patch entered as victor into the famous *Bierhalle* where 20 years earlier had been founded the Nazi Party! It became known that Adolf Hitler had killed himself in the bunker of the General headquarter of the *Tiergarten* in Berlin. The last defences of Berlin were being eliminated. The news of the death of Hitler was first spread by Radio Hamburg.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 1945, the Russian Marshal Koniev terminated the last resistance in Berlin. At 15h00, hour of Moscow, the German Chief of Staff for Berlin, Artillery-General Waldino, surrendered with his officers. Before 21h00, hour of Moscow, the Soviet troops made prisoners in the capital of more than 70,000 German officers and soldiers, among whom generals and also political personalities. Among them was General Krebs, who committed suicide. Krebs was the last of the Chiefs of the General Staff of the *Wehrmacht*.

On Thursday, 3 May, Marshall Montgomery met Admiral Dönitz, invested by Hitler of the supreme command of Germany after his death, and Admiral von Friedburg, to accept the capitulation of all German armed forces. With Dönitz also had come General Werner Best, the German Minister in Denmark, de Terboven, and the German Commissar in Norway and General Lindemann, Commander-in-Chief of the German forces in Denmark. Marshal Montgomery declared the German troops of Denmark, the Netherlands and the northwest territories of Germany had capitulated. Kiel fell in Allied hands.

The last meeting between Admiral Dönitz and Count Bernadotte was held at Flensburg, just south of the Danish border. Admiral Dönitz had installed his General Headquarters there, in a centre of barracks of the German Army. Admiral Speer, the Minister of War Production of Germany, pronounced over the radio a speech announcing the defeat of Germany.

The submarine war was ended on Monday, 7<sup>th</sup> May, on orders of the German Admirals. The German troops in Norway capitulated the same day. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of May, all canons silenced. The German Minister of Foreign Affairs, Schwerig von Krasiagh, announced the defeat of the German people.

The negotiations of the surrender were held for the Allies by Lieutenant-General Bedell Smith and for the Germans by General Jodl, the personal aide-de-camp of Hitler. A second surrender happened in Berlin, between the Generals Zhukov, Tedder, Speers, Vishinski and de Lattre de Tassigny on one side, with General Keitel, Admiral Friedeburg for the German Navy, and General Strumpf for the *Luftwaffe*. These last accepted to sign the surrender. The war in Europe was over! In Berlin, Field Marshal Keitel signed the ratification of the capitulation terms already accepted at Reims by General Jodl.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> February of 1945 took place the *Conference of Yalta* in the Crimea. President Roosevelt, Joseph Stalin and Winston Churchill met to establish the basis of a durable peace in Europe. It was a conference on military affairs, leaving political issues for later.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> July of 1945 was held the *Conference of Potsdam*, with the new President of the USA, Truman, Marshal Joseph Stalin, the President of the People's Commissars of the USSR, and the British Prime minister Winston Churchill. The conference lasted from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 25<sup>th</sup> of July. During the conference, Winston Churchill lost the elections in his country! He was replaced by Clement Attlee 2 days later, accompanied by the new British Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ernest Bevin. The conference actually ended on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 1945.

Despite the talks, the issues of the German disarmament, of the use of war material found in Germany and of the German economy, remained unsolved. The eastern border of the new Germany was determined as the Oder-Neisse line, but the borders of Germany in the west had not been discussed. The definitive statute of Germany, of Italy, of the Balkans, of Iran and of other countries were left unsolved. The 3 great leaders handed over such matters to a Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, meeting in London. This Council was authorised to discuss peace treaties with the involved European countries.

Of course, the talks of Potsdam involved the continuance of the war against Japan. The use of the atom bomb to hasten victory was regarded as a positive element of success. No definite agreement, however, had been reached by the 3 main leaders. Such decisions were left to the General Assembly of the United Nations, the UN.

For the US Government, Mr. Byrnes proposed a special meeting of the 3 large powers, the USA, the USSR and Great Britain, to call for another meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December 1945 in Moscow. This was to be a meeting of the diplomats of the 3 great countries. In fact, Yalta had foreseen such meetings every 3 months. But the 3 countries seemed unable to agree on the discussion points. The conference would be held in Moscow. The *Conference of Moscow* established a list of countries to be included in further discussions. A commission for the extreme eastern questions was set up, and an inter-Allied Conference decided definitely on no absolute agreements.



From the 21<sup>st</sup> of August 1944 to the 7<sup>th</sup> October of 1944 was held the *Conference of Dumbarton Oaks*. In the first sessions, the representatives of the 3 great powers met. In the second, held from the 29<sup>th</sup> of September to the 7<sup>th</sup> of October, met only the USA representation and the one of Great Britain. Soviet Russia had been replaced by China. It was a preparatory work for the Conference of Yalta, later.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of April opened the *Conference of San Francisco*. It had been decided upon at Yalta. It would discuss and decide on a vast organisation of further talks. It established a Direction Committee, assisted by an Executive Committee, to the actual work in 4 more commissions:

- One charged with examining the general dispositions of the charter of the UN.
- One charged with writing the statute of the General Assembly of the UN.
- The third would elaborate on the Security Council.
- The fourth would be on the judiciary organisation.

The commissions subdivided in special committees to solve particular issues. 50 countries would thus form the alliance of the new organisation to be called the *United Nations*. These 50 countries had all been engaged in the war against the Axis countries! They were assisted by 1,444 members. Total personnel would be as high as 10,000 men and women, the civil servants. The Conference of San Francisco ended on a speech by the President of the USA, who expressed his hope and confidence in the Organisation of the United Nations. As first President of the Assembly of the United Nations was elected Paul-Henri Spaak, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium. This happened at Westminster in January 1946.

## The Fall of Berlin

In one of the last major offensives of the Soviet Union in the *Third Reich*, the capital of Germany fell to the Red Army. The assault was called by the Russians their *Berlin strategic Offensive Operation* and the German defence plan was called *Operation Clausewitz*.

The first defence preparations on the outskirts of Berlin began to be installed as of 20 March 1945. They were made on orders of the newly appointed Commander of the Army group Vistula, General Gotthard Heinrici.

The Red Army attacked from three sides, from the east and south, and from the north. The Soviet soldiers encircled the city after two successful battles called of the *Seelow Heights* and of *Halbe*.

The Army Group Vistula, by the stream called the Weichsel in German, fought under the command of the *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler. The Red Army had taken East Prussia, Danzig and Posen to reach the Oder River, 60 km east of Berlin. On 30 March 1945, all counter-attacks in Hungary against the advancing Red Army troops had failed, and the Soviet divisions entered Austria, capturing Vienna on 13 April. The American General Eisenhower should by then have shown most interest in a race for Berlin. But he saw no further need to suffer casualties by attacking a city that would anyhow lie in the Soviet sphere of influence after the war. Nevertheless, the bombing of Berlin out of British airfields continued. In 1945, the US Air Force sent very large daytime raids on Berlin. For 36 nights in succession, the

RAF airplanes bombed the German capital. The bombings ended only in the night of from 20 to 21 April 1945, only just before the first Red Army troops entered the city.

Stalin meanwhile, had urged his troops on to move forward as rapidly as possible to capture Berlin. He wanted to get as far west as possible to have an advantage during the political discussions that would take place after the surrender of Germany.

On 6 March 1945, Hitler appointed Lieutenant-General Helmuth Reymann to Commander of the Berlin Defence Area, replacing Lieutenant-General Bruno Ritter von Hauenschild. On 20 March, Hitler appointed General Gotthard Heinrici as Commander-in-Chief of the Army Group Vistula, replacing Himmler. Himmler was no soldier, Heinrici was. Heinrici was one of the very best defensive tacticians in the *Wehrmacht*. Heinrici fortified the *Seelow Heights*, overlooking the Oder River, only 90 km east of Berlin. He created an artificial swamp at about 127 km west of the Oder to stop the Russian onslaught, and 3 successive lines of defence up to the outskirts of Berlin. The lines consisted of anti-tank ditches, anti-tank gun emplacements, with a network of other trenches and bunkers.

Königsberg, the old capital of Prussia, fell on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April. Marshal Rokossovsky's 2<sup>nd</sup> Belorussian front could move from the east to the Oder. Marshal Georgy Zhukov's 1<sup>st</sup> Belorussian Front moved to the *Seelow Heights*. This left gaps in the Soviet lines, through which the German 2<sup>nd</sup> Army of General Dietrich von Saucken, caught in a zone near Danzig, managed to escape to the delta of the Vistula. To the south, Marshal Ivan Konev threw his 1<sup>st</sup> Ukrainian front from Upper Silesia to the Neisse River.

The three Soviet Fronts together had about 1.5 million soldiers, 6,250 tanks, 7,500 aircraft, 41,600 artillery pieces and mortars, and over 95,000 motor vehicles! Opposing the Soviet forces in the north was the Tank General Hasso von Manteuffel and in the middle Colonel-General Gotthard Heinrici, a little farther the 9<sup>th</sup> German Army of General Theodor Busse. In the south stood General Ferdinand Schörner with 17 German divisions and 3 tank divisions. Marshal Konev attacked these with over 30 divisions and 15 tank and armoured brigades.

The *Battle of the Seelow Heights* was fought in 4 days, from 16 to 19 April 1945. The Heights were considered to be the gates of Berlin. Almost one million Red Army soldiers with more than 20,000 tanks and guns of all sorts broke through the German defences held by only about 100,000 German soldiers and a mere 1,200 tanks and guns. The Russians suffered 30,000 dead, the Germans about 12,000. But on 19 April, the 1<sup>st</sup> Belorussian Front broke through the German defences, with nothing but devastated, defeated, demoralised German soldiers between them and Berlin.

The *Ukrainian Front* drove northeast to Berlin, to a line of US troops on the southwest of Berlin, on the Elbe River. The Soviet forces cut off the German Army Group Vistula in the north from the German Army Group Centre in the south. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> April, the entire German eastern line north of Frankfurt-am-Oder around Seelow and in the south around Forst, had ceased to exist. The two Soviet fronts then enveloped the German 9<sup>th</sup> Army in a pocket west of Frankfurt-am-Oder. The 9<sup>th</sup> Army tried to break out to the west, which resulted in the *Battle of Halbe*. This battle was won also by the Soviet troops, though in all at high cost.

All that time, the British RAF continued to bomb Berlin to a heap of rubble, on practically every day from 15 April to 20 April, with raids of from 60 to over 100 bombers!

The first shelling of Berlin began as of 20 April 1945, which was also Hitler's 56<sup>th</sup> birthday. The *1<sup>st</sup> Belorussian Front* continued to advance from the east and northeast. The *1<sup>st</sup> Ukrainian Front* pushed on through the rests of the German Army Group Centre, passing Jüterborg. The *2<sup>nd</sup> Belorussian Front* attacked the north flank of the Army group Vistula, still held by Hasso von Manteuffel's 3<sup>rd</sup> *Panzer* Army. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Guards Tank Army came to within 50 km north of Berlin, attacking southwest of Wernuchen. The Soviets held to their plan of surrounding first Berlin, and then only destroy the German 9<sup>th</sup> Army and the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps, which had joined the former.

At that time, Field Marshal Ferdinand Schörner's Army Group Centre launched a counter-offensive to break through the Soviet deadly embrace. At the *Battle of Bautzen*, they fought successfully against the *1<sup>st</sup> Ukrainian Front*, and then engaged the 2<sup>nd</sup> Polish Army, the Red Army's 52<sup>nd</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> Guards Army. Hitler thought his moment had come to defeat the attacking Russian divisions, but Heinrici made clear to Hitler's staff that he did not have the power to attack frontally the on-rolling Soviet divisions, and that unless the 9<sup>th</sup> Army did not withdraw immediately, it would be surrounded by the Red Army and be crushed. Heinrici had to confront Hitler, saying that if the *Führer* did not allow the 9<sup>th</sup> Army to move west, he, Heinrici, would ask to be relieved of his command.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April, at a staff conference, Hitler drew himself in a raging anger when he realised his grand plans could not be achieved. He blamed his generals for having lost the war, and threatened to remain in Berlin until the end and then kill himself.

General Jodl suggested for General Walther Wenck's rests of the German 12<sup>th</sup> Army to draw to Berlin, because the American Forces would stop on the River Elbe they had reached. Hitler then ordered Wenck to move his 12<sup>th</sup> Army to support Berlin. In the evening, General Heinrici received the permission to link up with his 9<sup>th</sup> Army to the 12<sup>th</sup>.

The Russian *2<sup>nd</sup> Belorussian Front* had reached the west banks of the Oder and fought heavily against the German 3<sup>rd</sup> *Panzer* Army. Soviet tank groups were then already on the Havel River east of Berlin and penetrated the last defence ring of Berlin. The capital lay then within range of the Soviet field artillery. On 22 April in the morning, the Soviet field artillery could open fire on the centre of Berlin.

On 23 April, the Soviet *1<sup>st</sup> Belorussian Front* and the *1<sup>st</sup> Ukrainian Front* together, broke the last link between the German 9<sup>th</sup> Army and the city. The Soviet *1<sup>st</sup> Ukrainian Front* moved west and fought against the German 12<sup>th</sup> Army, moving in the direction of Berlin. Hitler on that day appointed General Helmuth Weidling as the commander of the Berlin Defence Zone, replacing Lieutenant-General Reymann. On the 24<sup>th</sup>, Berlin was completely surrounded by the Soviet troops. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> April too, Soviet troops of Berzarin and Katukov assaulted Berlin from the southeast, reaching at the evening of 24 April the Berlin S-Bahn railway north of the Teltow Canal.

On 25 April 1945, the Soviet troops began testing and then breaking through the defensive ring of the S-Bahn. The Soviets understood the German troops could not stop anymore their offensive onslaught. By that time, Schörner's offensive attack had been thwarted. He could slow the Soviet progress, but not stop it.

General Weidling commanded only diverse groups of soldiers, which included *Hitler Jugend* groups and the elderly men of the *Volkssturm*. Hitler appointed SS *Brigadeführer* Wilhelm Mohnke as the commander for the Central Government District. This included the *Reich* Chancellery and the bunker of the *Führer*. He had a mere 2,000 men! Many of Wilhelm Mohnke's men did not even have any combat experience. Other groups were the 9<sup>th</sup> Parachute Division to the north, the Panzer Division Müncheberg to the northeast, the 11<sup>th</sup> SS *Panzergrenadier Division* Nordland to the southeast and to east of the Tempelhof airport. In Berlin's centre stood the 18<sup>th</sup> *Panzergrenadier Division*. To reinforce the centre of Berlin, only a small group of French SS volunteers under SS *Brigadeführer* Gustav Krukenberg had arrived in Berlin Mitte.

On 26 April, Chuikov's 8<sup>th</sup> Guards Army and the Soviet 1<sup>st</sup> Guards Tank Army attacked the Tempelhof Airport. The *Müncheberg Division* temporarily stopped them. By 27 April, the German soldiers were forced back to the centre, forming new defence positions around the Hermannplatz. The Soviet troops attacked along the Frankfurter Allee, which ended at Alexanderplatz. From the south, they advanced to the Potsdamer Platz and from the north to the *Reichstag* building. House-to-house and hand-combat fights developed, in the Soviet attacks on the *Reichstag*. The Soviet troops captured the Moltke Bridge, Alexanderplatz and the bridges over the Havel at Spandau.

On 29 April, the Soviet 3<sup>rd</sup> Army crossed the Moltke Bridge and ran into the streets and buildings beyond. At 04h00 in the night, in the *Führerbunker*, Hitler signed his last commands and his will, and thereafter married Eva Braun. Later in the day, the Soviet troops captured the *Gestapo* Headquarters. The Russian 8<sup>th</sup> Guards Army attacked in the north across the *Landwehr Canal*, into the *Tiergarten*.

On 30 April, the Soviets launched an attack on the *Reichstag*, but could only enter the building on the evening. The *Reichstag* building had not been in use since it had burned in 1933! It was now no more than a heap of rubble inside. The Red Army controlled the building entirely only on 2 May. Until that day, a large group of German soldiers hiding in the basements, had launched counter-attacks against the Red Army. On 2 May 1945, the Soviet Red Flag could be placed on the roof of the building.

On the same day of 30 April, General Weidling had to inform Hitler that his defenders would probably have used up all their ammunitions during the night. Adolph Hitler and Eva Braun committed suicide and their bodies were burnt near the bunker. Admiral Karl Dönitz, according to Hitler's last wishes, became the *Reichspräsident* and Joseph Goebbels the new *Reichskanzler*. By then, about 10,000 German defenders were pressed together, still in a small area of the city centre. They were being assaulted from all sides, pushed together by Kuznetsov's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army and by the Russian 8<sup>th</sup> Guards Army.

On 1 May, General Krebs talked to General Chuikov of the 8<sup>th</sup> Guards Army, informing him of Hitler's death and he proposed the surrender of the city. The Russians insisted on a general surrender. Goebbels was against surrender! In the afternoon, he and his wife killed their children and then themselves. General Weidling accepted the terms of unconditional surrender, effective for the next day. On the night of from 1 to 2 May, the remaining soldiers of Berlin tried to break out of the city in 3 different directions. Only the groups that tried west succeeded in breaking through the Soviet lines. And only a few men made it to the Western

Allies. The others were killed or captured by the Red Army. General Weidling surrendered at 06h00 in the morning. At 08h23 he was at General Vassily Chuikov's staff, where he ordered the last defenders of the city to surrender. The Battle for Berlin was over.

## Ernst Vincius

Ernst Vincius had brought his wife and children to the village of Garzau, east of Berlin. He had found them a large house in the *Mühlenweg*. A more bucolic name was hard to come by. Ernst could reach Garzau by taking a train to Rehfelde Station, and then walk on foot for about ten minutes to his wife's house. The house stood isolated, so Ernst had to fortify doors and windows, which he had ordered immediately. Moreover, he bought firearms for his wife. She did look at him with strange eyes, but she didn't protest, and Ernst taught her how to shoot, and shoot well. Nearby lay a large wood, where Eva could walk with the children.

Ernst had his work in Berlin, purely administrative work, but he also had to travel some, always inside Germany. He was still a member of the SS, an *Oberst* or colonel now, and a close collaborator of Albert Speer. When in Berlin, Ernst wore the uniform of an SS Colonel, but when he travelled to the station of Rehfelde, he always wore civil clothes, without exceptions. In 1943, he used a car to reach Garzau, an old and inconspicuous Audi. He then drove from the centre of Berlin over Rüdersdorff and Herzfelde, where he knew a few spots where he could change clothes, which he usually did in his car, from his SS uniform to civil clothes. In Garzau, people may have recognised his car, but they only saw him in civilian clothes. He rode to his wife and children as much as possible, at least once a week, on weekends preferably.

Ernst became an important person in the Procurement Department and in Albert Speer's administration. He worked on the simplification plans of Speer and seemed the only one to have a fine overview of what could be done. Speer relied on him, and so did his superiors. These went to meetings with his reports in hand! He did a good job for the armies and for the armament industry of Germany. He knew almost instinctively how machines worked and what they needed as parts to repair them. His bosses relied on him for reports, as he also could write well, concisely and clearly on all subjects. He had to travel much in the week. He met many industrialists of Germany in that time. He advised the factory owners and directors on how best to adapt their machines to the necessities of war. When the directors were satisfied with his work and his suggestions, some money always was distributed to men who had helped. In the beginning, Ernst refused to accept money he regarded as bribes. In the later years of the war, however, the amounts of those proposals became smaller, and Ernst came to accept the sums placed on his bank accounts or handed over to him in envelopes.

Ernst still owned his garages, on which he continued to spend as much time as he could, beside his official work and his visits to his family. He still and as soon as possible exchanged the banknotes he received on buying metals, gold, silver, platinum, and even copper and aluminium. He stored these in a hidden place of one of his Berlin garages. At least twice a year, Ernst had to ride to Switzerland on official duties, to arrange contracts for the buying of metals and parts of engines for the German industry, with times even arms built

by the Swiss industry. He had to pay out of Nazi funds in Germany. There also, some money remained in his hands usually. He converted any banknotes immediately into metals. The gold and silver he left in his personal vault in a Swiss bank.

Ernst Vincius thus turned out to be a rich man with his garages and gold and silver in the Swiss banks. He never left large sums on his Swiss accounts. He waited for the end of the war, as eagerly as most of the common German citizens. If he survived the war, he would be a rich man and participate in Germany's rebirth. He would, he thought, be a richer man than Julian Vincius! Ernst Vincius had now acquired the property deeds for five garages in Berlin, which he thought would not be much worth after the war, for bombed to oblivion by the British nightly attacks, but he also was the owner of five more garages in Frankfurt, in Hannover, in Köln and Aachen. After the war, those would be worth something, and be places to start from. They were the result of his travels all over Germany, from the meetings with the directors of the large concerns with whom worked Speer.

Ernst's greatest worry was over how to survive the war and continue living as a normal German citizen then, despite his SS membership. The victors would not be soft on the SS. Ernst had never fought in any battle, never worn a rifle, even though a revolver always hung at his belt. He could remain almost visible in Germany, and he wanted to stay so after the war. As the months passed in 1943, then into 1944 and 1945, he was more and more convinced Germany could not win the war, not everywhere, not in Europe, not even in just Western Europe, and certainly not in the Soviet Union. He knew how cruelly certain departments of the SS had acted. How could he disappear from SS files? He knew finally that to be impossible. His signature stood on too many documents. But he could at least protect himself by never to handle weapons in any campaign and in any battle. He thought of disguising himself by having false papers. He was sure he could have found men to forge for him false papers and identities, but he soon rejected that idea. He would have to find false papers for his entire family, wife and children, and that would be too hard to uphold in lies. The only thing he could do was to get a kind of neutral passport, forged of course, for himself alone, which did not mention him as a soldier of the SS. Finally, Ernst never used that passport! He felt remaining inconspicuous could be enough. Even as an SS higher officer, he had never committed what could be considered as war crimes. He had never been much more than an Oberst, a colonel, of which there were many, not a very high-rank officer.

At a certain moment, Albert Speer had wanted to promote him to the rank of general. He refused politely, and told Speer he would do what Speer wanted of him in his present rank. He didn't need the honour of becoming a general. He explained he had always worked for the benefit of his homeland of Germany and its people, without asking for anything. Speer had looked at him, amazed at the refusal, but then, Speer seemed to understand. Speer smiled, and said that Ernst was smarter than most of the men he had met so far. Ture, Speer answered, Germany will soon fall. I have no idea what then will happen with us! Ernst had nodded sadly, and Speer had not insisted. In fact, Albert Speer escaped from being punished to death after the war, partly for the same reasons as Ernst had thought about.

Ernst tried to see Julian Vincius once every while, though that too became increasingly difficult. Ernst could return to Berlin from his Swiss missions by passing the Swiss-German border in the south of Germany, and then drive to Luxemburg. He always did that in his

civilian clothes. He became a master in changing clothes rapidly in his car, hiding on the back seats. He usually stayed a few days with Julian and Charlotte then, in Luxemburg. Julian was very eager for news of the war and for the situation in Berlin and Germany, and Ernst told him how matters truly stood with the Army and the Nazi Government. He never told Julian it had been a right thing to sell his apartment in the Landgrafenstrasse, for in that street of the centre of Berlin, only façades stood and pieces of sidewalls, the rest destroyed by bombs.

After the war, as the Luxemburg Vincius did not want to return to Berlin ever, the memories being too painful for Julian, it was Ernst who took trains to Luxemburg with his wife. They never broke up the relations between the Vincius of Luxemburg and their far family in Berlin. When Julian Vincius died, however, the relations ended.

## Part IV. The Holocaust



## The Holocaust

Among the greatest causes of deaths in World War II were the mass executions of Jews associated with the Holocaust. About 6 million Jews were slaughtered by the *Third Reich*, in death camps, through open-air shootings, and through the destruction of the Jewish ghettos. About 5 million of these were Polish and Russian Jewish citizens, about 1 million western and southern European Jews.

As late as 1930, Poland and Russia were probably even more antisemitic than Germany. Mostly Hitler, the most dangerous as he was in power, abhorred Bolshevism and equated it with Jewishness. The Nazi doctrine fed off the lower-middle class scapegoating for the humiliation of the German defeat in World War I and in the economic downturn of the Great Depression after 1929. Hitler, as no other politician of his times, possessed a unique ability of how to tap these feelings and of how to manipulate the deep-seated resentments and sense of shame of the Germans and other antisemitic persons of the 1920s and 1930s. By 1943, many Jews had disappeared from public life. The German people were not bothered by exactly how their disappearance had been carried out. They shut their minds, asked no questions, did not bother. The genocide had been choreographed in an antiseptic and scientific way.

The Nürnberg racial laws of 1935 excluded German Jews from their country's citizenship and forbade them marrying non-Jewish Germans. The laws defined Jewishness by race, not by religion.

On 20 January 1942, at the *Wannsee Conference* in Germany, the leading Nazis had outlined the organisation and the capital needed to exterminate the Jews. The *Wannsee Conference* discussed what was called in German the *Endlösung der europäischen Judenfrage*, the final solution to the European question of the Jews. How could the European question of the Jews finally be solved? The Jews had to be exterminated. The conference ended on concluding for the systematic destruction of the Jewish population in Europe!

The Jewish extermination then went on, all through 1944 and 1945, when the Nazi hierarchy must have known, at least privately, the war could not anymore be won. On 29 November 1941, Reinhard Heydrich ordered Adolf Eichmann to invite civil servants to discuss the final solution for the Jewish question. The invitation told the Reich Marshal had ordered Eichmann to make all organisational and technical preparations for a comprehensive solution to the Jewish question. No details about what the conference would exactly be about, were given.

The meeting was scheduled for 9 December 1941, in a lakeside villa in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee. It was first postponed, because the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor took place the day before. By then, it had become clear to Hitler and everyone else in the Nazi hierarchy that the war would last. They thought still the Soviet Union would collapse in the summer of 1942. The plans to deport the Jews to the Reich Commissariat of the Ukraine had to be abandoned. The annihilation of the Jews was decided upon. But how? We can't shoot 3.5 million Jews, and we can't pass them on, said Hans Frank. Hitler confirmed his approval of the murders directly. The extermination of the Jews in Russia was to be continued under the pretext they were partisans. From August to November 1941, 363,211 Jews had been killed.

At the *Wannsee Conference* 15 men came together, representatives from Rosenberg's Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories, from Hans Frank's Office of the General Government of Poland and the SS Security Service of Poland, Latvia and the Reich Commissariat of the eastern Territories. The Reich Ministers of the Interior and Justice would be present, as well as representatives of the Foreign Office, for Jews living in nominally independent countries, outside Germany. Members of the Four-Year Plan were to cover and discuss the economic aspects. Also present were representatives of the SS departments of the Reich Security Head Office and the Head Office for Race and Settlement.

Heydrich wanted to assert the authority of the SS. Heydrich told there were 4,000 Jews in Ireland, 3,000 Jews in Portugal, 8,000 Jews in Sweden, 18,000 in Switzerland. These were all neutral countries! The Jewish population in Europe was estimated at over 11 million. The Jews should be put to work in the east. The large majority would die, be eliminated by natural causes. Then, a pedantic and inconclusive discussion followed about what to do with people who were racially mixed. Various possible kinds of solutions were discussed, included the use of gas vans. The main concern of the conference was to organise the provision of labour for the huge road-building schemes envisioned by the General Plan for the East. It was not really about mass murder! But Task Force C had already months before recommended the drafting of the Jews for their labour projects, and commented it would be a gradual liquidation of the Jews. Jewish slave labourers would be deprived of adequate rations and worked till they dropped. Yet, the major purpose of the meeting turned to discussing the logistics of extermination.

In February 1942, the administration of all concentration camps was restructured with the economic construction and internal administrative divisions merged into the new *SS Economy and Administration Head Office* under Oswald Pohl. Group D of Pohl's Head Office, under Richard Glücks, was now in charge of the system of concentration camps. The camps were being seen as a significant source of labour to be supplied to Germany's war industries. The *Wannsee Conference* thus became a global planning of the genocide!

Thirty copies of the minutes of the *Wannsee Meeting* were sent out. On 30 January 1942, Hitler gave his anniversary speech in the *Sportpalast* of Berlin for his appointment as *Reich Chancellor* in 1933. Other speeches followed up on each other. Another tirade of Hitler against the Jews came on 26 April 1942 in the *Reichstag*. On 2 February 1942, Robert Ley, the German Labour Front Leader, gave a speech in the Sports Palace. He said straight on, 'Jewry will and must be exterminated!'

On 18 May 1942, a bomb attack by a group of Communist resistants under Herbert Baum, shook an anti-Soviet exhibition in Berlin. Little damage was done, and nobody was hurt. The perpetrators were 5 Jews, 3 half-Jews, and 4 non-Jews. Baum committed suicide after torture. 250 Jewish men were shot in Sachsenhausen.

Meanwhile, Himmler travelled much to organise the programme of mass killings by poison gas: visits to Cracow, Lublin, Warsaw, Łódź. On 6 March 1942, Eichmann told Gestapo chiefs that 55,000 more Jews would have to be deported from the Old Reich. In all, 60 trains of Jews made their way to the ghettos. On 27 February 1943, the German Police began

rounding up the remaining full Jews and their families. Over 11,000 Jews were transported in 1 week, including 7,000 from Berlin.

At that time, February 1943, the last remnants of the Jewish community organisations in Germany had been finally destroyed. The only Jews left were those in privileged positions, mostly through marriage to non-Jews, or those who had disappeared underground. Many Jews killed themselves rather than be deported. Well-known suicides were of the Protestant writer Jochen Klepper, actor Joachim Gottschalk, and of the widow of painter Max Liebermann. In 1941 to 1943, up to 4,000 German Jews killed themselves.

On 25 March 1942, the deportations started from other parts of Europe, such as from Slovakia: 90,000 Jews were sent to ghettos in the Lublin district, to camps in the east. From France on 27 March 1942, 1,112 Jews were deported. From Croatia, 5,000 Jews deported in August 1942. There were equally deportations from Hungary and Finland.

End September 1941, Hitler retired the *Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia*, the former Foreign Minister Konstantin von Neurath. New *Reich Protector* became Reinhard Heydrich. Heydrich systematised the destruction of the Czech Jews.

The Czechs were divided into 3 categories: the racially and ideologically unsound: these were deported to the east; the racially unsatisfactory, but ideologically acceptable: they would be sterilised, and last, the racially impeccable, but ideologically dubious people; these were to be Germanised. If they refused, they would be shot.

Heydrich had to deal with a swelling tide of resistance. 404 Czechs were arrested in Heydrich's first month and 1,300 more were sent to concentration camps. Most of them perished. In October 1941 was staged a show trial in Czechia of the figurehead Czech prime Minister Alois Elias, who was sentenced to death, and executed in June 1942. These measures destroyed the Czech resistance movement. Heydrich was henceforth called 'the Butcher of Prague'. Yet, he also reorganised and improved the Czech social security system.

The Czech exiled Government in London urged that Heydrich should be killed. Two Czech exiles were chosen to do the job in December 1941. They were parachuted in Czechia. They performed an assassination attempt on 27 May 1942. The attempt succeeded, though it was a mess. Heydrich had been badly injured by the grenade that had exploded in his car. He died on 4 June 1942.

Heydrich was replaced in the Protectorate for Bohemia and Moravia by Hermann Frank, a deputy of von Neurath. Frank was named State minister for Bohemia and Moravia in August 1943. Hitler wanted to shoot 10,000 Czechs in reprisal of Heydrich's assassination. Hermann Frank persuaded Hitler in Berlin more measures would cause immense damage to the Czech arms production. Among the papers found on another Czech agent, was found the name of the village of Lidice. Frank suggested a reprisal on Lidice. Hitler agreed. On 10 June 1942, the entire population of Lidice was rounded up. The men were shot. The women were sent to the Ravensbrück concentration camp. Among the children, 18 were found racially inferior. They were killed. 17 other children were given new identities, and placed with German families for adoption. A further 24 men and women were shot in the hamlet of Lezacky. Another 1,357 people were tried and executed. 250 Czechs and their families were killed in

Mauthausen. 1,000 more Jews were rounded up in Prague and killed. About 5,000 Czechs perished in the orgy of revenge. Rarely in history had been decided to kill so many persons in revenge for the death of but one! The assassination of Heydrich had reinforced the fear in the Nazi leadership that the Jews - who had nothing to do with Heydrich's assassination-, posed a growing threat on the Home Front.

There were growing food shortages in Germany at that time. Cuts in rations, therefore. Hitler retired his Minister of Agriculture Richard Walter Darré, and he promoted Herbert Bracke as Acting Minister. Himmler and Hitler met with Bracke in May 1942. Bracke secured their agreement to stop provisioning the German armed forces from out of Germany. Henceforth, the Army would have to live off the land. On 23 June 1942 therefore, Bracke ordered to cut rations in the east. Rations to Jews were to be stopped completely.

On 19 July 1942, Himmler ordered Friedrich Wilhelm Krüger, Chief of the Police in the *General Government*, to ensure 'that the resettlement of the entire Jewish population of the *General Government* was carried out and completed by 31 December 1942.'

The ethnic reordering of Europe demanded a 'total cleaning-out'. Hitler too wanted all the remaining Jews in Berlin to be deported. Göring and Hitler gave more speeches directed against the Jews. Hitler's Press Chief, Dietrich, stepped up the antisemitic propaganda once more. Roosevelt and Stalin were presented as puppets of a Jewish world conspiracy, aimed at the annihilation of the German race.

In Poland came the discovery of the massacred Polish officers at Katyn. The massacre was attributed not to the Red Army, but to the Jews. Germany was caught once more in an ideologically pervasive mixture of fear and hatred, blaming the Jews for all of Germany's ills. It regarded their destruction as a matter of life and death, a necessity in the interests of Germany's survival. As extermination camps existed then Auschwitz, Chelmno, (Kulmhof), Treblinka, Sobibor, Majdanek, and Belzec.

By January 1942, the target figure for the number of Jews to be exterminated in the final solution for the Jews in lands occupied by *Operation Barbarossa* was 11 million people. Actually, 5.5 million Jews were murdered. No other people were so relentlessly pursued and destroyed in a systematic program of mass annihilation! By early 1942, a program of mass deportation to killing locations in Poland was emerging. Early methods of using carbon monoxide in mobile and stationary gas chambers were introduced.

In December of 1941, the camp at Chelmno started to work. About 150,000 Jews were killed there. Belzec, Sobibor started in March to April 1942. It was a stationary camp. Treblinka began working in June 1942. The program of wiping out the whole of Polish Jewry was called the *Aktion Reinhard*. Most of these camps were wound down in the autumn of 1943. By that time, about 1.75 million Jews, mainly Polish, had been killed. In 1942 then, 2.7 million people had died in the camps.

The main mass killing centre in the period of the years 1943 and 1944 was Auschwitz-Birkenau. The extermination of mainly Jews began there in March 1942. About 1.1 million people were murdered at Auschwitz. The Red Army liberated the prisoners of Auschwitz in January 1945. They had taken Lublin in 1944, and hence also the camp of Majdanek. Birkenau was an auxiliary camp of Auschwitz, about 2 km away from the centre of Auschwitz, and much larger. It started up in May 1942. The largest mass deportations to the

camps happened for Hungarian Jews in the spring and summer of 1944, when about 437,000 Jews were brought here.

### *The Final Solution for the Jews*

At the beginning of *Operation Barbarossa*, and already before that time, the SS Security Task Forces and their subordinate Task Units, including a number of police battalions, began to carry out the orders of Heydrich to kill all civilian resistants, Communist Party officials, and Jews. In 1943, the four Task Groups had been reinforced by 5,500 members of the *Ordnungspolizei*, the Order Police, and with two SS-Brigades, each of 5,000 men. The killings were, if possible, to be done by local people, who the Nazis expected to rise against their Communist and Jewish oppressors. Head of Task Force A, for instance, was Walter Stahlecker, and of *Einsatzgruppe B* the *SS-Gruppenführer* Arthur Nebe. The anti-Jewish pogroms were to appear as spontaneous actions by patriotic, local people. The message to the world was, that the liberated population took the toughest measures against the Bolshevik and Jewish enemy on its own initiative.

The Nazis regarded the Baltic peoples not as subhuman Slavs, but as potentially assimilable to the German master race. Estonia had a Jewish population of a mere 2,500 people. Most of these Jews managed to flee in safety. SS Security Task forces in Latvia and Lithuania had already proceeded to killing Jewish men themselves. For example, the Tilsit Tank Unit had killed 3,000 civilians by 18 July 1941. Its chief was one Hans Joachim Böhme.

German forces treated all Jewish men as Communist partisans, saboteurs, looters, dangerous members of the intelligentsia, or suspicious elements, and acted accordingly. Antisemitism led regular German troops to shoot captured Jewish soldiers, rather than send them into captivity behind the front. One example of the killing frenzy was at Vilna, where at least 5,000 and probably about 10,000 Jews were killed by end July 1941. They were machine-gunned in groups of 12. Another example was Riga. More than 2,000 Jew were killed in a wood near the city by mid-July 1941. In Bialystok, 500 Jews were driven into a synagogue and then burnt alive. At least 2,000 Jews were killed in all in the town. In July 1941, a 1,000 more Jews were arrested and killed. Most Jews had not fled, unless they had some connection with the Communist Party.

### *Genocide in Ukraine*

News of the massacres spread quickly, so the Jewish population began to flee en masse as the German forces approached. They were often overtaken. On 12 September 1941, a report from Task Force 6 stated that 90% to 100% of the Jews in many Ukrainian towns had already fled.

In Ukraine, at Lemberg, Lvov, on 2 July 1941, mutilated corpses of Jews were found. Some Jews were shot. On 3 July, 500 Jews more were shot. On 5 July: another 300 Poles and Jews were shot. Jews were being clubbed to death next to the citadel.

Antisemitic and extreme nationalist militia marched into Galicia alongside the advancing German troops. Jews were beaten to death. At Brzezany, clubs with nails on were used to kill the Jews. At Boryslaw too, Jews were beaten to death. 7,000 Jews were killed in Lemberg in the first days of the German invasion. 2,000 more Jews were killed there in that month.

In Cracow, 23 Jews were shot in a wood. The Germans gave unfeeling descriptions of mass murders. The mass murders and the pogroms on Jews were photographed. Snapshots were taken.

On 17 July 1941, Hitler issued a decree. One gave Himmler complete control over security measures to remove the threat of Jewish-Bolshevik subversion. Himmler wanted to clean all the Jews out of the Polish areas by a mixture of shooting and ghettoization. On 19 to 22 July, Himmler ordered 2 SS Cavalry Brigades of 13,000 men to the region. The brigade noted 800 Jewish men and women had already been shot.

On 28 July 1941, Himmler issued guidelines to the 1<sup>st</sup> SS Cavalry Brigade to deal with the inhabitants of the Pripet Marshes: the SS were to take all the food and the livestock, and burn the houses.

The Higher SS and Police Leader for Central Russia, was Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski. One of his brigades shot more than 25,000 Jews in one month, following an order by Himmler. Jewish men were to be shot, women to be driven into the marshes, and later to be drowned in the marshes. As the women did not sink, they too were shot.

In August 1941, another SS brigade led by Friedrich Jeckeln operated the systematic shooting of the Jews in Kameneck-Podolsk. There, 23,600 men, women and children were shot in 3 days end of August. On 29 and 30 September, Jeckeln's men shot a total of 33,772 Jews in a ravine. By end October 1941, the following month, Jeckeln's troops had shot more than 100,000 Jewish men, women and children. The great majority of officers and men took part willingly in the murders and raised no objections.

Another example of mass shootings of Jews happened in Stanislawow in Galicia. Hens Krüger, head of the local German authorities killed by shooting on 12 October 1941 30,000 or more Jews. They were shot by the German Police, ethnic Germans and nationalist Ukrainians. At Zloczow, however, local German Army commanders protested and managed to get the murders stopped.

The village of Byelaya Tserkow, south of Kiev, was an example of children shot, despite protests of Lieutenant-Colonel Groscurth. The murder had been ordered by Field Marshal von Reichenau. Groscurth protested that such atrocities were no better than those committed by Soviet Communists. Von Reichenau reprimanded Groscurth.

The explicit inclusion of the mass murder of Bolshevik commissars, Jews, partisans, and others in the orders developed in Berlin in the spring of 1941, helped put genocide on the agenda in other parts of the Balkan too.

### *Rumania*

In July 1940, The German Army succeeded in cutting off completely the Rumanian oil deliveries to Great Britain, which was about 40% of the output of the Ploesti oilfield. Rumania lived practically under the dictatorship of King Carol. Hitler ordered him to cede Northern

Transylvania to Hungary, and to surrender more territories to Bulgaria in the south. Carol had already been obliged to cede Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the Soviet Union, in accordance with the Nazi-Soviet pact concluded a year earlier.

On 6 September 1940, King Carol was forced to abdicate under growing criticism against his regime. General Ion Antonescu drove him from power, in alliance with the *Fascist Iron Guard*. Antonescu became Prime Minister of a military-backed Government. Early 1941, the Iron Guard staged an uprising. Leader of this revolt was Horia Sima. In Rumania lived about 375,000 Jews. For simply killing these, the *Iron Guard* organised a pogrom against the Jews. But Hitler and Antonescu worked together to crush the uprising. The alliance of Germany and Rumania was a close one. In 1941, about 50% of all Rumanian crude oil was produced by German-owned companies in Rumania. The transports of oil to Germany tripled.

On 12 June 1941, in Munich, the Rumanian Army Chief and dictator Ion Antonescu received guidelines from Hitler as to how to deal with the Jews in the areas under Soviet Control, into which the Rumanian Army was scheduled to march into. The Rumanian Police then began the ghettoization of the Jews living in towns and the extermination on site of Jews found in the countryside. More than 100,000 Jews fled into the Soviet Union, but not before the Rumanians had begun killing them in great numbers. Jews were subjected to forced labour. Antonescu was a deep-seated antisemitic. The Orthodox Patriarch Nicodin had declared it was necessary to destroy the Jews, servants of Bolshevism and killers of Christ. Antonescu wanted the racial purification of the Rumanians. His discriminatory laws were racial in character. He blamed Rumanian military losses, food and supply shortages, and other problems, on the Jews.

On 26 June 1941, a pogrom took place in the north-eastern Rumanian town of Iasi, organised by the Rumanian and German intelligence officers and involving the local police. At least 4,000 Jews were killed, the rest put in sealed wagons sent by train. When the trains stopped, 2,713 more Jews had died of thirst or suffocated to death. Possibly 10,000 Jews in all were killed. Even the Germans were shocked by the atrocities.

Antonescu ordered the expulsion of all the Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina. Thousands of Jews were shot, the survivors put in poorly provisioned camps and ghettos, mainly in Kishinev, the capital of Bessarabia. The Jews were then expelled to Transnistria in the southern Ukraine, occupied by the Rumanians. In December and January of 1942, the Jews in Rumania were forced on marshes with hunger and disease as companions. The Rumanians ordered the shooting of thousands of Jews. At least 400 Jews died from paralysis of limbs caused by peas given to cattle.

On 22 October 1941, a time-bomb, laid by the Soviet Secret Service, blew up the Rumanian Army Secret Service in occupied Odessa. 62 Rumanian officers and staff members were killed. The Rumanian troops blamed the Jews, so they launched a pogrom, lasting 2 days. 417 Jews and Communists were immediately shot. Then, about 30,000 Jews were assembled, forced to march out of the city to the town of Dalnic. By an intervention of the Mayor of Odessa, they were marched back to Odessa harbour. 19,000 Jews were herded in 4 large sheds, and all of them machine-gunned. Then fire was set to the sheds to make sure no one inside survived.

52,000 Jews from Odessa and southern Bessarabia were crammed into 40 cowsheds at Budganovka, or held in open pens. At nearby Domanovka and Atmecetka there were 22,000 more Jews, placed mostly in pigsties. Typhus broke out. The Jews began dying in large numbers. 5,000 Jews were burnt alive at Bogdanovka. 23,000 Jews who could still walk, were taken to a ravine and shot. 18,000 more were shot by Ukrainian policemen on Rumanian orders. The pigsties at Akmecetka were used to house the sick and emaciated. Up to 14,000 Jews were starved to death on orders of the Rumanian Lieutenant-Colonel Tsapescu. Thousands more Rumanian Jews were deported to improvised camps in Transnistria, with death rates of 1/3<sup>rd</sup> to 1/2 in the winter of 1941-1942. In the Warsaw ghetto by comparison, with all its overcrowding, death rates were running at 15% at that time. Antonescu told the Jews had previously tortured and murdered Rumanian soldiers, so they had deserved their fate.

In the one year of the beginning of their campaign, Rumanian forces, sometimes with German SS and police units, had killed between 280,000 and 380,000 Jews! This was the largest number of people murdered by any independent European country in World War II, apart from Germany.

SS Task force D tried to channel the chaotic murders. Its Head was Ohlendorff. He reported in a secret report all Jews had been liquidated. In mid-September, a subunit of Task Force D murdered all the Jews in the town of Dubossary. The Jews had to kneel down, also the women, mothers, to be shot in the back of the neck. About 1,500 people were killed in the mass executions. For Ohlendorff and Himmler, these Rumanian murder operations were neither thorough nor systematic enough and perpetrated by an excess of inefficiency, corruption and randomly sadistic brutality. As task Force D moved southwards, it killed every Jewish man, woman and child it found in its way. It reported it had rendered the area completely free of Jews.

### *Croatia*

The *Ustashe* of Croatia began massacring Serbs in huge numbers in the spring of 1941. Thousands of refugees fled across the border into German-occupied Serbia. There, they joined the nascent resistance movement. These were the *Chetniks*, called after anti-Turkish armed bands in the Balkan wars earlier in the century. Leader of the *Chetniks* was Colonel Dragoljub Mihailovic, a Serbian nationalist, in touch with the government-in-exile of the young King Peter. Late June 1941, in a general uprising, Communist partisans under Josip Broz Tito joined the rebels. Tito's Communists aimed to unite all ethnic and religious groups in the struggle against the occupiers.

General Halder, the Chief of the German Army General Staff, ordered the armed forces to cooperate with the German police and the Security Service of the SS in arresting known or suspected terrorists, saboteurs and German emigrated persons, Communists and Jews. The compulsory wearing of the yellow David star for all Jews was enforced. German Army officers moved into well-furnished villas after the Jewish owners had been evicted, imprisoned or shot. For example, when the *Chetnik* uprising began, the military commander in Belgrade ordered the Jewish community to provide 40 hostages a week, to be shot if the resistance persisted. On 22 July 1941, the Germans shot 11 people in reprisals. Among these



were many Jews. On 27 July 1941, the Serbs were held co-responsible if they provided a supportive environment for the rebels.

By mid-August 1941, the Jews of the Banat area were deported to Belgrade. All male Jews and Gypsies were interned at the beginning of September. In August, about 1,000 Communists and Jews were shot or publicly hanged.

### *Brutal Acts in Yugoslavia*

Brutal acts were equally perpetrated in Yugoslavia, as revenges for attacks the Germans were unable to counter. A puppet Serb government was installed under Milan Nedic, a pro-German and anti-Communist Serb politician. Overall commander in the area was Field Marshal Wilhelm List, a Catholic Bavarian. The Serbs were naturally violent and hot-blooded. In early September 1941, the Chetniks captured 175 Germans in 2 incidents. General Franz Böhme was the Commander-in Chief. Böhme was anti-Serb, and antisemitic. He systematised the violent retaliation in Yugoslavia. He ordered punitive expeditions in towns and villages, the opening of concentration camps at Salac and Belgrade, and the shooting of new 1,000 suspected Bolsheviks by 4 October 1941.

On 16 September 1941, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, *Head of the Combined Forces Supreme Command*, had ordered 50 to 100 Communists to be shot for every German soldier killed in German-occupied areas all across Europe. On 10 October 1941, Böhme ordered that for every German soldier killed by partisans, 100 nationalistic and democratically inclined inhabitants were to be killed, Communist and Jews, and 50 to every wounded. Böhme exceeded Keitel's orders, which did not mention Jews.

Böhme had then shot 2,200 prisoners from the Salac and Belgrade concentration camps, 2,000 Jews and, 200 Gypsies. Some of the Jews were Austrian refugees, thus killed by mainly Austrian troops, for reprisals of acts of resistance by Serbian partisans in the German Army. It was nothing more than gratuitous mass murder! In the next 2 weeks, army units in Serbia shot more than 9,000 Jews, Gypsies and other civilians. For example, units of the 717<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division shot 300 men in Kraljevo, then indiscriminately another 1,400 Serbians were shot to reach their quota for 100 hostages shot for every dead German. Almost all Army officers and SS commanders in occupied Yugoslavia were Austrians. The horrors reflected the deep-rooted hostility against the Serbs, and the particularly virulent nature of antisemitism in that country. Overall numbers of murders by the army, the SS security Service Task Forces and their associates were hundreds of thousands!

Task Force A had by mid-October already killed 118,000 Jews. By January 1942, 230,000 Jews had been killed. Task Force B had shot by end October 45,467 Jews, 91,000 by end February 1942. Task Force C had shot 55,000 people by 12 December 1941, and almost 92,000 by 8 April 1942. In all, it is probable that about half a million Jews were shot by the Task Forces and their associated and paramilitary groups by end 1941. Himmler's and Heydrich's roles were central in the murders. Not only Hitler, but also many people in the senior ranks of the Nazi Party and in the state administration were fully informed of the massacres being carried out by the SS Task Forces in the east.

*The Genocide truly begins*

On 16 May 1940, the US President Roosevelt brought to Congress a proposal to build 50,000 airplanes a year. Hitler thought that the rapid defeat of the Soviet Union would bring about the capitulation of the British. But the German attempt to bomb the British into submission had failed. Hitler then sought the disruption of the British supplies, which by necessity had to come by sea, partly from Britain's far-flung Empire, but principally from the United States. The US President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, had privately thought the USA would have to act to stop further German aggression. Roosevelt ordered a large-scale programme of arms manufacture. The US Congress passed in 1940 the '*Two Oceans Navy Expansion Act*', inaugurating the construction of enormous Atlantic and Pacific fleets, grouped around aircraft carriers. Massive conscription came next, with the drafting and training of an army of 1.4 million men. In November 1940, Roosevelt was re-elected. He soon installed the Lend-Lease arrangements. In 1940, the British could purchase more than 2,000 combat aircraft from the USA, and in 1941 more than 5,000. By mid-August 1941, Roosevelt and Churchill met to sign the *Atlantic Charter*, which included the provision that US submarines would accompany convoys to Britain for at least half of the Atlantic passage. In June 1941, the USA also began shipping supplies and equipment to the Soviet Union, in ever-increasing quantities.

The pace and scale of American rearmament in 1940-1941 helped persuade the aggressively expansionist Japanese Government that its drive to create a new Japanese Empire in South-East Asia required the elimination of the American Naval Forces in the region, rather sooner than later. On 7 December 1941 came the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. It was an offensive on the sea realised by 6 Japanese carriers to bomb the most important US naval base in The Pacific Ocean. The Japanese sank, grounded or disabled 18 ships. Then the Japanese moved on to the invasion of Thailand, Malaya and the Philippines. Hitler allowed now the sinking of US ships in the Atlantic, to disrupt and cut off US supplies to Britain and to the Soviet Union.

On 11 December 1941, Hitler sent a formal declaration of war to the USA. Also declared war to the USA the Axis countries of Italy, Rumania, Hungary and Bulgaria. Hitler thought the Japanese attacks would weaken the Americans by dividing their military efforts. Great Britain would have to invest important resources in the Far East, as the Japanese military moved on the British colonies from Malaya to Burma, and maybe India as well!

On 22 June 1941, Hitler launched the *Operation Barbarossa*. He announced the hour had come to fight against the conspiracy of the Jewish-Anglo-Saxon instigations of the war and against the equally Jewish rulers of the Bolshevik Moscow Government. It was time for Nazi Germany to launch the propaganda designed to win the approval of the German people for *Operation Barbarossa*. A massive campaign was organised by Goebbels.

This was an antisemitic campaign, spearheaded by the Nazi's daily newspaper the *Racial Observer*, edited since 1938 by Wilhelm Weiss. The campaign began on 10 July 1941 with front-page, antisemitic stories. The paper *Word of the Week* also added its campaign, and wall-posters were placed between 1941 and 1943. There were attacks on the Jews in about 1/4<sup>th</sup> of all posters. It proved undoubtedly a peak in antisemitic propaganda in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 1941. The main message was the Jews were conspiring all over the world to exterminate the

Germans. The Nazis saw Jews everywhere in their enemies, as well in the Soviet Union as in the USA and in Great Britain.

In late June 1941, the German Task Forces killed increasing numbers of Jewish men in the east. From mid-August on, as well Jewish women and children, in the east. On 31 July 1941, Heydrich took a short document to Göring, who was formally in charge of Jewish policy, to sign. It gave Heydrich the power to make all necessary preparations in organisational, practical and material respects for a total solution of the Jewish question in the German sphere of influence in Europe.

In mid-August 1941, Hitler launched another diatribe against the Jews. Hitler's prophecy: 'if the Jews succeeded again in provoking a world war, they would have to pay the price in the east. Their last refuge could remain the USA, and there in the short or long run, they would one day have to pay too!'

In February to April 1941, Hitler sanctioned the deportation of 7,000 Jews from Vienna to the district of Lublin. This had been a request from Baldur von Shirach. Shirach's main aim was to obtain the Jewish houses and apartments to give them to non-Jewish homeless people.

In mid-August 1941, Hitler once more took up the idea of starting to deport Germany's remaining Jews to the east. On 18 September 1941, Himmler told Arthur Greiser, the Regional Leader of the *Wartheland*, Hitler wanted the Old Reich and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia to be emptied of Jews as soon as possible. Other Regional Leaders, such as Karl Kaufmann in Hamburg, were pressing for Jews to be evicted to make room for bombed-out German families.

On 18 September 1941, a decree of the German Reich Minister of Transport stated Jews were no longer allowed to use dining cars on trains, go on excursion coaches, or to travel by public transport on rush hours. Jews were denied coupons for shaving soap. There were additional bans on using buses, going to museums, buying flowers, owning fur coats, and woollen blankets, and even on sitting in deck chairs. Over 30 such restrictions on Jews were published. On 13 March 1942, the Reich Security Head Office ordered a white paper star of David to be pasted on the entrance of every dwelling inhabited by Jews. From May 1942 on, Jews were no longer allowed to hold pets. On 23 October 1942, Himmler ordered that Jews could no longer emigrate from the German *Reich*, or from any country occupied by German troops. This could only mean the Nazis wanted to eliminate all Jews in Germany itself. On 11 September 1941, the *Gestapo* ordered the dissolution of the Jewish Culture League. All remaining Jewish schools in the *Reich* had to be closed down.

The round-ups and deportations of the Jews began on 15 October 1941. The measure was personally approved by Hitler. The deported were deprived of their German nationality and their property was confiscated by the state. On 3 November 1941, 24 long trainloads of Jews rolled on with 10,000 Jews from Germany, 5,000 from Vienna, 5,000 Jews from the Protectorate, and 5,000 Gypsies from the rural Austrian territory of the Burgenland. The Jews were transported to Łódź. On 6 February 1942, a further 34 trainloads took Jews to Riga, Kovno and Minsk. Each deportee could take 50 kilograms of luggage and provisions for 3 to 5 days. The trains drove off by night. In January 1942, the order came for the Jews of

Dresden to be deported to the east too. The Jewish houses were visited and looted by the Gestapo. By October 1941, the deportation idea encompassed in principle the whole of Europe.

The Jews were at first being rounded up and confined in ghettos in the principal towns. On 6 September 1941, for example, 29,000 Jews were crammed into an area formerly housing 4,000 people. On 10 July 1940, the ghetto setup at Kovno, with a Jewish population of 18,000, was subjected to frequent, violent raids by German and Lithuanian forces searching for valuables. End October 1941, a ghetto was set up in Riga, holding 19,000 women and 11,000 men, because of already earlier major massacres of the local Jewish population. But on 20 November 1941 and 8 December 1941, 24,000 Jews were shot in Riga.

On 28 October 1941, at Kovno, Helmut Rauha, the head of the Jewish Department in the town, ordered with his assistants 27,000 Jewish inhabitants to separate those who could work from those who could not. 10,000 Jews could not. The next morning, these last were marched off on foot to Fort IX and shot in batches. On 5 December 1941, a ghetto was created in Yalra in an area of the city. On 17 December 1941, the ghetto was shut down and all the inhabitants killed. The ghettos were to be cleared for making way for the Jews whose expulsions Hitler was now repeatedly urging.

Himmler and Goebbels were often faced with severe food shortages in parts of the occupied areas of the *Reich*. They established then a hierarchy of food rationing, in which the Jews inevitably were at the bottom of the list. The Nazis definitely showed a genocidal mentality by then.

The mentally ill and handicapped were murdered, not for racial reasons, but for simple economic reasons.

By mid-October 1941, Jews from Germany were all being deported to the east. Jews from the rest of German-occupied Europe were to follow. No Jews were allowed to emigrate. All Europe's Jews were to be deported to the east. On 18 November 1941, Rosenberg said in a press conference the aim of the deportations was the biological extermination of the whole of Jewry in Europe.

In the *Reich Commissariat* of the Ukraine, 200,000 Jews were already killed end 1941, and in the end nearly half a million. But shooting the Jews would not provide a solution to the Jewish problem. So much became clear.

Specialists from the *T-4 Euthanasia Action* on 24 August 1941 – the action denounced by Bishop Clemens von Galen and then stopped – visited Lublin in September 1941. Also present were Viktor Brack and Philipp Bouhler, its two leading administrators. Also present was Albert Widmann, who had devised the standard gas chamber used in the killing programme. They visited Lublin, Minsk and Moghilev. The issue was how to kill as many Jews as possible in the shortest, most economic and efficient way possible. Their original idea discussed was to put people in an airtight van and piping exhaust fumes in it. Heydrich gave his approval to the idea. On 13 October 1941 then, Himmler met the Regional Police Chiefs Globocnik and Krüger, and agreed a camp should be built at Belzec to serve as base

for the gas vans. It would be a camp, created for the sole purpose of killing people! Specialists from the T-4 Operation were sent there the next month to prepare and lead the operation.

From that moment on, the inhabitants of the Polish ghettos were being systematically killed, to make space for the Jews taken from other parts of Europe.

A similar centre was set up at Chelmno in the *Wartheland*. Jewish prisoners from the Łódź ghetto would be taken out in vans to be gassed there. At Chelmno, 3 gas vans could kill 50 people at a time, to be driven at a distance of 16 km, asphyxiating the people along the way. Ditches were dug by other inmates. Some babies in the vans yet survived. German guards smashed their heads against nearby trees. Up to 1,000 people were thus killed each day, as well as 4,400 Gypsies in total. In all, 145,000 Jews were put to death from Chelmno. 7,000 Jews were murdered in the spring of 1944, when the camp briefly re-opened. The total number of Jews killed in the camp reached over 360,000 people.

One gas van was also sent to Serbia. General Franz Böhme reported in December 1941 that for 160 German soldiers killed and 278 wounded, in all between 20,000 and 30,000 Serbian civilians, male Jews and Gypsies, were killed. Till then, only men had been put in the gas vans. Böhme envisaged also killing over 7,000 Jewish women and children, 500 Jewish men and 292 Gypsy women and children. They were put in a camp at Sajmiste, across the river from Belgrade. The Gypsies were released. The lorry with the first 60 or so Jewish women were driven through Belgrade to the firing range of Avela on the other side, where the Jews were gassed. Their corpses were thrown in a mass grave by the Police. By May 1942, all the camp's Jewish inmates were killed. The leading SS officer in the country Serbia, declared in August 1942 Serbia was the only country in which the Jewish question had been completely solved.

The genocide and the ethnic cleansing on such a gigantic scale were an intrinsic part of the war and of the aims of the German leadership to implement their racial policies. The *Wehrmacht* soldiers believed they were part of a crusade to defend Germany from the threat by Bolshevism. This was their justification for their barbaric conduct of the war in the Russian territories they invaded. In the *Wehrmacht* served 18 million men in all. The German soldiers fought on to defend the *Reich*, to defend their family, home, prosperity and their culture.

For Germany's military allies, the meaning of the war was less clear, and thus morale far more difficult to uphold once the advance of the Axis troops stalled. After all, 690,000 non-German troops, mainly Rumanian, helped in the invasion of the Soviet Union. At Stalingrad, nearly 300,000 non-German Axis troops got caught in the Russian counter-offensives, as were the Italian troops. Most Italians did not want to fight in this war, but found themselves obliged to. The Red Army fought out of patriotism and Marxist-Leninist ideology. They fought a defensive war. They knew the war had to be fought and won lest their families would suffer terribly. For them, the war had real meaning.

By 1942, the alliance directed against the Axis powers was constituted of 26 nations.

The killing of Jews began in Poland, right after the German invasion of September 1939. The same happened in Soviet occupied Poland. As many as 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the Polish citizens deported to Siberia and to other remote areas of Soviet Russia, were Jewish. About 100,000 Jews died in the process. Conditions in Russian-occupied Poland deteriorated as of 1939 so rapidly, that the Jews who had fled from German-occupied territories to Soviet Russia, began going back to Poland. Due to the German-Soviet Pact of just before the German invasion, a majority of non-Poles, such as Ukrainians, Belarussians and Jews were mostly deported to far into the interior of the Soviet Union, in regions with the harshest of climates.

The Jews who had been living in Germany, about 1% of the population, suffered from growing Government discrimination, disposessions, violence from Nazi activists and other sufferings, so that half of them sought to emigrate. The Jews who did not have the money to escape and therefore could not but remain in Germany, were deprived of their livelihoods and their civil rights. They were removed from normal social interactions with Germans, and finally drafted into forced labour schemes. The Jews of Germany suffered as of end 1938 from a nation-wide programme of pogroms. Most of the synagogues in Germany were destroyed, thousands of Jewish shops were smashed, Jewish flats, apartments and houses were ransacked by the Nazi militia. Jews were arrested and thrown in concentration camps, in which they were beaten, maltreated and terrorised. The Jewish population were robbed of their last assets.

#### *Poland after the German invasion*

Poland in 1939, at the moment of the German invasion, contained the largest proportion of Jews living in any European state: about 3.5 million people or 10% of the global population of the country. About 350,000 Jews lived in Warsaw alone! Lodz housed 200,000 Jews. 85% of the Jews spoke Yiddish instead of Polish. If Poles were second-class citizens in the *General Government*, the centre part of occupied Poland, then the Jews scarcely qualified as human beings at all for the German occupiers. Fear and contempt had been instilled in the great majority of Germans by the incessant Nazi propaganda over the preceding years. The Jews had to live under growing Government discriminations, disposessions and periodic outburst of violence from the Nazi activists. Since the start of 1939, the Jews of Poland lived under permanent pogrom-like threats.

Most Polish Jews wore beards and sidelocks on religious grounds. The *Hassidim* wore the traditional black clothes of the Russian peasant class. They were mostly small traders, shopkeepers, artisans, and wage labourers. Less than 10% were professionals of the middle class. In 1934, more than 25% had lived off benefits. About 2 million Jews lived in areas occupied since 1939 by Germany. More than 350,000 Jews had fled to the eastern parts of Poland, to Lithuania and Hungary. They were the *Ostjuden*, eastern Jews. In addition, in October 1938, 18,000 Polish Jews had been forcibly expelled from Germany across the Polish border, and then in June of 1939, 2,000 more.

From the very beginning of the occupation of Poland, and later in Russia, SS Security Task Forces entered the country, rounding up the politically undesirable people, shooting them or

sending them to concentration camps. The Task forces massacred Jews indiscriminately, arresting men and sending them off to Germany as forced labourers. They engaged in a systematic policy of ethnic cleansing and brutally executed population transfers. Arrests, beatings, and murders of Poles and Jews became commonplace.

The possessions of Poles and Jews alike were available for looting. The theft of Jewish property was universal. Hitler declared Poland was to be totally destroyed. Its academically educated and professional classes had to be annihilated, its population reduced to the status of uneducated slaves, whose lives were worth close to nothing. The popular German hatred for Poles, Ukrainians, eastern Jews, Belarussians and Russians too, were deeply rooted in Germany. The German people considered Poles and Russians a backward, primitive and uneducated people. They would soon learn that these people could fight. Moreover, toughness and brutality, the indiscriminate use of force, the virtues of violence, had been inculcated in the young Germans since 1933. It was this younger generation of German soldiers, whose behaviour was the most brutal and violent against the Jews and the Slavs.

The German invaders unleashed terrible terror against the Polish Jews. Particularly active in attacks on Jews was the *Special SS Security Service Task Force* under Udo von Woyrsch. His men indiscriminately shot the Jews they remarked in the streets. The terror had as aim to force the Jews to emigrate, to flee to the east. Mass shootings took place all over the land. Were not the Jews but a dreadful rabble, filthy and sly? Even SS officers manhandled Jews in the street, roughly cutting off their beards. They perpetrated acts of sheer sadism. The Germans now felt nothing but hatred and contempt for the Jewish people. In Poland, robberies, shootings, open humiliations of Jews by German troops happened on a daily basis.

For instance, in Zamósc, German Army officers stole cash and jewels from Jewish houses. They used violence. They ordered Jews to sweep the streets, to clean the public latrines, to fill the street trenches. They forced half an hour of exhaustive gymnastics on the Jews, which could prove fatal for elderly people. The town synagogue was burnt down on 14 November 1939. As from early December 1939 on, it became obligatory in all Poland to wear a 10 cm large David Star on the right chest and on the right shoulder of every Polish Jew. From 22 December 1939, in Zamósc, all Jews of over 10 years old had to wear a yellow David Star on their sleeve. Shops had to display signs they were Jewish or not. Soldiers compelled the Jews to eat pork. Some even cut the David Star into their forehead with knives.

Robberies, shootings, humiliations of Jews by German troops and SS men happened on a daily basis everywhere in Poland. The rape of Polish and Jewish women was common. Bribery and corruption spread. Elsewhere in the country, about 50,000 Polish prisoners of war had been classified as Jewish. These were starved and maltreated, so that already by spring about 25,000 of them had died. Jews were obliged to take their hats off when Germans passed by, and they had to stand to attention until the Germans had passed.

On 13 September 1939, the Quartermaster General of the Army Supreme Command ordered Army Group South to deport all Jews of the eastern part of Upper Silesia into the regions that were shortly to be occupied by the Red Army. On 21 September 1939, Hitler ordered a deportation plan for longer than the next 12 months. All Jews were to be deported from the incorporated countries, along with 30,000 Gypsies and Jews from Prague and Vienna and from other parts of the *Reich* and of the Protectorate of Moravia and Bohemia. In charge of

this operation was the *Head of the SS Central Office for Jewish Emigration* in Prague, *Die Zentralstelle für Jüdische Auswanderung*, a man called Adolf Eichmann. The transit centre for the operation was Nisko on the River San. On 28 September, Heinrich Himmler and Soviet Union representatives signed for the transfer of ethnic Germans from the occupied regions. The large Jewish reservation for this was set up in the Nisko area. The SS ordered these to disband in 1940, and for the Jews to find their own way home. Eichmann was promoted to Head of the department IVD4 of the *Reich Security Office*, in overall charge of evacuation and resettlement.

In February and March of 1940, the entire Jewish community of Stettin in Germany, about 1,000 Jews, were deported on Heydrich's orders. One third of them died of hunger, cold and exhaustion en route. In 1939, 1940 and the 4 first months of 1941, 63,000 German Jews were deported into the *General Government*. Among these, 3,000 Jews had come from the Alsace Region, 6,000 from Baden and the Saar Region, 280 from Luxemburg.

The Regional Leader of the *Wartheland*, Arthur Geiser, concentrated all the Jews in the Land in a closed ghetto of Lodz. The ghetto was filled on 30 April to 1 May 1940. It sealed off 162,000 of the city's original Polish population of 220,000. The ghetto contained over 30,000 dwellings, without running water and without connection to any sewage system.

Hitler envisaged the concentration of all remaining German Jews thus into ghettos located in the main Polish cities. The first such ghetto in the *Central Government* was at Radomski in December 1939.

The Warsaw ghetto was built in the summer of 1940. In it played scenes of terrifying brutality. The ghettos had walls of 3 metres high, and barbed wire on top, of the walls. Motorised and mounted police patrols guarded the streets and the walls around. Traffic from and to the ghetto was regulated at 15 checkpoints. The leader of the ghetto was one Adam Czernia, age mid-60. The SS arrested him on 4 November 1940 and again in April of 1941. They tortured and humiliated him. In the Warsaw ghetto lived about one third of the population of Warsaw. But the ghetto was only 2.4% of the surface of Warsaw! About 445,000 people had been crammed into an area of 400 hectares. About 15 people per apartment, 6 to 7 people in one room. Fuel was scarce, the winters very hard. The yearly death rate of the Warsaw Jews had been 1 in 1,000 in 1939. This grew to 10.7 per 1,000 in 1941. In 1940, the figures were 43.3 in Lodz in 1940 and 75.9 in 1941. Children were particularly vulnerable. Orphaned children roamed in the streets.

On 20 September 1939, Reinhard Heydrich ordered each ghetto had to be run by a Council of Jewish men, headed by an Elder. For Lodz, this Elder was Chaim Rumkowski, a man over 70 years old.

In the spring of 1941, typhus spread in the Warsaw ghetto. By autumn 1941, there were 900 typhus cases a day in the ghetto and 6,000 more Jews lay ill in their homes. Tuberculosis spread as fast. During the existence of the Warsaw ghetto, 140,000 people died of such illnesses. Moreover, food was scarce and starvation widespread. People fought over scraps, pieces of bread. The black market thrived and money went from inside the ghetto to the outside. Only 11,000 Jewish people in all survived the war in Warsaw. German officials, soldiers, police and SS men frequently walked into the ghetto and beat and clubbed the Jews they encountered at will. The highpoint of sadism was when the German *Strength through*



*Joy* organisation organised so-called tourist visits to the Warsaw ghetto, to show how the Jews lived in Poland.

### *Atrocities in occupied Poland*

On 22 September 1939, an SS Unit of from 500 to 600 men, founded in Danzig by Kurt Eimann, killed 2,000 mental patients at Conradstein (Kocborowo) in occupied Poland. Officers shot the handicapped in the neck. Other, many such patients from Silberhammer (Srebyzck), Mewe (Gniew), Riesenburg (Probuty), were taken to Conradstein for execution. Handicapped people from Schwete (Swicie), Konitz (Choynice), were thus killed by German squads. The same happened with patients from Stralsund, Treptow an der Rege, Lauenburg and Uckermünde. These were taken to Neustadt in West Russia (Wegherowo) and shot. In the *Wartheland*, Gestapo men took patients to a fort of their local headquarters and killed the handicapped by carbon monoxide gas, released from canisters. Later, more such murders took place in the fort. In January of 1940, 7,000 inmates of psychiatric institutions were thus killed by gas asphyxiation.

Mobile gas wagons were used in May and June of 1940 to kill about 1,550 Germans and 300 Poles under the command of Herbert Lange. Many more hundreds of patients were killed. In all, about 12,000 patients were thus killed by Eimann, Lange and others. The reasons for these killings were purely ideological. Hitler was convinced ‘degenerates’, as he called them, should be eliminated from the chain of heredity.

In Poland, General Vladislav Sikorski was the Commander in Chief of the remaining Polish armed forces and the Prime Minister of Poland. He had 19,000 exiled Polish soldiers and airmen with him. From 1942 on, 40,000 Polish troops under General Vladislav Anders fought alongside the British in North Africa, and later on with the other Allies in Italy. He was a virulent anti-Soviet leader, though. In February of 1945, at the *Yalta Conference*, it was decided Poland should be assigned a post-war Soviet influence. This meant a basic betrayal for most of the Poles. For them and thus, the war had ended in a national disaster.

### *The Holocaust proper*

Already some time before the *Wannsee Conference*, Himmler had appointed Odilo Globocnik, the SS and Police Leader in Lublin, to organise the systematic killing of the Jews in the *General Government*. The ghettos would have to be emptied to make room for Jewish deportees from the West. Globocnik was to set up a series of camps to achieve his aim in the *Reinhard Action*. There were three *Reinhard Action* camps, all built at remote sites west of the river Bug: Sobibor, Majdanek, and Belzec. These camps had good railway connections, and lay within relatively easy reach of the major ghettos.

Globocnik was an Austrian Nazi. He had been the Regional Leader of Vienna after the annexation. In January 1939, he was reduced to the ranks for speculating in foreign currency. The following November, Himmler appointed him to Lublin.

In July 1941, a huge labour camp was built at Majdanek. Globocnik recruited a large number of people of the *T-4 Action*, including Christian Wirth. In each of the camps built by Globocnik, 20 to 30 SS-men were employed. The men continued to be paid by the headquarters of the Euthanasia Programme of the Chancellery of the Führer in Berlin. All of the men were officers or NCOs. Their basic manpower were Ukrainian auxiliaries, many drafted from the POW camps. These, then called *Reinhard Action camps*, had been set up to kill the Jews of Poland.

Auschwitz was set up to also kill the Jews brought in from the rest of occupied Europe. From Germany, Bohemia and Moravia, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and other countries.

Belzec had been built on 1 November 1941, on the site of an existing labour camp. Exhaust gases from cars were used to kill the Jews. Belzec received its first on 17 March 1942. In 4 weeks, 75,000 Jews were put to death, including 30,000 of the 37,000 of the Lublin Ghetto, and from other *General Government* sites such as Zamosc and Piaski. Then, 2,500 Jews were taken from Zamosc. They were executed in shootings. The houses of the victims were looted. The German Police ordered the local Jewish Council to pay for the ammunition used in the massacre.

The gas chambers at Belzec were designed to look like showers. The rooms were but crude constructions. Wirth, in June 1942 replaced the wooden gas chambers with a concrete construction of 6 gas chambers with a total capacity of 2,000 people. They were in operation by mid-July.

Sobibor was the second of the *Reinhard Action* camps, built near the village of Sobibor. It was constructed in March 1942. About 100 people could be put in each gas chamber. The exhaust fumes were piped in from the outside. It had been built in imitation of Belzec. A narrow-gauge tramway went from the railway to the pits in which the bodies of people who had died on the journey were thrown. Some SS-men trained a dog to bite the naked Jews, increasing their panic. Within the first months, nearly 100,000 Jews from Lublin, Austria, Bohemia and Moravia and Germany were killed there.

The wells at Sobibor had been contaminated, probably from the corpses thrown together near the water supplies. A large pit was therefore made, wood put in it, the corpses dug out and cremated over grilles. The cremation was done by a Jewish special detachment, whose members were afterwards put to death themselves.

Transport of Jews resumed in October 1942, and lasted till early May 1943. One transport of 5,000 arrived at Majdanek, but the gas chambers had broken down. 200 Jews died in the night from exhaustion, beatings, and shootings by the SS. Another transport arrived in June 1943. All the people from Lvov arrived naked. They had a long journey. 25 out of 55 freight cars contained nothing but corpses of people died of hunger or thirst. Some of them had been dead for as long as a fortnight by the time they arrived.

Jewellery, valuables, gold extracted from the teeth fillings of the dead, etc. were sent to a central sorting office in Berlin. Gold was melted down into bars for the *Reichsbank*.

Jewellery was exchanged in occupied or neutral countries for industrial diamonds, needed for

German arms factories. Collection and delivery were organised by Pohl's Economy and Administration Head Office. Furniture, clothing, crockery, etc, was confiscated in an organisation led by Rosenberg's office. The total volume of Jewish possessions confiscated in the *Reinhard Action* up to 15 December 1943, was about 180 million Reichsmark.

At Sobibor were killed 25,000 victims. Early 1943, Himmler visited Sobibor. He saw a gassing in action. He gave promotions to 28 SS and Police officers present. Then, he ordered preparations to be made for the closure of the camps, once the final batches of victims had been killed. The camp was to be transformed into a storage depot for ammunition captured from the Red Army.

A few battle-hardened Soviet POWs managed to escape from the camp. On 14 October 1943, some of the camps' personnel and Ukrainian auxiliaries were drawn into the workshops, and killed. The prisoners made a masse escape for the main gate. The Ukrainian guards shot on them with automatic weapons, killing many. Still, about 300 of the 600 inmates escaped. Those who did not were shot the next day. 100 escapees were caught and killed immediately. Shortly afterwards, the camp was dismantled. The buildings were razed, trees planted, a farm built on the site. When the work was done, the Jews were shot and burnt. After December 1943, no one was left in the camp. All traces had disappeared.

Treblinka was the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the *Reinhard Action* camps. It lay north-east of Warsaw. A single-track railway led to an old quarry from the railway station at Malkinia on the railway-line Warsaw-Bialystok, on which lay Treblinka. Construction began in June 1942, overseen by Richard Thomalla, the SS-officer who had also built Sobibor. Thomalla improved on Belzec and Sobibor. It had a railway track and station. The naked Jews had to go through an alleyway to a carefully concealed brick building with 3 gas chambers. Fumes were chased in from 3 Diesel engines, through a system of pipes. Behind the building lay the burial ditches. A narrow-gauge railway led to the ditches for easier transport of the victims. By end August, 312,000 Jews had been gassed at Treblinka. They had been brought in from Warsaw, Radon, and Lublin, in about 2 months. Commander of the camp was Irmfried Eberl, an Austrian doctor. The transport trains were unventilated, the wagons provided no water, and had no sanitation provisions. Thousands died en route in the hot weather. SS soldiers, Germans and Ukrainians, stood on the barrack roofs and fired in the crowds. The gas chambers there frequently broke down.

There were rumours of orgies staged in the camp. Globocnik and Wirth heard of the chaos of orgies organised by the guards. They paid Eberl a surprise inspection, and dismissed him on the spot. In early September, Wirth transferred the command to Franz Stangl, the commandant of Sobibor. He streamlined the operations, and re-established order. But scenes of sadism and violence continued at Treblinka. Jewish work details were beaten, later shot in the camp.

In December 1942, the first cremations took place at Chelmno and Belzec, then in April at Treblinka. By late July 1943, no less than 700,000 corpses had been dug up and incinerated. Then, there were fewer transports to Treblinka. In the camp took place a revolt. About 350 to 400 men were killed by the SS guards. Only about 100 men disappeared in the nearby woods. Globocnik then told Stangl the camp was to be closed. He was transferred to Trieste, to organise the suppression of partisans there.

The SS then set up an operation cynically called *Harvest Festival* to shoot all the remaining inmates near trenches. The shootings were organised at Majdanek, Travniki and Poniatowa, smaller camps. The murders continued from 06h00 in the morning to 17h00 in the afternoon. 18,000 Jews were murdered on one day. *Operation Harvest Festival* killed in all 42,000 Jews.

The *Reinhard Action* camps were emptied and then destroyed. No trace was left of the *Reinhard Action* Camps and its victims. The number of Jews killed in these *Reinhard Action* Camps was 1.25 million Jews. Modern estimates of Jews killed at Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka amount to about 1,700,000 Jews. Other extermination camps had been built at Stutthof, near Danzig, in September 1930 and in Natzweiler in the Alsace, as of June 1940, at Gross-Rosen in Silesia, in August 1940 and then also at Auschwitz, Oswiecim in Polish, in April 1940.

### Auschwitz

Auschwitz was the largest mass killing centre in the history of the world. It was larger than Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka. The commander of the camp at Auschwitz was Rudolf Höss. Höss was a former Free Corps Fighter, and a camp officer in Dachau and Sachsenhausen. The first prisoners entered this camp in June 1940. Auschwitz was a permanent centre for the Polish political prisoners. About 10,000 of these had been brought to the camp.

On 26 September 1941, Himmler ordered a vast new camp at Birkenau (Brzezinka) at 2 km from the Auschwitz camp, to house Soviet POWs and use them for labour projects. Up to 200,000 men were to be imprisoned there. Höss received 10,000 Soviet POWs to build Birkenau, but they were too weak. They were badly fed, so cases of cannibalism happened here, too! By following spring, only a few hundred prisoners were still alive. The others had died from hunger and cold.

Auschwitz was built as one of a pair. The other camp was Majdanek. The project did not go well at first, to under 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the projected extent. Instead of the planned 50,000 Soviet prisoners called in, only 2,000 arrived to construct the camp. There were not only POWs in the camp, also members of the Polish resistance, hostages, deportees, sick prisoners, all transported from other camps to here. The employment of Jews was treated mainly as a means of killing them for work of long hours at exhausting tasks.

At Auschwitz, in March 1941, there were 700 SS guards in the camp, and 2,000 by June 1942. Over the period of the camp's existence 7,000 SS men worked there at one time or other. Nearby had been built a gigantic I.G. Farben chemical plant, at Monowitz. It was a single complex of a residential area, a factory, a labour camp, plus an extermination centre.

Between 1.1 million and 1.5 million people were killed at Auschwitz. About 96% of them were Jews. The figures of the people killed were: from Poland 300,000 Jews, from Austria 1,600, from France 69,000, from Belgium 25,000, from the Netherlands: 60,000, from Germany 23,000, from Greece 55,000, from Croatia 10,000, from Italy 6,000, from Bohemia and Moravia 46,000, from Belarus 6,000 and from Norway 700. In a later stage were killed Hungarian Jews: 394,000, of non-Jewish Poles: 70,000, Gypsies: 21,000, and Soviet prisoners of war or POWs, in all 15,000 persons, and 15,000 other, various people.

Jews selected for work, received a number tattooed on their forearm, on about 400,000 people, half of the Jewish. Half of the people who worked died from malnutrition, disease, exhaustion or hypothermia.

Rudolf Höss remained an antisemitic to the end. He had a wife and 5 children. He was known for his bad temper.

### Majdanek

The camp of Majdanek had been set up with 7 gas chambers built, but only 3 were in use by September 1942. About 50,000 people were killed by exhaust fumes in the next months. In all, about 180,000 people were killed at this Majdanek camp, of which 120,000 were Jews. There was a continued maladministration problem at Majdanek. Two of its commanders, Karl Otto Koch and Hermann Florstedt stole on a massive scale, and neglected their administrative duties. Naked terror reigned in the camp. They went too far for even the *Reich Security Head Office*, were arrested and executed. Their successor was Max Koegel. He was not much better. The guards at Majdanek were mostly Croats and Rumanians, difficult to control, and very cruel men. Majdanek was unstable, badly run, an inefficient camp.

### Zyklon B

In July 1941, a team of prisoners and SS guards were disinfecting clothes and bedding with a chemical pesticide called *Zyklon-B*. Its main constituent was hydrogen cyanide. Its killing power was discovered when a cat strayed in and was rapidly killed.

In early September 1941, the gas was tried on 600 prisoners of war, classified as fanatical Communists, and on 250 sick inmates of Auschwitz. These were taken to Block 11 and gassed. Later in the month the gas was tried on 900 Red Army prisoners. The prisoners died. On Eichmann's next visit to the camp, it was decided to use the gas in a systematic way. The gas was more effective than the CO<sub>2</sub> exhaust gases, as the gas was brought in as hard crystals, which simply evaporated, and no engines were necessary anymore to form a gas. Deaths happened faster.

The camp morgue was set up close to the main administration building: screams in the gas chambers could be heard by the personnel. So, Höss decided the killings should take place at Birkenau. The first victims of Zyklon-B were killed on 20 March 1942. Originally, two bunkers with a capacity of 800 and 1,200 people were built at Birkenau. Over 1942 and 1943, the facilities were extended and refined. Four crematoria: I, II, III and IV were installed. The 2 early gas chambers were closed down in July 1943. One was destroyed, the other held in reserve. New crematoria were built at some distance from the barracks, disguised by trees and shrubs. The new gas chambers were completed between March and June 1943.

Pellets of Zyklon-B were thrown in the room with the naked prisoners, through 4 openings into wire-mesh columns. The pellets released cyanide gas. After 20 minutes, the canisters were pulled up again to remove the possibility of more gas escaping. A special detachment of Jewish

prisoners then dragged the corpses out, after ventilation. Gold teeth and fillings were taken, women's hair cut off, gold rings removed, spectacles, prosthetic limbs, etc. assembled. The bodies were brought to the crematorium room on the ground floor. Incinerating ovens were there, in which the bodies were reduced to ashes. The ashes were used as fertilizer or thrown away in woods and streams.

The facilities were designed and supplied by the firm Topf and Sons of Erfurt, patented by their inventor engineer Kurt Prüfer. He came often to Auschwitz. From September 1942 onwards, the SS under command of Paul Blobel began to dig up corpses of earlier eliminations, to burn them on metal grilles laid over ditches (such as in the *Reinhard Action* Camps). This all was an attempt to conceal all traces of the murders for posterity!

The Special Detachments who brought the corpses to the crematoria, were killed at regular intervals, to be replaced by other young, able-bodied prisoners. By 1944, SS Camp Guards had once more killed 200 members of the Special Detachments, when 300 men attacked the SS-men as they approached Crematorium IV. All were killed. Some 250 Special Detachment prisoners were murdered over the next 3 days.

In March 1942, the first transports to arrive at Auschwitz were from Slovakia and France. French, Slovakian, Polish, Belgian, Dutch Jews were killed there. Himmler visited on 17 and 18 July 1942.

From July 1942 on arrived German Jews, Viennese Jews, and in Nov-December Jews from Berlin. Then from Rumania, Croatia, Finland, Norway, Bulgaria, Italy, Hungary, Serbia, Denmark, Southern France.

### Theresienstadt

Most of the Jews were directly brought in to Auschwitz. Some came from a special camp set up in the Czech town of Terezin, or Theresienstadt. This was the place where the central prison of the *Gestapo* in the Protectorate had been established. The camp was built in November 1941 and the first 10,000 Jews arrived in January 1942. It was organised as a ghetto, with a Jewish Council under the elder Zionist Jakob Edelstein. It developed a wide range of cultural and sporting activities, a welfare system and it functioned as a model ghetto. Organiser was a German-Jewish actor, Kurt Gerron. On 18 October 1944 happened the last transport to leave the camp, Gerron too was gassed. Conditions in the camp were poor and deteriorated as time went on. From July 1942 on entered trainloads of elderly Jews. The total of Jews who died in this camp stood at about 58,000.

On 8 September 1943, 18,000 inmates of Theresienstadt were taken to Auschwitz. They lived in a 'family camp', designed to impress visitors. It was closed down after 6 months, and all prisoners taken to the gas chambers. In October 1944, 12 transports left Theresienstadt for Auschwitz, leaving only 11,000 people in the camp. By mid-September, there were again 30,000 people in the camp. These had come from Slovakia, the Czech lands, and Germany, as many were of mixed race. In all, about 170,000 people had been transported to Theresienstadt, of which less than 17,000 were left alive by the end of the war.

### *The ghettos*

The ghettos were desperately overcrowded, deprived of proper sanitation, and rife with disease. They could be called huge concentration camps under the *Third Reich*.

#### The Warsaw Ghetto

In 1942, thousands of Polish Jews had been gathered in the Warsaw ghetto. On 21 July 1942, the SS told the Elder Adam Czerniakov of the ghetto of Warsaw officially all the Jews would be deported, in consignments of 6,000 per day. Children included. Czerniakov refused to sign and swallowed a cyanide tablet. Doubts about him in the ghetto on where his loyalty lay, were immediately quelled. By 12 September 1942, more than 253,000 inhabitants of the ghetto had been taken to Treblinka and were gassed. In November 1942, only 36,000 Jews were left in the Warsaw ghetto, all engaged in labour schemes of one kind or other.

The Jews had been terrorised into passivity by the extreme violence of the Germans. The German authorities convinced the Jews selected for deportations they were merely being moved to another ghetto nor to another camp. The vast majority of the Jews were too weakened by prolonged hunger, privation and disease.

On 18 January 1943, insurgents suddenly attacked the German guards accompanying a deportation column. The deportees escaped. On 16 February 1943, Himmler ordered the total liquidation of the ghetto. The SS marched in for a final roundup on 19 April 1943. Bitter street-fights ensued. On 23 April 1943, Himmler ordered Jürgen Stroop, the SS officer in charge of putting down the revolt, to proceed with the greatest harshness, ruthlessness, and toughness. The great majority of the insurgent Jews were killed.

On 16 May 1943, Stroop blew up the main synagogue in the ghetto. This formed the end of the action. In all, 7,000 Jews were killed, 6,000 died as buildings were burnt down or blown up. The rest of the ghetto Jews was taken to Treblinka, to be gassed. A substantial number of Jews survived for a time in hiding, protected by Poles.

#### The Łódź Ghetto

143,000 Jews were living there in autumn 1941. In October 1941, 2,000 Jews were added from small towns nearby, and 5,000 Gypsies.

On 6 December 1941, the gas chambers of Chelmno had begun operation. On 12 January 1942, the Jews and Gypsies were deported. 10,000 Jews were killed in the gas vans of Chelmno. On 2 April 1942, another 34,000 people were taken away and murdered. In May 1942, 55,000 more people were exterminated, including over 10,000 Jews who had been deported to Łódź from the west. By mid-1942, the ghetto population reached well over 100,000. Hospital patients were taken out and gassed at Chelmno. Many were shot.

On 21 July 1943, Himmler ordered the liquidation of all the remaining ghettos in the *Reich*. At the Minsk ghetto, 26,000 inhabitants were killed, and 9,000 more were murdered by the end of the year. The final liquidation of the ghettos began on 15 August of 1943. The Jews fought in the ghetto for 5 days. Globocnik sent in tanks, and burnt all the buildings to the ground.

In the summer 1944, the Łódź ghetto was the last to be closed down. From mid-July 1944, the Germans ordered deportations to Chelmno. From 3 August 1944 on, 5,000 Jews were ordered to assemble at the railway station each day. The Ghetto Elder Chaim Rumkowski was sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau and gassed. By end July 1944, of the 70,000 Jews still living in Łódź, only 877 survived, charged with the task of cleaning up.

Lvov: 40,000 Jews were taken from a labour camp in mid-August 1942, and gassed in Belzec. In early 1943, the ghetto was closed down. Only 3,400 out of 160,000 persons survived the war.

Vilna: the roundups of Jews by the Germans began in April 1943. Most of the remaining 20,000 inhabitants were taken or killed in Sobibor. Before that, on 28 October 1941, all Jews had to assemble in the central square of the ghetto of the town. About 10,000 Jews had to stay, 17,000 more could return home. The about 10,000 Jews were brought to Kaunas Fort IX, and executed by shooting. Among these were 2007 Jewish men, 2920 women and 4273 children, in total 9,200 people killed. The executioner was one Helmut Rauca in this later called Great Action of Vilna. Rauca was an accomplice of SS *Obersturmführer* Joachim Hamann. The operation was supposed to solve the overcrowding in the Vilna ghetto.

All in all, over 90% of Poland's 3.3 million Jews had been killed by January 1945. More than 3 million Jews had been murdered in the extermination camps, 700,000 killed in mobile gas vans, 1.3 million were shot by the SS Task Forces, allied forces or auxiliary militias. At least 5.5 million Jews were killed by the Nazis and their allies. A more probable total may be about 6 million Jews killed in the Holocaust.

### *The German Jews*

In September 1939, there were still 207,000 Jews living in Germany. They were separated from German society overall. The Nazis ordered all Jewish men of from 15 to 55 and all Jewish women from 15 to 50 to register for labour. By October 1940, 40,000 Jews were working on forced labour schemes, most in the war-related industries. The Jews in Germany concentrated in Berlin. The *Jewish Culture League* still existed and published books and periodicals for them. The general interests of the Jewish community in the *Third Reich* were represented by the *Reich Association of Jews*. This organisation dispensed charity, organised education and apprenticeships for the young, arranged for emigration and found jobs where possible. Its funds depleted rapidly.

In 1940, only about 15,000 German Jews found refuge in a neutral country. On Vatican visas, 1,000 Jews moved to Brazil. Japan transit visas were given to 10,000 Jews, allowing them to reach Canada or the USA and other American countries. About 25,000 Jews fled to Shanghai over Hungary or the Scandinavian countries, then took the Trans-Siberian railway and then embarked on ships to the Americas.

In Germany, the Jews were continually harassed. No ghettos as such were set up inside the *Reich*. Jews were evicted from their houses and then moved into special Jewish houses,



defined by the state. This was based on a law of 1940, which allowed landlords to evict Jewish tenants if alternative accommodation was available. The Jews were sent to disused barracks and the like.

The Nazi administration had created about 38 residence camps after the outbreak of the war. The Nazis confiscated all radio sets and telephone sets from the Jews. Jews received no ration cards. Other Police Regulations and decrees made life very difficult for the Jews. The police subjected them to a curfew and placed severe restrictions on shopping hours. All Jewish-owned shops had gone. Jews were only allowed to buy in Aryan-owned shops, at particular hours. They got much lower rations for food and clothing and were banned from some luxury food items such as chocolate. In October 1939 already, by a decree issued by Himmler, any Jew who contravened any regulation, or failed to obey any instruction or who showed resistance to the state, was to be arrested and put in a concentration camp. In the spring of 1941, Himmler announced that any Jew placed in a concentration camp was to remain imprisoned there for the duration of the war.

The deportations of the Jews of Germany continued. In October 1940, on Hitler's orders, Jews living in Baden, the Saarland and the Palatinate were to be deported. A women's concentration camp was at Ravensbrück.

A same action had already been ordained in July for the Jews of Alsace-Lorraine. These Nazi Party districts were to be made entirely Jew-free. The Jews from Vienna and the Reich Protectorate of Austria were ordered to Nisko.

Mixed-race people could not work in state-funded jobs, as in school-teaching, etc. If such people practised the Jewish religion, they were now considered as being fully Jewish. A Jew married to a non-Jew could escape the antisemitic rules if the children were not brought up in the Jewish faith. Special taxes were levied on the Jews.

The measures of harassing applied also to Gypsies, in often ridicule ways. For instance, to mixed-race Gypsies, fortune-telling was henceforth forbidden. High numbers of Gypsies were deported to the *General Government* of Poland. The Gypsies were drawn into forced-labour schemes. Since the beginning of the war, the life of the Gypsies too knew drastic deterioration.

## The Jews of North Africa

About 50,000 Jews lived in Tunisia. Under the German occupation, their homes were raided, their property confiscated, their valuables stolen. Up to 4,000 young Jews were sent to labour camps near the front line. Tunisian Jewish women were raped by the German soldiers. The *Gestapo* Chief in Tunis was Walter Rauff.

The situation of the Jews in the French Vichy colonies of Morocco and Algiers was little better. About 1,500 Jews were serving in the French Foreign Legion. Now, they were imprisoned in labour camps, of which there were near one hundred in North Africa. They worked with along them internees from Poland, Greece and Czechoslovakia, forced to work on the new trans-Sahara railway. The conditions under which they had to work were very

harsh and brutal. More than 5,000 North African Jews died under the Axis occupation, 1% of the total.

### The Nazi War Production. The Simplification Schemes. Todt, Speer and Hitler

The Minister of Armaments, Fritz Todt, had already concluded during the Battle of Moscow in November to December 1941, that the war could not be won. British and US industrial resources were much stronger than Germany's, and the Soviet industry was producing better equipment on a larger scale. The German supplies were running short. Hitler wouldn't really listen to the warnings.

On 3 December 1941, Hitler issued an order for the simplification and increased efficiency in armaments production, and to bring about mass production on modern principles. Fritz Todt reorganised his departments of production under 5 principal Committees: for ammunition, weapons, tanks, engineering, and equipment. He installed an advisory committee with industrialists and air-force representatives. In February 1942, Todt was on visit at Rastenburg, Hitler's headquarters. He cautioned Hitler that the situation remained serious if not critical. Todt was killed in an air crash on his return from this visit from Rastenburg. Albert Speer was to succeed on Todt in all his capacities.

On 21 March 1942, a Hitler decree was published, ordering that all aspects of the economy had to be subordinated to arms production, the effort headed by himself. Albert Speer was Hitler's own man, his personal friend, and perhaps his only friend. Speer had, on his own admission, fallen totally under Hitler's spell. He would do unquestioningly anything Hitler wanted. At that time, General Georg Thomas was the Chief of Procurement at the Combined Armed Forces Supreme Command. And General Friedrich Fromm commanded the reserve army at home, responsible for the army's armaments supplies. In early 1942, German manpower reserves were being exhausted, and oil supplies were running short, leading to a critical situation in Germany's arms procurement and production. The situation seemed hopeless!

On 17 November 1941, Ernst Udet, the Head of the Procurement Organisation for the German *Luftwaffe* shot himself after failing repeatedly to convince Hitler and Göring that aircraft production in England and America was growing so fast that German airplanes would face overwhelming, impossible odds within a few months. In January 1942, also, Walter Borlet, the head of a major arms manufacturing concern shot himself, convinced he could never deliver what Hitler demanded, and that the war could not be won.

The British were out-producing the Germans in tanks and other weapons. The reason for that was that the German manufactories had been focusing on complex weaponry, which brought higher profits to businesses than cheap mass production. Yet, it was not so much quality as quantities the German armies needed! On July 1941, Hitler therefore ordered the construction of a new battle fleet for the high seas, a fourfold increase in the air force planes, and the expansion of the number of motorised divisions in the army to 36 divisions. Speer thought the war could still be won. He had a blind faith in Hitler's powers. Speer was not a technocrat, after all. He was a believer.

Advantages of Speer were that he could count on the support of Hitler, and that he had good relations with key figures in the Nazi hierarchy. Field Marshal Erhard Milch, the State Secretary in the Air ministry, was Göring's man, but in practice Milch was more willing to work with Speer. Speer began to eliminate overlaps in arms production between the 3 arms services. He subordinated the leading producers directly to himself, giving them a degree of delegated responsibility in improving the production methods. He fought against excessive bureaucracy and introduced streamlined methods of mass production. This, effective over the entire armaments production, went a good way to improve productivity.

As a result, Speer realised a significant result in production in every area, within 6 months. The 1941 average production index figure of 98 grew to 322 in July 1944! Speer trumpeted the virtues of nationalisation. He wanted standard parts on everything built. He thus reduced the time to build a U-boat from 42 weeks to 16. He implemented a new system of fixed-price contracts, already introduced by Todt in January 1941. Speer terminated contracts for new industrial facilities. He introduced a drastic concentration and simplification of the production of arms. He wanted less different firms producing the same thing, so that varieties in pieces diminished!

Just one example; when Speer found 5 out of 117 manufacturers in Germany were producing 90% of the carpets made, he closed down all the other. Aircraft factories had demanded 4 times the amount of aluminium per aircraft than was actually needed. He tied the allocation of raw materials to the production targets. He worked together with Hans Kehrl, the leading official of the Reich Economics Ministry.

Speer appointed Savings Engineers to advise firms on how to use steel and other raw materials more efficiently. Due to such ameliorations in the organisation, Speer could claim in May 1943 less than half iron and steel was necessary to produce a ton of armaments than had been used in 1941! For instance, at the end of 1944, each ton of steel was being used to produce 5 times the quantity of munitions than in 1941. More coal was obtained to boost steel output to 2.7 million tons a month. Arms production as a whole doubled in Speer's first year of office!

A rationalisation programme in aircraft production by Erhard Milch and the Air Ministry doubled the monthly output of aircraft, in a small number of very large factories. Speer and Milch sacrificed the development of new advanced fighters to the mass production of huge numbers of existing models. They scrapped the Me 210, bring more Me 109 off the production lines. They diminished the number of models of combat aircraft in production from 42 to 30, then to 9 and finally to 5. For models of tanks and armoured vehicles, Speer slashed them from 18 to 7, and 12 models of anti-tank weapons were reduced 12 to 1. More than 152 types of lorries Speer cut down to 23. Such harsh German rationalisation was achieved in some areas at the cost of quality.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding Speer's genius efforts at rationalisation, Todt's efficiency drive, and Milch's organisational reforms, as well as Kehr's administrative changes, all these proved insufficient in the end.

The US industry produced far more, and these numbers, the Germans could not match. Hereafter follow some data.

In aircraft production, the USA produced 48,000 airplanes in 1942, in 1943 about 86,000, and in 1944 more than 114,000. The Soviet Union produced in 1940, about 21,000 aircraft. In 1943, the number was nearly 37,000. The British Empire produced in 1940, about 15,000 aircraft, and in 1941 over 20,000. In 1942, the figure was more than 23,000, in 1943 over 35,000 and

in 1944, about 47,000. Germany, in 1940, built 10,000 new aircraft. In 1941, it was 11,000 and in 1942: 15,000. Then in 1943 (after Speer) the number was 26,000 and in 1944 about 40,000. This was still merely 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the combined production of the 3 Allied powers!

For tanks: from 1942 to 1944: about 6,000 tanks were built a year in Germany. The Soviet Union built 19,000 tanks a year! The USA built 17,000 tanks in 1942 and more than 29,000 in 1944. For machine guns, the Allied total produced was about 1,110,000 compared to 165,527 in Germany. About 6 times more!

The total war effort in 1944 for Germany was 75% of GDP dedicated to the war. For the Soviet Union, this was 60%, for Great Britain 55%.

After the defeat of France, Germany took 300,000 French rifles, 5,000 pieces of French artillery, 4 million French shells, and 2,170 French tanks. For arms: 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the total French production was seized by Germany. Another 1/3<sup>rd</sup>: seizure of railway engines and rolling stock such as 4,260 locomotives and 140,000 freight cars from the French, Belgian and Dutch railways. Germany took also massive quantities of raw materials.

The exchange rate with the French and Belgian Franc, the Dutch guilder, etc. was set at a level extremely favourable to the *Reichsmark*. Germany imported huge quantities of goods legitimately from the conquered countries. In the conquered countries, industrialists were paid by their own central banks, and the sums paid marked as debts to the *Reichsbank* in Berlin. The debts, of course, were never paid. Germany was thus using 40% of the French resources in 1943.

The result of this policy was, that the ‘occupation’ costs of Germany were paid by simply printing money. Hence, serious inflation rose, made worse by the shortages of goods to purchase, because they were being taken to Germany. German companies were able to use the over-valued *Reichsmark* to gain control of rival firms in the major parts of Western Europe. Especially the *Hermann Göring Reich Works* profited! Nevertheless, many of the biggest private enterprises in Europe escaped takeovers: Philips, Shell, Unilever, Arbed, etc.

### *The new Order*

The Grand Vision of the Nazis was the concept of a *New Order* in Europe, a large-scale European economy that would mobilise the continent as a single whole to pit against the giant economies of the USA and the British Empire. On 24 May 1940, representatives of the German Foreign Office, the Economics Ministry and other, held a meeting to establish this *New Order* as a proposal for European co-operation. *The New Order* was intended to reconstitute autarky, self-sufficiency, on a European-wide basis. Steering a middle course in integrating the European economies and the German meant not swallow up everything, although taking everything away from the others, and: yet pronounce the message, ‘we don’t want anything of the occupied countries’ a thousand times.

The German sphere of interest was *Mittleuropa*! Central Europe. Europe-wide cartels, investments and acquisitions were being created. The *New Order* had to be installed above all by private enterprise. European economic integration under the banner of the *New Order* was to be based not on state regulations and government controls, but on the restructuring of the

European market economy. The *New Order* had to serve German economic interests – of course.

Germany imposed ‘occupation costs’ on the defeated nations. Those were meant for the upkeep of German troops, military and naval bases, airfields and defences. The amounts exceeded the costs of occupation many times over. For instance, for France, the amount was 20 million *Reichsmarks* a day, an enormous sum. The Germans encouraged the French to contribute to their payment by transferring share over vital French-owned enterprises in the Rumanian oil industry, in Yugoslavia’s huge copper mines, and so on. These passed into the hands of the state-owned *Hermann Göring Reich Works*.

The invasion of the Soviet Union would be in the interest of Germany, not of Europe, as sometimes was claimed. This was very clear to the Nazi leaders. Göring could state, ‘when this war is over, we will be the masters of Europe’. Low morale, poor health and nutrition among workers, ideological resistance, ensured that productivity in French aircraft factories was only a quarter of what it was in Germany. The occupied Western countries managed to produce only 2,600 airplanes for German military use in the war.

The *Third Reich* was short in fuel. Particularly in lack of petroleum oil! The occupied countries were massive consumers of imported oil. Only Rumania and Hungary produced about, together, 3 million tons of oil per year. As the fuel reserves were seized, France reduced - compared to pre-war levels - by only 8%. But the British Empire and the USA provided Great Britain with over 10 million tons of oil imports in 1942, twice as much in 1944.

Coal was present in the occupied countries in huge quantities, but the production plummeted down as workers slowed down. About 30% of the coal used in Germany came from the occupied countries.

The marine blockade of Germany cut off imports of grain, fertilizers, animal fodder from overseas. German confiscation of those and the drafting of labourers into forced labour schemes in Germany, had a disastrous effect on agriculture. Official rations in food were introduced in most countries. By 1941 in Norway: 1,600 cal/day. France, Belgium: 1,300 cal/day. This was not enough to live on, so the black market rapidly emerged, spread and amplified. The German war economy gained less than expected from the occupied territories. The Nazi regime intervened ever more intrusively in the economy. It introduced price and exchange controls, regulation of labour, raw materials distribution, capping of dividends, forced rationalisation, setting of production targets: a drastic deformation of the market. Practically the whole newspaper and magazine industry had fallen under Nazi leadership even before the war. Also, the film studios and the book publishers. The Aryanisation of Jewish firms in the occupied countries continued unabatedly.

The SS Economy and Administration Head Office was led by Oswald Pohl. It had formed a complex network of businesses, under a holding company set up by Pohl in 1940, called the ‘German Economic Enterprise’, ‘*Deutscher Wirtschaftsbetrieb*’. The SS Economic empire expanded very quickly! It grew by accretions in a rather haphazard way. Germany remained a nevertheless a capitalist economy, dominated by private enterprise. Managers, executives and company chairmen were more than willing to take advantage of the many inducements the state

had to offer, most notably the provision of lucrative arms contracts! For instance, the Frankfurt-based Degusa firm was Germany's leading company for the processing of precious metals. About 95% of the firm's gold intake came from loot.

For the occupied territories, the *German New Order* meant only executions and mass-shootings. The only way to fight the resistance by the German armies, had replaced the Germans' informal mechanisms of co-operation and collaboration. Regimes friendly to the Third Reich were distancing themselves or losing their autonomy. They fell into the same pattern of repression and resistance that was undermining German control in the occupied countries. A cycle of violence was resistance-reprisals. This was also a reflection of the generally deteriorating position of Germany in the war.

### *The Work Force*

From 1939 to 1941, when Albert Speer took office, the proportion of the industrial workforce in arms manufacturing had grown by about 160%. Speer halved the number of man-hours to make a Panzer III tank. Aircrafts made in Germany quadrupled between 1941 and 1944, with only a 10% increase of manpower needed.

On 21 March 1942, Hitler appointed Fritz Sauckel to General Plenipotentiary for Labour Mobilisation. Sauckel came from a poor family, had little education, and was a real plebeian. He had a happy marriage with 10 children. He was also the former Regional Leader of Thüringen in 1927. He had been Minister-President of Thüringen in 1932, with the Nazis there the strongest party. He had an own holding company: the Wilhelm Gustloff Foundation. He was a close ally of Martin Bormann and possessed the qualities of energy and ruthlessness needed to solve the labour problem in 1942. He was a hard-line Nazi. His new post was directly subordinate to Hitler, which gave enormous clout to Sauckel. He worked closely with Speer in organising the recruitment of foreign workers.

In May 1940, already 1.2 million POWs and foreign civilians were working in Germany, 60% in agriculture. Among these were 700,000 Poles, farm labourers or workers in road construction. Many were in poor health, malnourished, unfit for heavy physical labour. Needed now were workers in the arms industry. By mid-1940: 200,000 French and British prisoners were at work by early July, 600,000 by August 1940, and 1,200,000 by October 1940! In October 1941, about 300,000 civilian workers in Germany from the Western countries had obtained a job, 270,000 from Italy, 80,000 from Slovakia and 35,000 from Hungary. On 31 October 1941, Hitler ordered that Russian POWs should be drafted into work for the war economy. Only 5% of the 3,350,000 or so Red Army soldiers captured by end March 1942, could actually be used as workers, for many had died, and their physical condition was poor.

At end November, Sauckel claimed to have recruited 1.5 million extra foreign workers since his appointment. In total, nearly 5.75 million foreign workers. They came mostly from the west, on 6-month contracts. In total, in November 1942, 4,665,000 foreign workers were busy in Germany. And yet, these numbers were not enough!

By 1942, the war in the east had turned into precisely the kind of war of attrition that Hitler had tried to avoid. From June 1941 to May 1944, the German Armed Forces lost on average

60,000 men killed on the Eastern Front each month! Hundreds of thousands more men were put out of action by capture, wounds or disease.

In 1942, Hitler gained a million more men, recruits, by lowering the age of conscription. 200,000 more men were drafted in from jobs of the arms industry previously ruled exempt. These measures in turn exacerbated the existing shortages of labourers in the arms industry and in agriculture.

On 6 June 1942, Hitler agreed with Pierre Laval, the Vichy French Prime Minister, for Hitler to release 50,000 French POWs in return for despatching 150,000 civilian workers to Germany. By December 1943, there were over 666,000 French workers employed in Germany, with 223,000 Belgians and 274,000 Dutch. Sauckel's roving commissioners seized, however, these workers from French factories. As a result, it became more difficult for those foreign factories to produce munitions and equipment for the German war effort. Compulsion also led to growing resistance. As the military situation on the Eastern Front became more difficult, the occupation authorities and the SS abandoned all scruples for recruiting the local inhabitants to forced labour. The SS burned down whole villages if the young men evaded labour conscription, picked up potential workers from the streets, and took hostages until sufficient candidates for conscription came forward.

*Operation Hay* was a plan of the German military authorities in the east to seize up to 50,000 children of age between 10 and 14 for employment in construction work for the German Air Force, or for deportation to Germany to work in arms factories.

The number of Soviet men working in Germany were more than 2.8 million by the autumn of 1944, including about 600,000 POWs. In 1944, there were more than 8 million foreign workers in the Reich! 46% of the workers in agriculture were foreign, there were 33% of foreign workers in mining and 30% of foreign workers in the metal industry, 12% of foreign workers in construction, 28% in the chemical industry, 36% in transport. In 1945, more than a quarter of the workforce in Germany consisted of citizens of other countries. Camps and hotels everywhere in Germany were to house foreign workers.

By end 1944, BMW housed 16,600 foreign workers in 11 special centres. Daimler-Benz near Stuttgart housed 15,000. 70 different facilities were set up to house these workers in: improvised barracks, an old music hall, a former school. Corruption was rife in the camps: officers siphoned off supplies to sell them on the black market. Prostitution rings had been formed. By end 1943 existed 60 brothels with 600 prostitutes, providing sexual services to the workers. The Security Service of the SS estimated that at least 20,000 illegitimate children were born to German women as a result of contacts of Western foreign labourers and German women. The danger of foreign contamination of the blood of the German people was constantly increasing! The situation of Polish workers in the *Reich* was particularly bad. The Poles had to wear a special badge as of 1940. Polish workers were not allowed to use public transport. They were subjected to a curfew.

Sexual intercourse with a German was punishable by death for a Polish man involved, on personal orders of Hitler. German women would be publicly named and shamed, their heads shaved. Nothing happened to German men who had sexual relations with Polish women, however! Generally, the Poles were to be kept apart from German society. Soviet prisoners were treated even more harshly. The SS continued to show exterminatory, racist impulses.

In February 1942, Heydrich signed a draft decree by which Soviet prisoners had to be segregated from Germans, as far as possible. Soviet forced labourers were herded into barracks,

subjected to humiliating rituals of delousing, fed on bread and watery soup. Tuberculosis and similar diseases were rife. Even Rosenberg's Eastern Ministry demanded an improvement in their treatment. And any insubordination was punishable by death.

By the end of 1942, foreign workers were vital for the industry and agriculture in Germany.

In April 1942, about 2,000 Soviet POWs and civilian workers escaped. In August 1942, such incidents multiplied tenfold. The situation was spiralling out of control. Police checks and controls became more intrusive. *Gestapo* Chief Heinrich Müller instituted checkpoints about everywhere.

The German Nazi regime did not bring women into the workforce. Women were to marry and bear and raise children! In 1939, over half of all women between 15 and 60 in Germany were at work. In the UK, these figures stood at 25%, then at 41% by 1944. And in the USA, the proportion was 26%. The reason for this was that the small farms, so characteristic in Germany, depended heavily on female labour. 6 million German women worked on farms, compared to only more than 100,000 in Britain. At harvest time in Germany, in the summer of 1942, 950,000 women were at work in the farms. In 1941, already 14 million women were in employment, 42% of the native workforce. How much higher could the rate go? Even with the most vigorous efforts to mobilise women for war production, it would not be possible to recruit more than 1.4 million extra women in the factories, a fraction of what was needed. When the war began, Germany experienced a fall in female employment. Half a million women left the labour market between May 1939 and May 1941: due to the cutbacks in the textile, footwear and consumer goods in general.

The *German Labour Front* lobbied strongly for an improvement in conditions for female workers, in order to attract them to the arms industry. The state provided more funding for crèches, improved allowances before birth and after, and introduced restrictions on working hours for breast-feeding mothers. Hitler personally vetoed the ideas of conscripting German women between 45 and 50 for labour service in 1943, as he felt it would affect their ability to look after their husbands and families. Women with young children in Germany were 3.5 million, 4 times as much as in Great Britain.

Hitler was obsessed with the '*stab-in-the-back*' theory. This, he thought, had caused the defeat of Germany in 1918. Women at home had been discontented, because they had resented being forced into poorly paid, dangerous and exhausting factory work. They had taken part in the strikes that had undermined morale on the home front. Inadequate welfare support had led women to take part in food riots and spread anti-war sentiment among the wider population.

The majority of women in full-time paid work were young and unmarried. Women's share in the German civilian labour force did increase from 37% in 1939 to 51% in 1944. Also, 3.5 million women were working part-time in shifts. But employers found it much easier to rely on foreign labour, at very low wages. Women made up 58% of all Polish and Soviet civilian workers in Germany. On 10 September 1942, Sauckel issued a decree for the importation of female domestic workers from the east. This was fine for Hitler, who brushed aside his racial objections. Sauckel's decree was for the women of ages between 15 and 35 to look as much as German women as possible.



Sexual relations between German men and female foreign workers happened on a grand scale. By end 1942, the children were taken and put in nursing homes. They received only low priorities in terms of nourishment and overall standards of care and support. Many of these children were allowed to starve slowly to death!

1944 was to prove the high-water mark of the German war economy. For example, I.G. Farben in October 1944 had 83,300 foreign workers, 46% of the total workforce, POWs and prisoners supplied by the camp system. The use of concentration camp prisoners as workers was the outcome of a significant change in the nature and administration of the camps, early in 1942. Richard Glücks was the head of the camps. The overall population expanded from 21,000 on the eve of the war, to 110,000 in September 1942. New camps were established, such as Auschwitz, Gross-Rosen, and Stutthof. The distinction between a concentration camp, a labour camp, and a ghetto, rather blurred as the war progressed. Himmler transferred the 'Inspectorate of the Concentration Camps' to the 'Economy and Administration Head Office' of the SS, run by Oswald Pohl. The SS received payment for workers, and in return supervised and guarded the labour detachments, made sure they worked hard, and supplied them with clothes, food and accommodation and medical assistance. In August 1943, there were 224,000 prisoners in the labour camps. At Auschwitz: 74,000. Sachsenhausen: 26,000, Buchenwald: 17,000. In April 1944 existed 20 such camps and 165 sub-camps. In August 1944, they had nearly 525,000 inmates! And in January 1945, nearly 715,000 inmates, including more than 202,000 women. Some of the sub-camps were very small.

In October 1944, the SS lost control over the distribution of camp inmates, taken over by the Armaments Ministry. The SS was reduced to, 'providing security'. Deaths in labour camps were common. Conditions were terrible. Prisoners too weak or too ill to walk, were shot or gassed. The Deputy Commander at Auschwitz was Hans Aumeier.

Death rates were high! In the second half of 1942, 57,000 died out of 95,000 prisoners, a mortality rate of 60%! Mortality rates were even higher in Mauthausen, a camp where asocial and criminally convicted Germans were sent for extermination. From January to August 1943 died 60,000 prisoners in the camps from disease, malnutrition, ill treatment or murder.

A Soviet prisoner cost less than half to employ than a German worker. Yet, in 1943-1944, the productivity of POWs in the coalmines was only half that of Belgian-Flemish workers. Foreign labour was increasingly used on construction works that did not yield significant profits before the war came to an end.

By 1943, most business leaders realised that the war was going to be lost. They began to look ahead and position their enterprises for the post-war years. In the course of the war, 8,435,000 foreign workers were drafted into the industry. Only 7,945,000 of them were still alive mid-1945. Of the 4,585,000 POWs engaged in forced labour during the war, only 3,425,000 were still alive when the war ended.

The mobilisation of foreign labour made an enormous contribution to the German war economy. Probably as much as a quarter of the revenues of the *Reich* was generated by conquest in one way or another.

The German military successes of the first two years of the war depended to a large extent on the element of surprise, on speed and swiftness and on the use of unfamiliar tactics against an

unprepared enemy. Once this element was lost, so too were the chances of victory. By the end of 1941, the war had become a war of attrition, just like in the First World War. Germany was being outproduced by its enemies. Speer could do nothing to rescue the situation, however hard he tried. The ratio of the GDP of the Allies to that of the Axis countries, including Japan, was at no moment in the war less than 2 to 1 and by 1944 it was more than 3 to 1. The odds were hopeless.

By 18 January 1944, Albert Speer was worn out by the strain of trying to achieve the impossible. He fell ill and was taken to the hospital. It took him 4 months to recover.

## Notes on the antisemitic Actions in other European Countries

Some areas of the countries dominated by the Nazis were incorporated in the *Reich*: Western Poland, small pieces of France and Belgium. Other parts such as Alsace-Lorraine, Luxemburg, Bialystok were placed under the authority of the nearest German Regional Leader. Of indeterminate status remained: the Reich Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, the Reich Commissariats of the Ukraine, the Baltic States, Belarus. These were run by a specially created German administration. If strategically important for the war, countries such as Belgium, occupied France, Greece, obtained a military administration. 'Germanic' countries such as Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, were run by a civilian *Reich Commissioner*, using the native administration as far as possible.

A Fascist leader had been placed in power in Norway, and in Vichy France a regime with Fascist traits had received power. Croatia and Slovakia, were client states, with limited German presence, but German agents wielding huge power. Germany's allies were Hungary, Italy, Rumania. In these countries ruled no German domination.

The *New Order* demanded the racial restructuring of Europe, as well as its economic rearrangement for Germany's benefit. All these countries were supposed to implement the final solution of the Jewish question in Europe. With anti-Jewish laws, and Aryanisation of Jewish property, the round-up of the Jewish population and its deportation to the killing centres of the east. The Jewish refugees from other countries were the first victims, as they enjoyed no protection by the country in which they had sought safety. When the German moved against the native Jewish population of these countries, the reactions turned out to be more complex and divided. Germany's early victories made it a country to be admired, or at least, respected.

## THE BALTIC COUNTRIES

As the German troops advanced in the Baltic countries, they found collaborators among the Nationalists in these lands to suppress the Jews and the Bolsheviks. Thus, in Lithuania, mobs killed about 2,500 Jews in pogroms. In Latvia, 70,000 out of the 80,000 Jews living in the land were killed by local militia by late 1941. In Estonia, all 963 Jews were killed by local militia, together with some 5,000 or so non-Jewish Estonians for presumed collaboration with the Soviets. The *Einsatzgruppen* in the Baltic countries could report about 230,000 Jews killed.

## BELARUS

Jews had a very high participation in the success of the whole campaign of sabotage and destruction in Belarus. In one operation, up to 80 armed Jews among 223 bandits attacked German installations. About 345,000 people, 5% of the entire population of Belarus died in the partisan war against the German armies! About 283,000 people of Belarus took part in partisan groups. In early 1942, Jewish partisan groups began to emerge, most in the forests of Belarus. Villagers were often hostile to the partisans. Jewish involvement in the partisan movement was widespread. The first Jewish resistance group in Eastern Europe was by the 23-year old intellectual Abba Kovner on 31 December 1941. At around the same time, another Jewish resistance group was set up by the four Bielski Brothers, whose parents had been killed by the Germans in ember 1941. These partisans numbered 1,500 by the end of the war. Many more Jews joined local Communist-led partisan units.

In Belarus alone, the German soldiers destroyed more than 600 villages.

## BELGIUM

In Belgium, the networks for helping the Jews were more extensive than in the Netherlands. In all, 24,000 Belgian Jews were deported to Auschwitz, but over 30,000 Jews in the cities of Brussels and Antwerp could escaped, found refuge in Belgium, and survived the occupation. When the German forces marched in, 2 million Belgians fled to the south of France. Only the damage done to property by the Germans was considerable.

The Belgian Government that had fled to London was blamed for the defeat, along with the Parliament. Hitler decided to leave the military in charge, which proved a milder form of occupation than had a Nazi Commissioner been in charge. The Belgian establishment, civil service, lawyers, industrialists, etc. worked with the German military administration to preserve peace and calm and to maintain the existing social order. The Flemish inhabitants were seen as Nordic, as the vast majority of the inhabitants of the Netherlands. Holland was slated for incorporation into the *Reich*. There were 65,000 to 75,000 Jews in Belgium at the beginning of the war, 6% of them immigrants and refugees.

On 28 October 1940, the German Military Government issued a decree compelling all Jews to register with the authorities. Native Jews were being dismissed from the civil service, the legal system and the media. The Flemish Nationalists set light to synagogues in Antwerp. This happened in April 1941, after the showing of an antisemitic film.

Most Belgians, it seemed, regarded the Jews living in the country as true Belgians. On 4 August 1942, the first train bound for Auschwitz contained only foreign Jews. By November 1942, 15,000 of these Jews had been deported. A widespread action of the Belgian population to hide the Jews followed. The Jewish underground organisation and the Belgian Resistance, with its Communist wing in which already Jews fought, began to organise hiding Jews. The Catholic institutions also hid Jewish children. The Belgian police was less willing to round-up the Jews. As a result, 25,000 Jews from Belgium were gassed at Auschwitz, and 25,000 found their way

in hiding. 40% of the Belgian Jew were murdered by the Nazis, but in the Netherlands that number was 73%, with 102,000 Jews out of 140,000.

## BULGARIA

King Boris III of Bulgaria decided in 1943 the Germans were not going to win the war after all!

In June 1943, Boris III thought it polite to still agree with Hitler's request to replace with Bulgarian soldiers the German forces in North-East Serbia, so that the German soldiers could be redeployed on the Eastern Front. But he required more, and sent peace-feelers to the Allies. He feared the Soviets would disregard Bulgaria's official stance of neutrality.

On 28 August 1943, Boris II fell ill, only 49 years old. He suffered a heart attack, and died. His successor was Simeon II, only a boy, so a regency was necessary. The regency continued King Boris's policy of disengaging from the German side, and that mainly because of increasing Allied bombing raids on Sophia, as of November 1943. Opposition to the war spread rapidly. Armed partisan bands under the leadership of Soviet-inspired *Fatherland Front* banned increasing disruption. The Government back-tracked, repealed anti-Jewish legislation, and declared full neutrality in 1944.

## CROATIA

The Croatian Fascist leader Ante Pavelic had declared an independent Croatia on 10 April 1941. Croatia then included Bosnia and Herzegovina. Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina suffered under the regime of Ante Pavelic, the leader of the *Ustaz* Fascists. These terrorised the population. Pavelic wanted to clear the country of all non-Croatians, which amounted to about half of the country! He wanted 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the inhabitants to be expelled for not Croatian, 1/3<sup>rd</sup> converted to Catholicism for not Catholic but Orthodox or Jewish, and 1/3<sup>rd</sup> to be killed. His death squads mostly targeted the Serbs in the country, and the Jews and the gypsies. He applied sadistic terror against these minorities. By 1945, the *Ustaz* had murdered about 400,000 people. Pavelic allied with Germany, and he declared war on the Allies.

The atrocities fed anti-Axis feelings in Yugoslavia, and the growing strength of the partisan leader Josip Broz called Tito. "Pavelic converted his movement, the *Ustashe*, into a Fascist movement, seeing the Croats rather as westerners than as Slavs. He wanted to save the Catholic west from the threat of the Orthodox Slavs, from the Bolsheviks and the Jews. He won the support of only 40,000 of the 6 million Croats in Yugoslavia. Soon, Pavelic began a wave of ethnic cleansing. With terror and genocide, he drove out 2 million Serbs from the territory, with 30,000 gypsies, and 45,000 Jews, to convert everybody who stayed to Catholicism. Ultra-nationalist students and especially Franciscan catholic monks joined him.

On 17 April 1941, Pavelic had a decree published in Croatia, accusing of high treason anyone who offended the honour of the Croat nation. The Croats were Aryan, he proclaimed, so inter-marriage with non-Aryans were banned. All non-Croats were outlawed. Sexual relationships between male Jews and female Croats were forbidden, though not the other way

round. On this decree, the *Ustashe* installed their terror. They enacted terrible scenes of mass murder on non-Croats in the summer of 1941, especially directed against the Serbs.

Concentration camps opened in Croatia at the end of April 1941, by a law of 26 June 1941. The camps were set up to exterminate ethnic and religious minorities. For instance, thus, in the camp of Jasenovac, more than 20,000 Jews perished.

Probably in all, 30,000 Jews were killed in Croatia, all the Gypsies, and about 300,000 Serbs. This Croatian genocide created feelings of deep and lasting bitterness among the Serbs against Croats.

## DENMARK

King Christian X remained in the country, with a German Governor above him. The king had surrendered immediately in April of 1940. After August 1943, a rebellion took place against collaboration with Germany. The Danish Government had then resigned. Denmark's strategic position was vital to Germany. The Danish Government and administration were left intact until September 1942. King Christian X caused Hitler's irritation. The king answered Hitler's message of congratulations for his birthday with terseness that definitely sounded impolite.

Hitler appointed the senior SS Officer Werner Best as Reich Plenipotentiary on 26 October 1942. But Best was aware he should not offend the Danes. He operated with a policy of flexibility and restraint. The Danish Jews then were about 8,000.

In the summer of 1943, acts of resistance began to multiply in Denmark: sabotage, strikes, and unrest in general. Hitler ordered the martial law, then withdrew his cooperation with the Danish Government. Best moved to assume total power himself, using the Danish civil service to implement his own, personal rule.

On 17 September 1943, Hitler gave his approval for the deportation of the Danish Jews. The confirmation was given on 22 September 1943. Sweden offered to grant asylum to all Danish Jews. These began to go in hiding. Best thought a police action to be counter-productive. As Berlin refused, he leaked out the dates of the action on 2 October 1943. The Danes shipped 7,000 Jews across the straits to Sweden. Only 485 Jews were arrested the next day's action. They were sent to Theresienstadt, not to Auschwitz, as Best had negotiated with Eichmann. Most of the Jews survived.

Werner Best later acted on Hitler's orders to take reprisals on the Danish resistance. His policy had little success. Even his own driver was assassinated by the resistance. Best installed his own policy. He refused to implement a policy of mass murder and terror. Hitler wanted a ratio of 5 to 10 killings for every German touched, Best reduced it to 2 to 1. The hold of the German occupiers in Denmark became steadily shakier.

## FINLAND

Himmler visited Helsinki to persuade the government, allied to the Third Reich, to hand over about 200 foreign Jews who lived in Finland. Only 8 were handed over (four Germans and a family of Estonians). They were deported to Auschwitz on 6 November 1942. All were

killed, save one. Himmler abandoned the attempts to obtain the other 2,000 or so Finnish native Jews. The Finnish Government assured Himmler there was no Jewish question in the country.

## FRANCE

The occupied zone of France during most of the war amounted to about 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the country, including Paris. France was reduced to an un-occupied quasi-autonomous zone with as capital the small town of Vichy. The main collaborators with the Germans were the Socialist Marcel Déat, Minister of Labour and Jacques Doriot, a fascist leader, with Pierre Laval, the Vice Prime Minister. German occupation was mild at first, but it became draconian as Germany started to face adversity in France.

The *Légion Française des Combattants* was an organisation in the Fascist style of Vichy France. They built up a cult around Philippe Pétain. Pétain was their figurehead against atheism, socialism, secularisation, and they found some backing in the Catholic Church hierarchy. Vichy-France introduced anti-Jewish statutes to restrict Jewish employment. After 1942, Vichy bureaucrats and its police collaborated reluctantly in the round-up and brutal deportation of foreign Jews, about half of France's Jewish population of about 300,000 people. The French Vichy paramilitary police, the *Milice*, were feared as much as the *Gestapo*. More than 75,000 Jews were deported from France to the death-camps in Poland, from which only about 2,600 survived.

Oradour-sur-Glane was a French village destroyed by the Waffen SS. The inhabitants of Oradour, 642 inhabitants, were shot or burnt to death by troops of the Second SS Tank Division. In France rose a wave of revulsion!

On 16 February 1943, a law of the Vichy Regime to enforce compulsory labour in Germany, created a climate of popular disobedience.

Pierre Laval, the Fascist Deputy Prime Minister, was dismissed in December 1942, and then recalled by Pétain on 18 April 1942 as Prime Minister until the end of the war.

On 18 November 1939, a new law was promulgated in France, providing for the internment of anyone who was considered to be a danger for the French Fatherland. As a result, 20,000 foreigners in France, including many Jewish immigrants, were put into prison camps, though many were released shortly after. All German citizens, most Jewish, were arrested once more and brought back to the camps. Antisemitic campaigners in occupied France were mainly Charles Maurras, Jacques Doriot. These made rhetorical attacks on the Jews. Antisemitic writers would be Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, and Lucien Relatet. Some of these blamed the Jews for the French defeat.

On 3 October 1940, Occupied France published the first formal measure against the Jews in the country. Jews were defined as people with 3 or 4 Jewish grandparents, or 2 if they were married to a Jew. Jews were banned in particular from owning or managing media concerns. Jewish professors were dismissed from their posts. This was made valid for the whole of France, including the occupied zone.

A day later, another law, creating special internment camps for all foreigners in the Vichy zone, was promulgated. By end 1940 already, 40,000 Jews were forcibly interned in them.

In August of the same year, the German embassy in Paris had begun urging the French military authorities to remove all Jews from the occupied areas. The German ambassador in the occupied area was Otto Abetz. He banned Jewish immigration to the occupied zone.

On 27 September 1940, with the agreement of the German Army's Commander-in-Chief von Brauchitsch, Jews who had fled to the unoccupied zone were banned from returning to Germany. All Jewish persons and their property were to be registered in preparation for expulsion and expropriation. The harassments continued. On 21 October 1940, all Jewish shops had to be marked as such. The registration of 150,000 Jews in the occupied zone was by then complete. Aryanisation of Jewish businesses was driven forwards rapidly. A series of ordinances banned Jews from a whole variety of occupations. Jews were, for instance, forbidden to enter bars where members of the German armed forces were customers.

The man who had to reinforce the anti-Jewish measures was Theodor Dannecker, the officer responsible for the Jewish question in the Security Service of the SS in France. On 14 May 1941, Dannecker ordered the arrest and internment in camps of 3,733 Jewish immigrants.

The confiscation of Jewish assets and businesses happened also in the Vichy regime. By 1942, 140,000 Jews had been officially registered there. The preparations to deport them began in October and November 1941, with Himmler, Abetz and senior officers in the French occupation administration. Senior Army Commander in the occupied zone was Otto von Stülpnagel. He was replaced on 16 February 1942 by his cousin Karl-Heinrich von Stülpnagel, a hard-line anti-Semite, transferred from the Eastern Front. He ordered future reprisals to take the form of mass arrests of Jews and their deportation to the east.

An attack on German soldiers happened in occupied France. 743 Jews, mostly French, were arrested by the German police, to be interned in a German-run camp at Compiègne. These Jews were deported with another 369 Jewish prisoners to Auschwitz in March 1942. On 1 June 1942, the new Chief of the SS and the Police in Paris, Carl Oberg, was also transferred to the east.

In the unoccupied zone in France, in the *Vichy Government*, Pierre Laval came back in the Government in April 1942. Laval appointed a radical anti-Semite Louis Darquier to run the Jewish affairs, with the assistance of an effective and unscrupulous chief of Police, René Bousquet. On 7 May 1942, during a visit of Heydrich to France, Bousquet asked permission to transport 5,000 Jews from the transit camp at Drancy to the east. By the end of June, already 4,000 Jews had been brought to Auschwitz.

On 11 June 1942, a meeting took place, called by Eichmann in the Reich Security Head Office, with the heads of the Jewish Affairs departments of the SS Security Service in Paris, Brussels and The Hague. Himmler demanded the transport of Jewish men and women from Western Europe for labour duties. Together with a substantial number of those Jews judged unfit for work. 100,000 people from the two French zones, later 40,000 more, and 15,000 from the Netherlands (later augmented to 40,000), as well as 10,000 from Belgium, were sent to camps in Germany.

The wearing of the Jewish star had become compulsory in the occupied zone, calling many individual demonstrations of sympathy from French Communists, students and Catholic intellectuals.

On 15 July 1942 began in earnest the arrest of the stateless Jews in France. There followed a round-up of 27,000 Jewish refugees in the Paris region. Many Jews went underground and disappeared. About 13,000 Jews were arrested by 17 July 1943. Unmarried and childless couples were sent to Drancy. The rest amounted to 8,160 men, women and children. These were penned up in the Parisian bicycle-racing stadium of the Vel d'Hiv, the *Vélodrome d'Hiver*. Then, they were sent, in very hot weather, and without food for 3 to 4 days, with 7,100 Jews from the Vichy zone, to Auschwitz. The same happened at other collection centres too, to a total of 42,500 people by the end of the year. A transport of sick children and adolescents were sent on 24 August 1942, children of ages 2 to 17. All 553 children were gassed immediately on arrival at the camp.

On 11 November 1942, German troops crossed the border from the French occupied zone into the area controlled by Vichy, to take it over. Hitler ordered its ineffective fighting forces to be disbanded. On 10 December 1942, then, Himmler told that Hitler had ordered for the Jews and other enemies of the Reich in France to be arrested and taken away. The deportations resumed therefore in February 1943. But with increasing difficulties! 30,000 Jews found their way to relative safety in the Italian-occupied zone of south-eastern France. In the summer of 1943, Eichmann sent Aloïs Brunner from similar work in Salonica to replace the French officials in charge of the transit camp of Drancy. The *Gestapo* arrested most of the leaders of the Jewish community and deported them to Auschwitz or Theresienstadt. The last train left for Auschwitz on 22 August 1944. In all, about 80,000 of the 350,000 French Jews were killed.

The German takeover of the unoccupied zone meant the decline of the Vichy Regime. Pétain became merely a figurehead for Laval, Laval's radical right-wing views had now free rein. He openly said he wanted Germany to win the war.

In January 1943, Laval set up the *Milice Française* under Joseph Darnand. The core were Darnand's own Fascist paramilitary Legionnaires of 30,000 members. There was some resemblance here to Michel Codeanu's *Legion of the Archangel Michael* in Rumania. Laval was being outflanked on the right. By 1943, the Vichy regime had lost most of its power, and lost all sympathy by the French people.

## GERMANY

In Germany, the popularity, even enthusiasm for the war in the East and the enthusiasm for the Nazi Regime that had taken the German people into the war, declined dramatically. After February 1943, after the disastrous defeat at Stalingrad, the German population began to understand that the country had launched an army into a war that could also be lost. The German people then thought of that they had after all been aware of the fact the German soldiers had committed terrible crimes in the occupied East, and that the Nazis were still committing crimes in the concentration camps and about everywhere in the countries where the Army was present. They heard and read stories about how about half a million East Prussians had died in a desperate flight from the doomed German East. Had not 20% of the women there be raped? And in the last months of the war, more than 10,000 German soldiers were being killed every day. In the streets, everyone could see mutilated men shuffling along the façades of the houses, or worse, be begging for a piece of bread at a crossing.



On top of this horror, the British bombing raids continued terrorising the German population. More than 400,000 people were killed in those bombings, and 800,000 injured. About 1.8 million homes had been destroyed, leaving 5 million Germans homeless. The war had caused more misery than anybody could have imagined when Adolf Hitler and his Nazis talked about conquering living space. Would not the Soviet Union soon be claiming living space in the German lands? Typically, the German civilians were in search for scapegoats. We have been fooled, we have been misused, was heard more than ever after World War I, after 1918. Nazism, Fascism, was dead as a major political force, but the men who nurtured Nazism were still in power! The German defeat would come soon, unmitigated, total and final. The Germans could blame no one but themselves. It was clear that an overriding consequence of the Second World War would be the recasting of the geopolitical structure, and Germany's living space would not be expanded. It would crimp again, this time worse than in 1918.

In February 1945 took place the *Yalta Conference* between the superpowers, between the United States of America, the Soviet Union, and with Great Britain maybe as a small mediator, despite the bulk of Winston Churchill. Europe would be divided between the two blocks, the liberal USA and the Communist Soviet Union. The people in the East of Europe would once more fall under decades-long subordination to Russia. For Western Europe, the end of the war would mean a new start, though under the domination of the USA. Western and east Europe would again be pried apart.

Germany was a completely ruined country now. It had been economically, politically and militarily be destroyed. What more could have been expected of a party led by a dumb lunatic? For whatever reasons had Germany chosen to follow such a man? It had been madness! How could the most intelligent, smartest, high-cultured country on earth have chosen to follow a madman?

The destruction of the Jews had eliminated the best elements of society. It had wiped out centuries of rich cultural presence and innovation. Maybe as a punishment, the same had happened in the east, the elimination of the German presence with Stalinist brutality and rationality. The Poles had been the victims twice of savage cleansing actions, both by the west and by the east. Worse of all, the German people saw now clearly the terrible crimes of which human beings were capable when all legal constraints had been removed or had been misused to serve and not inhibit anymore inhuman behaviour.

## GREECE

On 20 May 1941, the Greek King and his Government fled to Crete with the remaining Greek, British and other Allied forces. German airborne forces then landed on Crete. On 26 May, the Allied situation had become hopeless on the island. They evacuated Crete in chaos. The German aircraft sunk 3 British cruisers and 6 destroyers in this offensive. By 30 May, the Allies had abandoned 5,000 men on the island. In Greece itself, more than 11,000 British soldiers had been captured and 3,000 soldiers and sailors had been killed. This was a disaster for the British troops. On Crete, more than 3,300 of the invading German soldiers had been killed. This persuaded the Germans not to invade the islands of Malta and Cyprus.

The Germans installed a puppet Government in Greece. The German troops were all over Greece, also in Athens. They began to loot the country and requisitioned everything they could use. The unemployment skyrocketed in the country, so many people had to beg for food in the streets. Disease became widespread, and deaths from disease rose quickly. The resistance in Greece then began to organise itself, in which British soldiers participated. Yet, The resistance lacked coordinated leadership to do very great harm to the German occupiers. Albania took the Backa territory and other regions it had ruled since 1918. The obsessive pursuit of the Jewish population all over Europe continued, irrespective of the economic utility or otherwise of their extermination.

Greece had a substantial Jewish community of 55,000 in the German-occupied zone and 13,000 in the zone occupied by the Italians. In February 1943, the wearing of the yellow star had become compulsory in Greece. Alois Brunner, with senior officials of Eichmann's department, then arrived in Salonika. On 15 March 1943, a first train left Greece with 2,800 Jews on board. Within a few weeks, 45,000 out of the 55,000 Greek Jews had been deported to Auschwitz. Most were killed on arrival. There was no resistance, just surprise and a swift action, then the removal of the Jews. The German troops razed the Jewish cemetery. The gravestones were used to pave new roads in the area. On 23 March 1944, 800 Jews had gathered in the main synagogue. They were arrested and deported to Auschwitz. In July 1944, the Jews from the Greek Islands were rounded up and deported to Auschwitz.

Communist resistance groups launched successful attacks on German communication lines. In August 1943 took place serious fighting between the Communists and its smaller right-wing rival, led by Napoleon Zervas. He was backed by the British as a counter-weight to the Communists. It became a full-blown civil war!

## HUNGARY

In the beginning of the war, Hungary had merely 190 tanks and infantry rifles that frequently jammed. Six of their 10 Alpine battalions were mounted on bicycles! Slovakia had 2 divisions of armed forces, intended mainly to provide security behind any front.

In October 1944, Admiral Miklós Horthy announced the country was quitting its alliance with Germany and had made a separate peace with the Soviet Union. Hitler immediately replaced Horthy by Ferenc Szálasi, the leader of the *Arrow Cross Fascists* of Hungary. Hungary surrendered to the Red Army in February 1945. Szálasi's *Arrow Cross* organisation then exposed the rest of Hungary to a terror regime.

Well into the war, Hungary began to find excuses to avoid the deportation of Hungarian Jews. The Head of State, Miklós Horthy and his Prime Minister Miklós Kállay rejected in October 1942 a German request to introduce the wearing of the yellow star for the Jews. Hitler became very angry, because Hungary would not deliver its 800,000 Jews for extermination, and realise the confiscation of their assets. Horthy was drawing his soldiers already then out of the German-led Army on the Eastern Front. From 16 to 17 April 1943, Hitler met Horthy near Salzburg, with von Ribbentrop. Horthy refused to hand over his Jews. He still refused on more pressure.

On 18 March 1944, Hitler once more summoned Horthy of Hungary for a meeting. He told him that German forces would occupy Hungary immediately. There were signs that Horthy was preparing to switch sides! Horthy agreed to install the pro-German Hungarian ambassador to Berlin, Döme Sztóvay as Prime Minister. The next day, on 19 March 1944 already, German troops marched into Hungary. Adolf Eichmann arrived in Budapest, followed by a special unit under Theodor Dannecker, charged with the arrest and deportation of the Hungarian Jews. Two radical anti-Semites, László Endre and László Bary were appointed as the top civil servants in the Interior Ministry to assist in the round-up of the Jews.

On 7 April 1944, a Jewish Council was established. The wearing of the Jewish yellow star was introduced. The first arrests of Jews took place in Hungarian Transylvania and in Carpatho-Ukraine. Ghettos and camps were erected. Thousands of Jews were arrested by the *Gestapo*. No steps were taken by the Hungarian service of the BBC to warn the Jews what would happen to them. The Jewish Council did not want to cause unrest, and hesitated before urging people to break the law. But several Council Members fled to Rumania, and up to 8,000 people fled this way.

The first trainloads of Jews left Hungary for Auschwitz on 14 May 1944. About 12,000 to 14,000 were packed into cattle-wagons every day and sent to the concentration camps, with their gas chambers and crematoria. Hitler refused to stop. The King of Sweden and US President Franklin D. Roosevelt protested to Horthy. Pope Pius XII's intervention on 25 June 1944 did not mention the Jews by names. The leading figures in the Hungarian Catholic hierarchy refused to issue any public condemnation of the deportations. On 7 July 1944, Horthy ordered the Nazis to stop! Eichmann nevertheless sent 2 trainloads still. In 2 months, 438,000 Hungarian Jews had been taken to Auschwitz and about 394,000 of them had been gassed immediately on arrival.

## ITALY

The regime of Mussolini had collapsed already in July of 1943 in September of that same year, as the Germans had occupied the north of the country, the Germans reinstated Mussolini at Salò on Lake Garda. Vicious German and Fascist death squads were formed to hang or shoot partisans. In all, 40,000 partisans were killed, of which 10,000 were anti-Fascist victims of reprisals. The partisans assassinated hundreds of Fascists each month in that period. Then, 12,000 more Fascists were killed, in all more than 250,000 activists by April 1945. End April 1945, the partisans captured and killed Mussolini. They hung his corpse upside down in the centre of Milan. In July 1943 already, the Allied troops had entered Rome.

## THE NETHERLANDS

In the Netherlands, the population suffered from the drastic rationing of food. Severe food shortages happened until 1944. The Netherlands saw 25,000 men in the resistance, and 10,000 more after the autumn of 1944. About 33% of the Dutch resistance was arrested by the Germans, and about 25% killed in the war.

The Austrian Seyss-Inquart, then the Head of the SS and German police in Holland, proceeded appointing fellow Austrians to the top civilian posts. He did this with another Austrian, Hans Rauter. Seyss-Inquart issued a stream of edicts and injunctions to establish comprehensive control over the administration.

There were 140,000 Jews in the Netherlands, of whom 20,000 were foreign refugees. As the Nazis regarded the Dutch as quintessentially Aryan, the need to remove the Jews seemed particularly urgent. Therefore, in November 1940 already, the Germans ended Jewish participation in state employment. Jewish shops were to be registered. On 10 January 1941, all Jewish individuals, as roughly defined by the Nürnberg Laws, were also to be registered.

When in Amsterdam, Dutchmen attacked a pair of German policemen, German forces invested the Jewish quarter, arresting 389 young men, who were deported to Buchenwald, then to Mauthausen. Of these, only 1 of them survived. A Communist strike in Amsterdam happened on 25 February 1941. The massive and violent repression followed. About 200 young Jews, refugees from Germany, were tracked down, arrested and killed in Mauthausen. .

On 7 January 1942, on German orders, the Jewish Council of Amsterdam began ordering unemployed Jews into special labour camps at Amersfoort and elsewhere. The camps were centres of torture and abuse. Another camp, was Westerbork. It became the main transit centre for non-Dutch deportees to the east. Trains started there, bound for Auschwitz, Sobibor, Bergen-Belsen, and Theresienstadt.

In May 1942 in the Netherlands, wearing the yellow star was introduced. A Dutch version of the Nürnberg Laws was implemented. The Dutch Police then was a voluntary force of 2,000 men recruited in May 1942. Corruption and favouritism reigned in this group. The Dutch Jews used every means in their power to obtain the coveted stamp on their identity cards granting them immunity. This immunity was not available to non-Dutch Jews, mostly refugees from Germany. Two members of the Jewish Council managed to destroy the files of about 1,000 working-class Jewish children. They smuggled the children into hiding. Some resistance also was shown by the Catholic and Protestant Churches. Reports about the German death camps were sent to Holland by Dutch SS volunteers and by 2 Dutch political prisoners, released from Auschwitz. This had no effect, however on the views of the Dutch officials.

From July 1942 to February 1943, 53 trains left Westerbork, carrying 47,000 Jews to Auschwitz. Of these, only 266 survived the war. In the next months, a further 35,000 Jews were taken to Sobibor. Only 19 Jews survived. A train of 1,000 Jews left Westerbork every Tuesday, until over 100,000 Jews had been deported to be killed. The Nazi administration in Holland went further in its antisemitism than any other in Western Europe. Seyss-Inquart even proceeded to the sterilisation of Jewish partners in 600 mixed marriages!

## NORWAY

About 40,000 Norwegians were actively engaged in the resistance against Germany. The village of Televag was destroyed by the Germans, and its inhabitants sent to the concentration camp of Sachsenhausen near Berlin, where 31 people died.

Norway remained under direct German occupation. The majority of the Norwegians were opposed to this German occupation. A puppet government under Vidkun Quisling ruled in the country. Norway was effectively ruled by *Reich Commissioner* Josef Terboven, the Nazi Party Regional Leader of Essen. But Norway knew growing shortages of food and raw materials. The country held about 2,000 Jews. In 1941, the Quisling Government dismissed the Jews from state employment and the professions. By October 1941, their property had been Aryanised. In January 1942 then, the Quisling Government ordered the registration of Jews according to the Nürnberg Laws.

In April of 1942, the Germans dismissed the Quisling Government for having failed to win the support of the Norwegians. Terboven began to rule directly. Then in October 1942, the Germans ordered the deportation of the Norwegian Jews. On 26 October 1943, the Norwegian police began arresting Jewish men and as of 25 November also the Jewish women and children. About 530 Jews were sent to Stettin, followed by the others. In all, 770 Norwegian Jews were deported, 700 gassed at Auschwitz. 930 Norwegian Jews fled to Sweden; the rest survived in hiding. The Swedish Government decided to grant asylum to any Jews arriving from other parts of Europe.

The number of Jews was so small as to have virtually no political or economic importance in Scandinavia. Native antisemitism was much smaller, too.

## POLAND

By the spring of 1942, the security situation for the German troops was out of control in some parts of Poland. Partisans were everywhere and robbed. The Police gave up trying to intervene. Some Polish officers were forming regular units of the Home Army. These contacted the Polish Government in exile in London. Increasing acts of military resistance and sabotage followed. Constant explosions on railway tracks sounded, and machine-gun attacks could be heard in the night.

Rival partisan groups were organised by the Russians too! The German and the Polish auxiliary police were increasingly unable to mount effective operations against the resistance movements. But partisan activity fuelled the antisemitism of civilian administrators.

## RUMANIA

Rumania was a country with strong local antisemitic feelings. It led to pogroms and killings on an enormous scale.

By mid-1942, the dictator Ion Antonescu had second thoughts about the extermination of the Jews. Intervention from abroad (USA, the Vatican) had an effect on the dictator. Wealthy Rumanians bribed him. He considered that when the war was over, the other powerful countries might object to Rumanian claims on Transylvania. In December 1942, Churchill and Roosevelt had declared the punishment of countries that had persecuted the Jews would be an Allied war aim.

Antonescu had acceded to the German request to allow the deportation to Poland of the Rumanian Jews, for over 300,000 Jews, and also of the Rumanian Jews living in Germany or in German-occupied Europe. Antonescu dithered then to following German demands. He stopped the deportation of Jews to Transnistria. Late 1943, he began repatriating the surviving deportees back to Rumania. Antonescu was no longer willing to listen to Hitler!

## SLOVAKIA

Slovakia was a rather small, Catholic country. Since March 1939, its independence day the Catholic priest Józef Tiso reigned as President, and he had the extreme nationalist law professor Vojtech Tuka as Minister-President. This last led the para-military force the *Hlinka Guard*, named after the priest Andrej Hlinka, who had encouraged Slovakian nationalism..

On 28 July 1940, in a meeting with Hitler. Tiso, Tuka and their Interior Minister Mach had been told to put in place legislation to deal with the Jews, for 80,000 people or 3.3% of the population. They agreed to the appointment of the German SS Officer Dieter Wisliceny as their advisor on Jewish questions. The Government began a comprehensive programme of expropriation of the Jews, driving them out of economic life, removing their civil rights, drafting them into labour schemes. Jews were forced to wear the yellow star. In a few months, the Jews had been reduced to a state of destitution!

The Government offered 20,000 Jewish workers when the Germans insisted on Slovakian workers. Eichmann agreed: the Jews could be used to build the extermination camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau! He also accepted to take in women. These would be led to the gas chambers. On 16 March 1942, about 1,000 young Slovakian Jewish women were loaded in cattle trucks by the *Hlinka Guard* and brought to Auschwitz. By end June 1942, 52,000 Slovakian Jews had been deported, most to Auschwitz. None of these lived very long.

Growing protests, however, rose then in Slovakia. The leading churchman was Bishop Pavol Jantusch. He demanded the Jews to be treated humanely. The Vatican called in the Slovakian ambassador to have him explain what was going on. Tiso had second thoughts after that!

A group of still wealthy Slovakian Jewish community leaders systematically bribed Slovakian officials to hand out exemption certificates. On 26 June 1942, the German ambassador complained 35,000 exemption certificates had been issued, so there were almost no Jews anymore to deport. In the German foreign Office, Ernst von Weizsäcker told the ambassador to remind Tiso that the halting of the deportations would cause 'some surprise' in Germany. Nevertheless, the deportations stopped. In April 1943, when Vice-President Tuka threatened to resume them, he was forced to withdraw the resolution by the growing public protests, especially from the Catholic Church. Despite a meeting Hitler-Tiso on 22 April 1943, matters remained thus.

In 1944, the Slovakian resistance movement made an attempt to overthrow Tiso. This was brutally suppressed by the *Hlinka Guard* and German troops. Tiso then ordered the deportation of the remaining Jews in the country. Some were sent to Sachsenhausen and Theresienstadt, most to Auschwitz.

## SWEDEN

Neutral Sweden took then a significant role for those trying to stop the genocide. On 9 August 1942, the Swedish Consul in Stettin, Karl Ingve Vendel, working for the Swedish secret service, had good contacts with the German military resistance to the Nazis. He filed a report that made it clear Jews were being gassed in large numbers in the *General Government* of Poland. The Swedish Government accepted Jews, but refused to launch any initiative to stop the murders. Hitler considered the Danes, Swedish, and Norwegians to be Aryans.

## UKRAINE

In the Ukraine, Jews were slaughtered in vast numbers. The non-Jews in Ukraine also were mercilessly treated by the German troops. Many Ukrainians deserted from the Red Army. The Russian NKVD emptied their jails and shot thousands of Ukrainian prisoners. The German Army arrived at Kiev on 19 September 1941 in *Operation Barbarossa*. The Soviets exploded the city centre by mines. They left 20,000 people homeless and killed many people. The Germans were therefore rather welcomed as liberators. Hitler, however, backed utterly ruthless domination in the Ukraine. He sent a particularly brutal *Reich Commissioner* Erich Koch to the country, with the objective to cleanse the Ukraine for future German settlement. Hitler's General German Plan for the East foresaw over a period of 25 years the removal of 31 million people from the conquered Slav countries. The repression of the police units in the eastern lands was so brutal, that it engendered all-pervasive fear in the population. Out of an initially welcoming nation, the German occupation created a nation of enemies. All these populations especially feared being deported for slave labour in Germany.

The Ukrainian Jews too, found themselves having to live not only in a friendless society, but also facing a murderous onslaught from the conquerors. There were about 1.5 million Jews in the Ukraine.

## YUGOSLAVIA

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of March 1941, Serb officers staged a coup, overthrew the Prince Regent and proclaimed Peter II of 17 years old as king. Hitler was furious, saying Yugoslavia would be smashed if it betrayed Germany. On 6 April 1941, the German 12<sup>th</sup> Army entered Yugoslavia and northern Greece. The Germans used 800 airplanes to submit Yugoslavia. The Yugoslavian Army, 1 million soldiers strong, but badly equipped and poorly led, ethnically divided, crumbled rapidly. On 12 April 1941, Belgrade had been heavily bombed and fell. On 17 April, the Yugoslav Government capitulated. 344,000 Yugoslavian soldiers were technically the prisoners of Germany. The German losses were only 141 men killed.

Yugoslavia had known a brutal German occupation with huge reprisal actions, and great atrocities committed by the Croatian Ustaze. Two main partisan movements had been created. One was formed by the *Chetniks*, nationalist Army officers, who wanted to restore Greater Serbia. The second were the Communists, led by the Croat Josip Broz called Tito. Tito could gain control and form a government. The Yugoslav Communist partisans of Tito won the backing of the British, because they were more active than the Serb nationalist *Chetniks*. In

1943, Tito's forces numbered 20,000 men. They took over large territories in the inhospitable, remote interior of the country. The resistance movements fought each other.

## THE MIDDLE EAST

The Germans tried to gain access to the vital Allied oil supplies in the Middle east by fomenting unrest against the British rule in Iraq. The British could quell such revolts in the summer of 1941. The British also took over Syria, a French colony, from the Vichy Regime.

The Germans secured their monopoly over Rumanian oil supplies as from 27 May 1940.

On 28 November 1941, the Islamic cleric Haj Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, fled to Berlin at the defeat of an uprising in Iraq. He received empty promises from Germany to destroy the Jewish settlements in Palestine.



## Part V. The End of the Third Reich

## The last Convulsions of the Third Reich

### *The Advance of the Soviet Armies*

The military situation of the Third Reich deteriorated rapidly in 1943 and after that year!

On 3 November 1943, Hitler issued a general directive for the conduct of the war in the next months. There was an acute danger of an imminent invasion of the Allies in Europe. Priority was given to building up defences in the west. The east could for the time look after itself. But Hitler was unwilling to sacrifice territory in the east, which still provided Germany with major supplies of grain, raw materials and labour. Meanwhile, the Soviets were driving Army Group South under von Manstein back from the bend in the river Dniepr.

In April and May 1944, the 120,000 German and Rumanian troops were cut off in the Crimea and annihilated in a Soviet pincer movement.

On 28 March 1944, Hitler sacked von Manstein and Kleist. They were replaced by two of his favourite senior officers, Ferdinand Schörner and Walter Model. The Red Army had now completely seized the initiative. The next Russian attack took place in the Ukraine.

Model persuaded Hitler to move in reinforcements to support his forces in the Ukraine: to the renamed Army Group North Ukraine, taking reserves away from Army Group Centre in Belarus under Field Marshal Ernst Busch. Stalin and his commanders were moving massive reinforcements into this area, concentrated for *Operation Bagration*. Busch went away for a few days, lulled into complacency by deceptions of the German intelligence by the Soviets. On 19 and 20 June 1944, the Soviet massed partisans blew up hundreds of railway lines and roads, so that the Germans would have it difficult to bring in reinforcements.

Then, 1.5 million Soviet soldiers then began a huge encirclement, with a series of armoured thrusts. In 2 weeks, 300,000 German soldiers were killed or captured. By mid-July, the Soviets had advanced 200 miles in the central sector. They had to stop to regroup. This meant the Soviet offensive had proved to be a success. It opened the way for further victories all along the Eastern Front.

In the North, Soviet troops advanced as far as the Baltic, west of Riga. Schörner managed to fight back. His forces had to retreat from Estonia and much of Latvia, to avoid getting cut off. From 5 to 9 October 1944, Soviet troops again pushed to the sea. The Germans were now defending East Prussia, German territory! The German forces managed to stop the Soviet advance.

In June 1944, the Soviet forces had also launched an offensive against Finland. On 4 September 1944, a new Finnish Government under Marshal Mannerheim signed an armistice with the Soviets. The 1940 borders were to be restored. German soldiers fleeing to the Soviet Union would be arrested and interned.

In the South, Model's Army Group North Ukraine was weakened by transfers of soldiers to Army Group Centre. It was attacked by large Soviet blows, which sent it back to the Carpathian

Mountains. Huge Soviet artillery battered at the German troops, and the Soviets had superiority in the air. Soviet artillery pounded on the remaining German tanks. Feared were the Russian *Katyusha* rocket launchers, first used at Smolensk in 1941. They had a range less than 10 miles in 1944, so they were rather inefficient, but they had been improved recently, and produced in large numbers. They were called *Stalin Organs*.

By the autumn of 1944, the Soviet forces were approaching the gates of Warsaw. The Soviets crushed the exiled Polish regime's underground Home Army, a nationalist organisation opposed to the Communists. The Russians moved into Polish territory in strength. An uprising happened in Warsaw on 1 August 1944, called by Stalin. The Home Army in Warsaw was poorly equipped, since most of its weapons and ammunition were being used for partisan activities in the countryside, and it was ill prepared. The Poles fought a stubborn defence against tanks, artillery, machine-guns and flame throwers. The Russian soldiers did not move simultaneously and rapidly against Warsaw. The German SS and Police Units commanded by Erich von dem Bach-Zelenski confined the insurgents to isolated zones, pockets of resistance, and finally wiped them out, razing most of the city to the ground. In all, 26,000 German soldiers were killed. The Polish dead men, women and children numbered more than 200,000. Bach-Zelenski massacred everyone he could find. Himmler had ordered the whole city and its population to be destroyed.

Stalin held back the Red Army. It focused on establishing bridgeheads on the Vistula and Narva Rivers. On 2 October 1944, the last Polish resistance in Warsaw surrendered. Now, Stalin moved his forces in to take over the devastated city.

The resistance groups in the west equally fought the Germans. The French Maquis, thousands of men and women engaged in sabotage, damaged German military installations in preparation for the invasion of France.

In the night of 5 to 6 June 1944, 4,000 landing craft and over 1,000 warships brought the Allied soldiers across the Channel. Three Airborne divisions began parachuting Allied soldiers behind the German defences. The German Navy was out of action. The German *Luftwaffe* was much weakened by losses in the preceding months. The German forces were dispersed. Resistance was weaker than expected. In heavy bombardments, the German forces were overwhelmed by the Allied power of war.

By the end of 6 June 1944, 150,000 soldiers and 16,000 vehicles had safely landed in France. The Allies had even built *Mulberry Harbours*, artificial harbours on the coast of Normandy to form 5 beachheads. On 7 June 1944, the Allies captured Cherbourg, a seaport, so the allies could bring in huge quantities of men and equipment.

Von Rundstedt and Rommel had no effective strategic plan for dealing with the invading forces. The Allies began to fight their way slowly across Normandy. Hitler blamed the débâcle all on his generals. On 1 July 1944, the German Chief of the Army General Staff, Kurt Zeitzler, broke down and simply abandoned his office. Hitler threw him out of the Army in January 1945, and even denied him the right to still wear a *Wehrmacht* uniform.

On 21 July 1944, Hitler appointed General Heinz Guderian as Chief of the Army General Staff. Field Marshal von Rundstedt was sacked on 23 July, and also Hugo Sperrle, the *Luftwaffe* commander who had ever bombed Guernica. Marshal Günther von Kluge was appointed to

replace von Rundstedt. On the Eastern Front, Hitler sacked Field Marshal Ernst Busch, because of his defeat of Army Group Centre in *Operation Bagration*. Hitler replaced him by Field Marshal Walter Model. On 14 July 1944, Hitler returned to his field headquarters of the *Wolf's Lair* in Rastenburg.

### *Resistance against the Nazi Dominance within Germany*

Open acts of resistance in Germany itself were still rare. Collective resistance was near impossible. Social democratic and Communist organisations had been crushed by the Gestapo already by the mid-1930s.

In 1942, after the defeat of the German Army before Moscow, clandestine Communist resistance groups had begun to emerge in Saxony, Thuringia, Berlin, and the Ruhr. There was little central coordination. Since the mid-1930s, the official Party line from Moscow had emphasised the need for Communists to collaborate with Social Democrats in a Popular Front. When the war was over, the Social-Democrats would emerge as the major rivals of the Communists for the allegiance of the working class. The Communist strategy of trying to strike a balance between ideological purity on the one hand, and self-protection through collaboration with the SS on the other, led to widespread and sometimes bitter controversy after the war.

Espionage could now play a greater role. The *Red Orchestra*, *Die rote Kapelle*, was a series of overlapping and rather different clandestine groups. It had links to a resistance circle in Berlin, with a civil servant in the Reich Economics Ministry, a man called Arvic Harnach, and with an attaché in the Air Ministry called Harro Schulze-Boysen. A group of Communists, but independent of any central direction from Moscow were active in Germany. Also, the women began to resist, such as Arvic Harnach's American wife, Mildred Harnach-Fisch and Schulze-Boysen's wife Libertas. Mrs. Schulze-Boysen worked in the film section of the Propaganda Ministry. The Soviets received information from them. Stalin refused to believe the group's early warning of an imminent invasion in June 1941. On 30 August 1942, Schulze-Boysen was arrested. On 7 September 1942, Harnach was arrested. With 15 members of the group he was working with. Hitler insisted the death sentences were carried out by hanging.

Another tiny resistance group was *The League: Community for Socialist living*. It had been formed in the 1920s by the lecturer Artur Jacobs. Some were Communists, other Social democrats, others still had no party application. They identified antisemitism as the core of Nazi ideology. In 1933, they went underground. They helped Jews avoid being arrested, and to escape. Its work remained undetected by the *Gestapo*. It delivered false identities to the Jews. Another such group was the *White Rose* Organisation. Its members had been involved in the autonomous youth movements of the Weimar years. They disliked the racism and antisemitism of the Nazis, and above all the extreme violence unleashed on the Eastern Front. Some of these young men had studied medicine at the München University, and had been sent to work in the army medical service on the Eastern Front and thus seen the horrors. They worked together with the Munich Professor Kurt Huber. Leading members were the Scholl siblings Hans and Sophie, Alexander Schmorell, Christoph Probst, and Willi Graf. They spread leaflets in large quantities. They condemned the mass murders of the Jews and of the Poles. On 18 February 1943, observed by a university porter, Hans and Sophie Scholl were arrested by the *Gestapo*. On 22 February 1943, the Scholls were brought before a People's Court, found guilty of treason

and beheaded. Huber, Schmorell and Graf were condemned on 19 April, and also executed. Their Hamburg group was equally discovered by the Gestapo and arrested in June 1944, then eliminated.

### *Plots against Hitler*

The military resistance that had originally emerged in 1938 among senior Army officers, had among them the former ambassador to Italy, Ulrich von Hassell. They remained convinced of the criminal irresponsibility of the *Third Reich* regime. Other Foreign Ministry officials shared Hassell's ideas, men such as State Secretary Ernst von Weizsäcker, Adam von Trotte zu Solz and Hans-Bernd von Haeften. Also, with Carl Goerdeler, former Price Commissioner and ex-Mayor of Leipzig and Johannes Papitz, the Prussian Minister of Finance. Equally the former Chief of the Army General Staff Ludwig Beck. A circle was built around the Head of Military Intelligence, Admiral Wilhelm von Canaris and his Chief of Staff Hans Ostern. They were concerned about Hitler's reckless military ambitions. Also, the young theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, an inspirational figure in the Confessing Church was a member of their group.

A group of mostly aristocratic officers of the younger generation were outraged by the atrocities being committed in Russia. Their 2 most active leaders were Fabian von Schlabendorff and Henning von Treschow.

The *Kreisau Circle* was another such group, a loose network of intellectuals, about one hundred, who met at the estate of Count Helmut von Moltke at Kreisau in Lower Silesia. Equally members or sympathizers were Count Peter Yorck von Wartenburg, a civil servant in the Price Commissioner's Office and Count Fritz-Dietlof von der Schulenburg, Deputy Police President of Berlin. Von Moltke worked in the POW Department of the Combined Armed Forces Supreme Command.

They all had idealistic views of Germany. They emphasised Christianity as the basis for a moral regeneration of the German people. Theirs was a radical conservative idealism. Belonging to this group was based on Christian values and local identities. They vowed to common ownership of vital industries and co-responsibility in the individual plant.

On 8 January 1943 took place a secret meeting between the members. It did not go well. Von Moltke considered Goerdeler a reactionary. Many older men thought the younger men quite unrealistic. In May 1944, they envisaged a negotiated peace on the basis of Germany's frontiers of 1914, plus Austria, the Sudetenland, South Tyrol, autonomy to Alsace-Lorraine, and holding an effective defence force in the East. They would not get such guarantees! A Social Democrat in the group was Julius Leber. Many conservatives in the group were looking back to the Prussian reforms of Baron Karl vom Stein. They wanted the abolishment of the Nürnberg Laws. Others remained antisemitic. Another member was Wolf Heinrich, Count Helldorf, The Police President of Berlin. Yet another member was Arthur Nebe, commander of the SS task force B in the Soviet Union, which had murdered thousands of Jews.

Moltke and most of his friends were against an assassination attempt on Hitler on religious grounds. Henning von Tresckow was convinced Hitler had to be killed for the Nazi regime to be overthrown. On 13 March 1943, Tresckow tried to blow up Hitler's airplane between his field headquarters, with explosives supplied by Admiral Canaris. The detonator did not work

in the low temperatures of the hold at high altitude. Fabian von Schlabendorff managed to defuse the bomb in time.

On 21 March 1943, Colonel Rudolph-Christoph Baron von Gersdorff hoped to kill Hitler at an exhibition in Berlin. Hitler rushed through the exhibition; the device could not be exploded. In the spring of 1943, Oster and key officers, also Bonhoeffer, were arrested by the Gestapo. Canaris was interned. Military intelligence passed under the Security Service of the SS.

In January 1944, von Moltke was arrested. Von Kluge had a car accident. The Social Democrat Miesendorff and the retired Army Chief Hammerstein died of natural causes. The conspiracy was set back by many months. With them also was General Friedrich Olbricht, who headed the armed forces reserve section in Berlin, and also General Friedrich Fromm, commander of the Reserve Army. He played a waiting game.

The men who decided on the *Operation Valkyrie*, a new plan to eliminate Hitler were then Ludwig Beck, Treschow, and Olbricht. Klaus Schenk, Count von Stauffenberg was a lieutenant-colonel.

Von Stauffenberg had no right hand, no 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> fingers on his left hand. A Black patch covered one eye. He was due to take up his appointment as Chief of Staff of the Army General Office on 1 October 1943. He was a disillusioned Nazi. He turned against the Nazis. Several schemes to kill Hitler failed or were discarded as impossible. In the end, Stauffenberg resolved to kill Hitler himself. On 1 July 1944, Stauffenberg now promoted to colonel, and appointed Chief of Staff of Fromm, Head of the Army Reserve, had some access to Hitler as Fromm's emissary. On 10 July 1944, Stauffenberg visited Hitler's field headquarters at Rastenburg. Stauffenberg left the room, and the bomb in his attaché-case exploded. He flew back to Berlin by airplane. But Hitler had suffered no serious injuries. The men who had plotted together were arrested. Executed were Olbricht, Stauffenberg, Colonel Albrecht Merz von Quirnheim. They were shot on orders of Fromm, to hide his own involvement. Von Beck also was killed.

A coup against the regime happened in Paris, Prague and Vienna. Over 1,000 SS officers were arrested. Field Marshal von Kluge released all the SS-men. General Günther Blumentritt patched up a deal. Stülpnagel committed suicide. This precluded new changes in the leadership of the *Wehrmacht*. Guderian became Chief of the Army General Staff. Hitler, Himmler and the *Gestapo* identified and arrested the surviving conspirators. Canaris was brought in for questioning. Hitler ordered to arrest Hjalmar Schacht, because he felt Schacht had sabotaged rearmament in the 1930s. Johannes Papitz, Gustav Noske, Wilhelm Leuschner (Social Democrats) were arrested. Carl Goerdeler hid but was caught and arrested too. He gave the *Gestapo* the names of the other conspirators.

Himmler arrested 5,000 people. Names as Halder, von Brauchitsch, General Georg Thomas, Ulrich von Hassel fell in his nets. Henning von Tresckow committed suicide. Many other conspirators took poison or shot themselves. Also committed suicide: von Kluge, and Erwin Rommel. Rommel had known of the conspiracy, but he had not approved of it. A court martial hastily convened on Hitler's orders, was presided over by Field Marshal von Rundstedt. It dismissed 22 other military conspirators from the army, with dishonour.

On 7 August 1944 opened in Berlin the trial of the first 8 conspirators, including General Erwin von Witzleben, and Yorck von Wartenburg. More trials started later to condemn Schulenburg, Trott, Goerdener, Leuschner, Hassel, the blinded Stülpnagel and more. Leber, Papitz, Eugen Bolz, von Moltke. It took place in January 1945. The President of the People's Court, Roland

Freisler, bullied and hectored the accused men, showered them with insults, and barely let them speak a few words. He had an outrageous conduct. Even Minister of Justice Otto-Georg Thierack complained about it.

The lawyers made an attempt to plead mitigation. But Hitler had ordered that they all should be hanged. They were indeed hanged then, on crude hooks at the Plötensee Prison in Berlin. Hitler had the executions filmed. He watched the films at night in his headquarters. Someone who was arrested, though survived, was Fabian von Schlabendorff. He sheltered in a cellar of the People's Court when a bombing demolished the courthouse on 3 February 1945. Freisler was killed instantly. The court later acquitted von Schlabendorff, because he had been illegally tortured. About 1,000 people were killed or committed suicide in the wake of the failed coup attempt. Also, the families were punished by Himmler: wives and children, brothers and sister, parents, cousins and aunts. All property of the families were confiscated.

Hitler's charismatic authority, backed by Goebbels, Göring, Himmler and Bormann, was still enough to prevent vacillating senior officers like Fromm and von Kluge from throwing their weight behind the coup attempt. Goebbels, Hitler, Himmler and the SS acted quickly and decisively, while the conspirators were dilatory. The plotters had not managed to persuade enough key military commanders to back the coup. Yet, the majority of the senior officers knew by now that there was little hope of Germany winning the war. Most of them were still locked into a rigid military mentality, in which orders from above had to be obeyed. Killing the Head of State was an act of treachery.

The assassination attempt was more a moral gesture than a political act. When the news of the attempt reached London and New York, it was quickly dismissed as a meaningless squabble within the Nazi hierarchy.

The military-conservative resistance had very little support in the German population at large. Yet, Hitler's death might well have hastened the disintegration of the regime.

### *The Downfall of the Regime*

The Nazis wanted to sacrifice an entire people, just to postpone their own downfall a little longer. Many soldiers thought Hitler had let them down badly. He should have left the conduct of the war to the professionals. Yet, very many German soldiers kept on fighting on the Western Front to the bitter end. For some Germans, the leading role taken by the Prussian aristocrats was a cause for anger. Some said the aristocracy should be completely exterminated. For Goebbels too, it was clear that traitorous generals had not wanted to win. They had been in league with the Allies to bring about Germany's defeat.

In Berchtesgaden, the SS Security Service reported that women in particular were desperate for the war to come to an end, and some thought that Hitler's death might bring this about. But in general, the attempt had no general effect on popular morale. The popular mood was then the worst imaginable. A kind of creeping mood of panic set in.

The German soldiers on the Eastern Front were not engaged in a planned withdrawal, but rather in a wholesale retreat. Entire units were running away or giving themselves up to the enemy.

The great majority of the soldiers did not believe in victory any more. People were beginning to flee from the territories that lay in the path of the advancing Red Army, taking their money and possessions with them. By November 1944, also Hitler's reputation declined still further. The Red Army moved ever further towards, and then into Germany itself. The Nazi attempt to provide for *Lebensraum* had been a total failure, and the result would be catastrophic for Germany. The news from Germany's Allies in Europe was equally bad!

Turkey broke off diplomatic relations with Germany on 1 August 1944. Bulgaria declared war on Germany, as Soviet troops entered the country on 8 September 1944. In Rumania, the Red Army advanced, leading to the annihilation of 18 German divisions in the country. On 23 August 1944, Rumania's Marshal Antonescu was ousted from power. Rumania went over to the Allies, hoping to regain the territory it had lost to Hungary in 1940. In Greece, on Hitler's authorisation, the German forces withdrew in October 1944 into Macedonia. In Albania, of Southern Yugoslavia, German troops evacuated these countries in October 1944.

In Hungary, the Red Army reached the borders after the loss of Rumania. Admiral Horthy organised fierce resistance to the Red Army. But on 15 October 1944, Horthy announced that Hungary was no longer allied to the German Reich. Otto Skorzeny kidnapped Horthy's son Miklós from the fortress of Budapest, and the Nazis incarcerated him in the concentration camp of Mauthausen. Hitler informed Horthy that his son would be shot and the fortress stormed unless he surrendered. Horthy resigned, and was brought to a Bavarian castle.

The leader of the Fascist *Arrow Cross*, Ferenc Szálasi, then seized power with the backing of the Germans. He had 25,000 Jewish men rounded up into labour battalions to construct fortifications around Budapest. When they tried to escape, *Arrow Cross* units killed them on the banks or bridges of the Danube. On 18 October 1944, Adolf Eichmann arrived in Budapest. He organised the arrest of another 50,000 Jews, sent them on foot in the direction of Vienna. Many thousands died on the futile march. Szálasi stopped the deportations mid November 1944. He feared he would be held account for the deaths. The remaining Jews were confined in the ghetto of Budapest.

By January 1945, 60,000 Jews were living in 4,500 dwellings, up to 14 in one room in the Budapest ghetto. Starving, disease-ridden, and regularly harassed by *Arrow Cross* murder squads, the prisoners suffered cruel treatment. Diplomats in Budapest, among whom the Swedish representative Raoul Wallenberg, made attempts to protect the Jews in getting nearly 40,000 sets of exemption papers, recognised by the *Arrow Cross*.

In Slovakia in August 1944, the Slovakian military, led by the Minister of Defence, were plotting to overthrow the Government and switch sides to the Allies. German troops occupied Slovakia on 29 August 1944. A full-scale uprising ensued. The Red Army failed to move quickly enough to come to the partisans' aid. In October 1944, the uprising was brutally suppressed. In the meantime, about 58,000 Jews had been taken to the extermination camps. Trainloads rolled from September 1944 to March 1945. More than 8,000 Jews were sent to Auschwitz, 2,700 to Sachsenhausen, 1,600 to Theresienstadt.

The rapid deterioration of the Reich's military situation in 1943-1944 was obvious to everyone. Still, Hitler felt that Germany would still be winning if the generals had not been constantly undermining his strategy, disobeying his commands and deliberately retreating in the face of an enemy he alone knew how to defeat. Nothing was his fault!



On 18 July 1944, Hitler appointed Goebbels to Reich Plenipotentiary for the Total War effort. Goebbels was claiming his reward for his loyalty and presence of mind during the coup attempt. Hermann Göring felt himself outflanked, and sulked at his estate at Rominten for several weeks. Goebbels unleashed a whole set of measures, in particular on trying to draft yet more men into the armed forces, but on this point, Hitler overruled him.

Theatres, orchestras, newspapers, publishing houses and other institutions deemed inessential for the war effort were cut back or closed down. The upper-age limit for women to be drafted into the war industries was raised from 45 to 55. 400,000 women were moved out of domestic services to war-relevant areas of the economy. Efforts to merge the Prussian Ministry of finance, over which the plot conspirator Papitz had presided, into the Reich Finance Ministry were too complex to resolve, but overall, the measures freed up more than 450,000 men for the war. With further measures, this helped find about 1 million men more to the front between August 1944 to December 1944. But about 1 million men were also killed, captured or wounded on both fronts in that period!

On 20 November 1944, the Red Army had come within striking distance of Hitler's field headquarters at Rastenburg. Hitler left it for good, for the Reich Chancellery in Berlin. The Soviet forces were now exhausted. They had to regroup and reorganise, to solve the supply problems caused by the narrower gauge of the railway lines.

### *The last Battle*

In early December 1944, the German armies had been forced back to behind the West Wall. Hitler planned to break out with 30 new divisions. The aim was Antwerp. Jodl put the plans to the generals on 3 November 1944. They dismissed them as unrealistic. They had a massively superior force against them. They had shortages of men, munitions and fuel. Jodl ordered them to begin the offensive.

On 11 December 1944, Hitler arrived at his new field headquarters of Bad Nauheim. On 16 December 1944, the new German offensive attack began. 200,000 German soldiers, 600 tanks, 1,900 artillery pieces were launched on the Western Allies, to break through the American lines in the Ardennes, defended by only 80,000 soldiers and 400 tanks. The Germans pushed on rapidly 65 miles towards the Meuse. They surprised the Allied troops. Though not for long.

Around Christmas Eve 1944, the Germans ran out of petrol. The American tanks brought them to a halt. The Allied airplanes could bomb the German lines to smithereens by 5,000 Allied aircraft in improved weather. This battle has been called the *Battle of the Bulge*. The Americans under George Patton mounted a successful armoured tank counter-attack from the south. The Germans had attacked Allied airfields with their *Luftwaffe* on 10 January 1945, but they lost as many planes as the Allies, about 280 aircraft. Ultimately, they failed to force a breakthrough. A subsidiary German attack in the Alsace failed too. On 17 December 1944, the SS First *Panzer* Division, frustrated by the failures, massacred a large number of American POWs at Malmedy. The American forces resumed their advance on Germany.

Casualties in the *Battle of the Bulge* were 80,000 German and 70,000 American soldiers, killed, wounded or missing in the battle. Each side lost about 700 tanks and armoured vehicles. These were irreplaceable losses for the Germans! Hitler's last counter-attack had failed. He withdrew his troops and on 15 January 1945, he rode back in his special train to Berlin. Germany had definitely lost the war. Hitler and the Nazi leadership turned their thoughts not to victory then, but to revenge.

### *Another Blitz on Great Britain*

The *Blitz* on London was aimed above all at the docks, while an attack on Coventry was mounted because of the city's key function in armament production. The purpose of the new German raids was to weaken the British war economy and to bring Churchill to the negotiating table, not so much to terrorise the civilian population. Hitler only ordered the first beginning of terror raids on Britain after April 1942, following the British raid on Lübeck. The rapidly intensifying Anglo-American raids on German towns and cities, during which in 1943 fell up to 70% of the high-explosive bombs and 90% of the incendiary bombs on residential German areas, had created a widespread popular desire for retaliation. Goebbels especially, favoured bombing the parts of British cities where the plutocrats lived.

The German *Luftwaffe*, however, had no 4-engined bombers, no high-altitude bombers, no specialised night-bombers. Air-raids on London now began again on the night of 21 to 22 January 1944. 440 bombers of mostly older bombers like the Ju88 attacked. The bombings were therefore called the *Baby Blitz*. Further German raids on a variety of targets from Portsmouth to Torquay, with about 200 aircraft, happened. About 100 such raids took place in April-May 1944. No significant damage was done anymore, so this offensive ended in May 1944. Another kind of terror then came on Great Britain.

The pilotless *Flying Bombs*, named the V1 by Hans Schwarz von Berkl, a journalist in Goebbel's organ *Das Reich* were sent to great Britain as of 17 June 1944. The V stood for *Vergeltungswaffe*, weapon of revenge. It was an aerial torpedo, or a cruise missile. The German Air Ministry gave its formal approval for its development by the aircraft manufacturing firm of Fieseler. The first 10 V1s were launched on 13 June 1944 at Hitler's urgent command, onto London. They had a considerable psychological effect! Hitler ordered a massive boost in production late in June 1944. In total, 22,384 missiles were fired, 1,600 from aircraft, the rest from launch ramps. More than a third failed to reach targets. By September 1944, the V1 had failed to break British morale. The programme was scaled back. Increasingly, V1s were launched from Germany on Belgium, on the port of Antwerp, as the Allies overran the launching sites on the Atlantic coast.

The V2 was a ballistic rocket, developed by the Army as a rival to the *Luftwaffe's* V1.

Wernher von Braun was a wealthy young aristocrat. He was born in 1912 in a very conservative family. In 1932, von Braun senior became a Minister of Agriculture in the Franz von Papen Government. He lost his job when Hitler came to power. Wernher von Braun had a Ph.D. in applied physics, on liquid-fuel rocketry. He moved to a site where the V1s could be built, tested and launched. There existed a testing range at Peenemünde on the Island of Usedom on the Baltic Coast. Von Braun joined the Nazi Party in 1937, the SS in 1940. Albert Speer, shortly

after his appointment to Armaments Minister, visited Peenemünde with General Fromm, Field Marshal Milch and a representative of the Navy. The first successful trial of the V1 happened on 14 October 1942.

The British and US troops soon learnt from where the V1s were launched. On 18 August 1945, the British and American Air Forces launched a raid on Peenemünde by 600 British bombers. The site was damaged, but Hans Kammler found another site. In a complex of old gypsum mines near the town of Nordhausen in the Harz mountains of Thüringen. This new rocket production centre was called the *Mittelwerk* for Central Works. To carry out the construction work, the SS established a sub-camp of Buchenwald, *Work Camp Dora* at the site. In October 1943, 4,000 prisoners were at work: Russians, Polish, and French prisoners. At end November 1942, 8,000 workers were busy there. Temperatures were never higher than 15°C, and the quarters were very damp. The prisoners were always kept in the tunnels. The conditions were appalling.

On 10 December 1943, Speer visited the camps. He saw the appalling conditions, the terrible health situation in the camp. Deaths were: 18 in October 1943, 172 in November 1943, 670 in December 1943. Since the opening, 2,882 prisoners had died. In all, 20,000 of the 60,000 men forced to work here, in *Dora*, or in one of no fewer than 30 sub-camps, died of disease, starvation and maltreatment. Yet, the Nazis had their revenge weapon.

Himmler arrested von Braun, his brother, and 2 of his closest collaborators on charges of belonging to a completely fictional left-wing resistance organisation, trying to sabotage the rocket programme. They were released by Speer and Walter Dornberger, the Army officer with overall responsibility for the V2-programme. No fewer than 65,000 changes were made to the blueprints. The poor physical condition of the workers, their lack of expertise as slave workers were altered some for the better.

In September 1944, the Germans launched their first rockets against London. Production was at a rate of about 20 a day, 700 per month. On 1 February 1945, Hitler assigned a new commandant: Richard Baer, who had served as last commander of Auschwitz. The factory constructed 6,000 rockets. Also, still several V1 flying bombs. And 3,200 V2 rockets had been successfully fired. Not at Britain now, but on Belgium. The speed of the V2 was up to 2,000 mph. It had a payload of a ton of high explosives. Yet, it was unable to cause significant destruction. The total number of people killed reached no more than 5,000. More people died producing the V2 than died from its explosions, according to Michael Neufeld, its historian.

General Fromm, who was to be arrested for his complicity in the bomb plot against Hitler, was convinced Germany needed a super-bomb to be developed under the theoretical physicists Otto Hahn and Werner Heisenberg. But Heisenberg and Hahn never managed to calculate the quantity of Uranium 235 needed for a bomb. To keep the fission process under control, they thought they needed heavy water, a heavier isotope of water. The only factory that could produce this was captured by the Allies in Norway in April 1940, and had been totally destroyed by British bomber planes in 1943.

Heisenberg's team failed to recognise the importance of graphite in controlling nuclear fission. An 'atom bomb' could only be ready in 3 years. The *Third Reich* didn't have that time! Speer,

Heisenberg and his team built a cyclotron that succeeded in splitting an atomic nucleus in the summer of 1944. The experiment went not much further.

Another project was led by Manfred von Ardenne, backed by Reich Postal Minister Wilhelm Ohnesorge. His friend was the court photographer Heinrich Hoffmann, who persuaded Hitler to take an interest in the research. Ardenne was assisted by Kurt Diebner, an army physicist and a team of 100 researchers in 17 different institutions. Their aim was to develop a tactical nuclear weapon using enriched Uranium. A test site was built in March 1945, with concentration camp workers. Several hundred men died. The researchers could not obtain the quantities of Uranium needed.

### *Other weapons*

IG Farben developed nerve gasses. In 1938, IG Farben scientists Schrader, Ambros, Rüdiger and Van der Linde synthesised an extremely deadly organophosphorus gas they called *Sarin*, after their surnames. They had another one, *Tabun*, ready to manufacture, and a third, *Soman*, synthesised by the scientists at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Chemistry lead by Richard Kuhn, in early 1944. As of 1942, production of *Sarin* and *Tabun* had begun at a site north of Breslau. By June 1944, 12,000 tonnes of *Tabun* had been produced. The nerve gases had caused convulsions or other injuries in over 300 workers and at least 10 deaths. There was no known effective protection against them. But it was simply too dangerous to deploy them on the battlefield! It was never used.

Speer wanted to concentrate on the *Waterfall* ground-to-air missile to stop the bombing raids. Hitler ordered resources concentrated on the V1 and V2. Yet, these schemes imposed a huge financial burden on Germany, without having any effect on the outcome of the war.

By 1941, Ernst Heinkel had developed and tested a jet engine, to be put on a revolutionary new fighter plane, the 2-engined Me262, with a speed of over 500 mph. It first flew in 1943. Speer was enthusiastic, Hitler not. Hitler then declared it had to be a bomber, instead of a fighter. From autumn 1944 onwards, Hitler banned all discussions on the Me262. Messerschmitt simply lacked the time and resources to bring the project to fruition.

The Navy thought of a new generation of submarines equipped with powerful batteries. These submarines would remain submerged for long periods, and less detected by radar. They were built for speed, too. First delivered in June 1944, 150 of them were built by February 1945. They were not tested and tried enough. A long-range reconnaissance aircraft, the Ju290, had to be called off in the summer of 1944 after damage by bombing on the production centres. Soon, the U-boat bases of the French coast fell into Allied hands.

The V3 was an enormous gun with a barrel over 150 meters long. It was intended to shoot shells at London. It was still under development when the Allies destroyed the firing site by bombing. A 4-stage rocket with powder instead of liquid fuel was a multi-stage solid-fuel rocket. No more than 200 were produced, and launched end 1944 against Antwerp.

In all, fewer than 6,000 V1s fell on Great Britain and just over 1,000 V2s. 31,600 houses were destroyed, mostly in London, and 9,000 people were killed, 24,000 injured. The German people

called the V1 the *Volksverdummer*, the ‘stultifier 1’ of the people’. Or the *Versager Nummer 1*, the ‘failure no. 1’. Until the last few days, the German people retained a remnant of belief in a miracle weapon. It never came.

Already at the end of 1943, increasingly older age-cohorts were called up to the armed forces. Hitler on 26 September 1944 called up a *Volkssturm*, in which all men from 16 to 60 were required to take up arms. To be organised by the Party to ‘defend the German people against the attempt of its Jewish-international enemies to annihilate them’. Its official launch date was 18 October 1944. These never were a very effective fighting force: they had no uniforms, they had to come only with a rucksack, a blanket, and cooking equipment. Finally, 175,000 of these men were eventually killed fighting against the armies of the Allies. Final drafts then happened of young women and younger pupils of from 14 to 16 years.

### *The last Struggle*

Hitler’s last speech was given on 30 January 1945, the 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his appointment as Reich Chancellor. He railed as ever against the ‘Jewish-International world conspiracy’. His speech was not very inspirational.

It was clear to most Germans that the war was drawing to a rapid close. The Red Army resumed its attacks. After the loss of the Rumanian oilfields, the German Army needed to cling to its source of supply in Hungary. But by end March 1945, the Red Army had occupied almost the whole of Hungary.

In the north, the German forces in Latvia held out, but were completely isolated. The main Soviet attack came mid-January in the central sector. They pulverised the German front and crushed the remaining German tanks.

End January 1945, the Red Army occupied most of pre-war Poland. Breslau held out until May. The Red Army stood on the River Oder, at the gates of the German Reich. Silesia was captured, the Soviets had gained control of the Hungarian oilfields, the Russian soldiers were nearing Vienna.

Then, the pause came for the final offensive. In the west, end January 1945, 1.5 million US soldiers, 400,000 British and Canadians, 100,000 Free French troops assembled for an attack on the Rhine. They advanced, took more than 50,000 prisoners, and passed the stream. On 7 March 1945, American soldiers reached Remagen. The bridge there over the Rhine was intact! The Allies established a bridgehead on the other side, allowing many troops across, until the bridge finally collapsed. After crossing the Rhine, 300,000 German soldiers had been captured, 60,000 more were killed or wounded. The US soldiers pushed on to Saxony, and the Canadians advanced into Holland. British forces drove to Bremen and Hamburg. US troops mounted a huge encirclement operation in the Ruhr, and captured more than 300,000 German prisoners.

On 25 April 1945, US soldiers met their Red Army counterparts for a ceremonial meeting at the small town of Torgau on the River Mulde, a tributary of the Elbe.

Meanwhile, Allied troops moved towards Munich, to meet Allied forces coming over the Brenner Pass from northern Italy. A final assault there happened on 9 April 1945. Then, already on 3 April 1945, Red Army soldiers had entered Vienna, while US troops rode in Austria from the west. In negotiations, the German capital of Berlin was left to the Red Army to take.

In March and in early April 1945, Soviet troops destroyed almost all the remaining German armies, and the fortresses in East Prussia and Pomerania. General Rokossovsky launched a massive assault into Mecklenburg in the north. By mid-April 1945, 2.5 million Red Army soldiers were poised for the final attack on Berlin. In March 1945, about 58,000 of 16-and 17-year old Germans were sent against the enemy. Training had been perfunctory. They were no match for the Allies.

German losses on the Eastern Front amounted to 812,000 in 1943, 1,802,000 in 1944. By the end of 1944, the Red Army had killed or captured about 3.5 million German soldiers! Then, in January 1945, 450,000 German armed forces were killed, in February 295,000 more, in March 284,000 and in April 280,000. Over 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of all German soldiers killed during the war died in the war's last 4.5 months! End 1944, about 800,000 German soldiers were in the custody of the Western Allies. This climbed to a million by April, to 4 million by the time the war was over. 700,000 German soldiers were then in Soviet camps. In April 1945, 600,000 sick and wounded soldiers, airmen and sailors were in hospitals. In the second half of 1944, the *Luftwaffe* lost 20,000 airplanes. In September 1944, Speer managed to complete still 3,000 fighter planes. But the economy shrunk.

The Germans were no longer a disciplined, effective and motivated fighting force. They were rapidly shrinking in numbers, demoralised and disorganised. The propaganda in Germany nevertheless continued. Heinz Guderian, Chief of the Army General Staff, said all the Red Army wanted to do in Germany was to rob, rape and kill. The question was what else the Germans had wanted to do.

As propaganda failed, terror began to take its place. Makeshift courts swung in action. On 18 March 1945, Field Marshal Model ordered the Military Police to shoot any soldiers or civilians engaged in acts of sabotage. Mid-April 1945, the message still was of no retreat, no surrender. Himmler instructed his SS officers and police to shoot all persons brandishing a white flag. But Himmler never fought in the first lines.

Up to 10,000 people were summarily executed in this final phase of terror and repression. They included a significant number of the 190,000 or so criminal offenders in Germany's state prisons. Horrors still happened. State prisoners were forced to go on marches towards the concentration camps. Thousands of the considered incorrigible prisoners were taken out and shot. Also, foreign forced labourers were killed. In April 1945 still, Reich Justice Minister Thierack personally ordered a large number of prison executions. Army commanders who saw prison inmates as a military threat, also ordered executions. Field Marshal Walter Model had 200 prisoners shot in his area, surrounded by US soldiers. The more desperate the situation became, the more vital it seemed to men like Hitler and Model to eliminate anyone who might threaten the regime from within.

141 French resistance workers were shot in Natzweiler, the day before the camp was evacuated in the face of the advancing Allied armies.

On 4 April 1945, chance led to the discovery of Admiral Canaris' personal diaries. Hitler read them in his bunker. He was convinced that Canaris and his fellow-conspirators had been

working against him from the outset. He began by ordering the head of the SS Security Service, Ernst Kaltenbrunner, to do away with the surviving plotters.

Therefore, on 9 April 1945, Canaris, Oster, Bonhoeffer and 2 other political inmates of Flossenburg concentration camp were stripped naked and hanged by ropes from wooden hooks in the courtyard. The bodies were immediately cremated. Himmler gave orders for the execution of Georg Elser, who had narrowly missed in killing Hitler with a home-made bomb in November 1939. Elser was shot at Dachau by the commandant. Further series of murders happened between 20 and 24 April in Berlin. The SS shot more of the people involved in the bomb plot of July 1944. Murders thus happened on a large scale. Also, the former Communist Leader Ernst Thälmann. He was executed at Buchenwald in August 1944. He was shot and cremated.

Other murdered people during that period were the former Chief of the Army General Staff Franz Halder, the former Economics Minister Hjalmar Schacht, the sacked head of the Army Procurement Georg Thomas (all 3 had been arrested after the bomb plot), the last Austrian Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg, the French former Prime Minister Léon Blum, the Confessing church Leader Martin Niemöller, the former Hungarian Miklós Kallay, the bomb plotter Fabian Schlabendorff, the families of his co-conspirators the Stauffenbergs, Goerdeler and von Hassel, a nephew of the Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov, British agents, etc. 160 people in all were in an SS convoy taken to South Tyrol in 28 April 1945. One of the prisoners managed to contact the local German Army Commander, who sent a subordinate officer, Captain Wichard von Alvensleben, to browbeat the SS-men into releasing the prisoners.

In October 1944, still 40,000 people perished at Birkenau. In November 1944, Hitler ordered all gas chambers in every camp to be closed and dismantled. At end 1944, the former commandant Rudolf Höss of Auschwitz, was sent by Oswald Pohl to the camp, to make sure the order of destruction had been properly carried out. Höss could not reach the camp, as the Red Army was there before he arrived.

On all the roads and tracks in Upper Silesia, columns of prisoners struggled through the deep snow. Most of the NCOs accompanying them had no idea where they were supposed to go. Every few hundred meters lay the bodies of prisoners who had collapsed and been shot.

For instance, on 19 January of 1945, 58,000 prisoners walked slowly out of Auschwitz, most of them on foot, some by train. SS guards shot stragglers, leaving the bodies by the roadside. About 15,000 prisoners died of starvation or cold, or were killed by the SS. In the end, 43,000 prisoners reached camps in the west. The administration of Auschwitz ended up at Gross-Rosen. Camp Doctor Joseph Mengele also absconded, taking his research notes and papers with him. On 20 and 21 January 1945, the SS-guards abandoned the watchtowers, blew up the remains of the crematoria, set fire to the personal effects of the inmates. The last crematorium was blown up on 25 and 26 January 1945. The SS still killed 700 prisoners at the various camps and sub-camps of the Auschwitz complex.

On 27 January 1945, the Red Army marched in at Auschwitz. They found 600 corpses; 7,000 prisoners still alive but very weak. The Russian soldiers found 837,000 women's coats, 44,000 pairs of shoes, 7.7 tons of human hair.

Other horror stories could be told on cruel German last-minute actions. In East Prussia, 5,000 mostly female Jewish prisoners walked out of the camps. All were shot at the fishing village

of Palmwicken. At a sub-camp of Flossenburg, Helmbrechts, 1,100 prisoners walked out in 3 groups on 3 April 1945. By 3 May, they had marched 195 miles. Shootings, beatings accompanied them on the way. On 4 May, they reached the Czech border town of Prachtice. A US plane shot a guard. All prisoners were shot as they fled. At least 178 Jewish prisoners had died. The evacuation of the concentration camp at Neuengamme, with 57 sub-camps and 50,000 prisoners had been organised in co-operation with the Regional Leader of nearby Hamburg, Karl Kaufmann. The prisoners were sent to collection camps among which Bergen-Belsen by mid-April. Then, there were still 14,000 prisoners in the main camp. Kaufmann had decided to put them on ships. 10,000 prisoners from Neuengamme marched therefore off to Lübeck from 21 to 26 April 1945 and were put on 3 ships: the freighters Athens and Thielbeck, and on a luxury liner the Cap Arcona. But on 3 May 1945, British fighter-bombers stopped the ships, and attacked them with rockets. Only 350 prisoners survived, but also 400 of the 500 SS officers on board.

A column of 1,000 prisoners from the Dora camp came to the camp of Gardelegen for the night. The barn walls were collapsed on the prisoners. The police and the Hitler Youth poured petrol over the roofs, and burned those inside alive. The next day, the US soldiers arrived, too late to save the prisoners. These were the last acts in the brutal and violent history of the *Third Reich*'s horror system of repression.

The camps in the *Reich* proper were soon overcrowded. Buchenwald grew from 37,000 people in 1943 to 100,000 in January 1945. 14,000 persons died in the camp from January to April 1945, half of them still Jews. In Mauthausen, 45,000 inmates died in the camp from October 1944 to May 1945. Ohrdruf, a sub-camp of Mauthausen near Gotha, was the first to be discovered by the US troops, as they advanced through Thuringia. The soldiers were shocked. They invited Generals Patton, Bradley and Eisenhower to visit it.

Bergen-Belsen had since March 1944 become a dumping ground for sick and exhausted prisoners from other camps. In August 1944, also, Jewish women from Auschwitz had been brought there. In December 1944, more than 15,000 prisoners, including 8,000 women had arrived. One of these was Anne Frank, who died in March 1945. Commander as of 2 December 1944, was Josef Kramer, an SS officer. He began a regime of rapidly increasing chaos and brutality. He had overseen the murder of hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. In April 1945, still 60,000 prisoners remained in the camp. Excrements lay on the barrack floors up to a meter thick. Food supplies were completely inadequate. There were no water supplies. On 15 April 1945, the British soldiers overtook the camp. They noticed cases of cannibalism among the prisoners, and found epidemics of typhus. From January 1945 to April 1945, 35,000 people died still at Bergen-Belsen. Later, 14,000 more could not recover.

Across Germany as a whole, between 200,000 and 350,000 concentration camp prisoners died on the 'death marches' and in the camps. Up to half of the prisoners held in this camp system in January 1945 were dead 4 months later.

Devastating air raids continued on Germany, bombing on a daily basis. Firestorms ensued in cities. In Magdeburg, on 16 January 1945, a firestorm killed 4,000 people and flattened 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the city. To make matters worse, bombs with time-fuses were dropped! The bombs exploded while the helpers tried to stop the fires in the streets. Mosquito fighter-bombers still flew over the city to disrupt aid.



On 21 February 1945, more than 2,000 bombers attacked Nürnberg. In the night of 23 to 24 February 1945, British bombers were sent in a raid on Pforzheim. A firestorm destroyed the centre, killed up to 17,000 people out of the town's 79,000 inhabitants. On 3 March 1945, in broad daylight, over 1,000 American bombers attacked. The city centre was destroyed, and more than 100,000 people were homeless, 3,000 citizens had been killed. Water and electricity distribution was cut off. On 12 March 1945, on Soviet request, more than 650 US bombers devastated the harbour of Swinemünde. 5,000 people, all refugees, were killed. The death toll may have been much higher. On 13 March happened a raid on Dortmund. On 16 to 17 March, 225 British bombers destroyed more than 80% of the built-up area of Warzburg and killed 5,000 people. On 14 to 15 April 1945 took place the last substantial British air raid attack on Potsdam. At least 3,500 people were killed. On 13 February 1945, the most devastating air raid of all took place on Dresden. Two waves of British bombers attacked the city centre, unopposed by Flak batteries. The bombers flew in clear weather. After the British raids came 2 daylight attacks by US bombers. This created a firestorm. The city was in a single sea of flames. About 35,000 people were killed.

The country's infrastructure was crumbling rapidly. Theft and black-marketeering became the only ways to survive. Looting grew more widespread. Thieves took advantage of shop owners' absence during night-time air raids.

In September 1944, Gestapo officers were authorised to carry out summary executions of looters, an order formalised by the Reich Security Head Office in November 1944.

Large thieving gangs were growing in number, and not afraid of shooting it out with the police. Most members were Army deserters and escaped prisoners. Gangs in Köln, in Duisburg, shot it out with the *Gestapo* and police, gangs of up to 100 men large! Essen, Wuppertal, Bochum, were other examples of such gangs. Gang activity in the regions was more driven by the sense of survival than by any desire to offer overt resistance to the Nazi regime. But as so often, the regime's response was political in its very essence, ideological to the last.

The Red Army's total losses in the war were of more than 11 million soldiers, over 100,000 aircraft, more than 300,000 artillery pieces, nearly 100,000 tanks and self-propelled guns. Other authorities had far higher losses, at 26 million people. More tanks were lost every day in the final battle for Berlin by the Soviet Union than had been lost even in the Battle for Kursk. Stalin sought victory at any price. The price his men paid was astronomically high. Instead of mounting tactically sophisticated attacks, the Soviets often stormed the German lines in frontal assaults, which incurred heavy losses to the Red Army. The war on the Eastern Front took more time to win than it would have done with more intelligent and less profligate military leadership. The suffering of the soviet soldiers and the enormous losses they underwent, infused the Soviet soldiers' commitment to victory with a strong dose of bitterness and hatred.

In July 1944, the Soviet soldiers entered Majdanek. They discovered other killing centres, Auschwitz, and smaller places like Kalouga near Tallinn. The Soviets had seen burned-out cities of their own, though, like Kiev and Smolensk. The Soviet military and civilian authorities ordered the occupied parts of Germany to be stripped bare. 80% of Berlin's industrial machinery had been removed to the Soviet Union by the time they arrived in the city. Artworks had been plundered by Soviet art recovery units. Ordinary Red Army soldiers looted at will.

The atrocities they committed were a symptom not of breakdown of discipline and morale, but of group cohesion and collective mentality forged in the heat of the battle.

In mid-1945, 20,000 railway wagons of booty were waiting to be unloaded or sent to their destinations. There was as well much violence and senseless destruction in Berlin and other cities. The Russians were then driven by hatred, vengefulness and endless quantities of alcohol. The Red Army soldiers indulged in a systematic campaign of rape and sexual violence against German women. Women and girls were subjected to serial rape whenever they were encountered. This was often accompanied by torture and mutilation. The raging violence was indiscriminating. In East Prussia, Pomerania, and Silesia, about 1,400,000 ethnic German women were raped, often several times. At least 100,000 women were raped in Berlin. The sexual violence went on for many weeks, even after the official end of the war.

Millions of Germans fled before the advance of the Soviet troops. At the end of January 1945, up to 50,000 refugees were arriving in Berlin by rail every day. Mid-February 1945, more than 8 million people fled westwards into the heart of the *Reich*. On the Baltic coast, 500,000 German refugees were trapped in Danzig. The 'Strength through Joy' cruise liner Wilhelm Gustloff took 6,600 refugees from Gdynia on the Baltic. It was sunk by 3 torpedoes of a Soviet submarine: 5,300 people drowned. People also fled in large numbers before the advancing Allied troops in the west. Everywhere in the first months of 1945, people were on the move in Europe.

### *The Defeat*

Hitler's influence over the German masses finally disappeared. He had dissatisfied everybody in Germany. Everybody criticised him. The people still feared the threat of the SS and of the die-hard Nazi activists more than they feared defeat. Retrospective expressions of sympathy for the Jews were heard. People began removing swastikas from buildings. There was increasing anger, too, at the Nazi leadership failure to surrender with dignity when everything was so obviously lost.

Hitler continued to urge for a policy of scorched earth, denying the enemy armies the ability to live off the land. The idea was completely unrealistic. The victors now took whatever they wanted. The only victims would have been the German civilians. Speer persuaded Hitler to disable industry in the battle zones by removing vital components, rather than by blowing up factories or flooding mines. The main person standing in the way of a managed surrender, was Hitler himself. Hitler stripped even the Armaments Minister Speer of most of his powers.

On 19 March 1945 Hitler ordained his *Nero Order*. He wanted to destroy all military, transport, communications, industrial and supply installations and equipment within the *Reich* that might fall into the hands of the enemy. The phantasy would cause immense suffering if implemented. Albert Speer was determined to stop it. He toured the battle-fronts, to ignore Hitler's command. He arranged with Model, Heinrici and Guderian to preserve the physical infrastructure of the invaded areas. Speer avoided dismissal, and even obtained from Hitler he modified the *Nero Order*. The destruction had to take place only in order to deny the enemy the use of industrial

plants to bolster its own military strength. It was allowed to cripple the plants, rather than destroying them. Hitler was now in a mood of apocalyptic defeatism.

The Chief of the Army General Staff, Heinz Guderian, advocated surrendering in the west and throwing all German troops and resources in the defence of Berlin against the Red Army. Hitler refused.

Hitler's Parkinson tremor was back by mid-sept of 1944. He had a serious car injury and experienced dizziness often. As of 23 September 1944, Hitler suffered of stomach cramps and had 4 days later symptoms of jaundice. He recovered as of 2 October 1944. But Hitler's health continued to deteriorate. He walked stooped. He spent increasing time in the bunker complex beneath the Reich Chancellery. He worked and slept underground. His apartment above had been destroyed in an air raid on 3 February 1945. On 24 February 1945 should have been feasted the anniversary of the promulgation of the Nazi Party programme in 1920. Hitler held a meeting with the Party Regional Leaders in a hall of the *Reich Chancellery*. He was looking mainly to what he imagined would be his place in history. He knew that propaganda had finally failed in the face of the hard facts of invasion and defeat.

The US President Franklin Roosevelt died on 12 April 1945. His successor, Harry S. Truman had no intention of reneging on the policies of his predecessor.

Hitler sent most of his staff to Berchtesgaden. Göring shipped his art collection from his hunting lodge Carinhall north of Berlin, to the south, in a convoy of trucks. He departed for Bavaria. Left in Berlin were Hitler, Bormann, Julius Schaub, Keitel and Jodl and a few top military men. Goebbels, his wife and 6 children came to stay with Hitler. Also, 2 secretaries remained. Schaub left for Berchtesgaden. Speer came to Berlin to talk with Hitler, then Speer flew out again, for good. Hitler heard of the death of Mussolini and Clara Petacci. His world was crumbling around him. Göring had to resign of all his duties. Hitler put him under house arrest on the Obersalzberg. Hermann Fegelein, the brother-in-law of Eva Braun was equally arrested. Hitler sentenced Fegelein to death, so that the man was executed outside the Berlin bunker.

By 25 April 1945, the Soviet Generals Zhukov and Konev had closed the ring around Berlin. They began to advance to the centre. General Gotthard Heinrici finally resigned on 19 April. He could no longer cope with the *Führer's* increasingly meaningless commands. On 29 April 1945, Soviet soldiers entered the Government quarter around the Potsdamer Platz at the heart of Berlin.

Hitler then married Eva Braun in the presence of a city councillor, Walter Wagener. Witnesses were Goebbels and Bormann. Keitel told him of the last attempt at relieving Berlin that had failed. At dawn, Soviet guns began bombarding the *Reich Chancellery*. Hitler shot himself at 15h30 in the afternoon. Eva Braun had taken poison. His adjutant, Otto Günsche, assisted by 3 SS-men, took the bodies, wrapped them in blankets, brought the bodies into the *Reich Chancellery* garden. There, watched by Bormann, Goebbels and 2 senior military officers Krebs and Burgdorff, the bodies were burnt in petrol. At 18h00, Günsche went to bury the remains. Hitler's testament still insisted on the racial laws and to resist pitilessly against international Jewry.

In April 1945, an SS doctor, Helmut Kunz, gave each of the 6 Goebbels children a morphine injection to put them to sleep. Then, Ludwig Stumpfegger, Hitler's last physician, put a vial of Prussic Acid in the children's mouth and crushed it. Goebbels and his wife went to the *Reich Chancellery* garden and bit on their capsules of poison. An SS-man shot each body twice, to make sure they were dead. Then, also these bodies were set alight, but with much less petrol. When the next day the Russian troops entered the garden, they easily recognised the bodies..

The 2 remaining generals, Wilhelm Burgdorff and Hans Krebs, the last Chief of the Army General Staff, killed themselves, and also the commander of Hitler's military escort, Frans Schädle. The others escaped through an underground railway tunnel. Bormann and Stumpfegger got as far as the Invalidenstrasse. There, they were blocked by Red Army soldiers. They took poison to avoid capture. Other senior Nazis committed suicide too. Hereafter follow, in a few words, what happened to the most prominent Nazis.

ERWIN BAMKE, President of the Supreme Court, killed himself.

General JOHANNES BLASKOWITZ killed himself by jumping out of the window of his cell at Nürnberg on 5 February 1948.

PHILIPP BOUHLER, head of Hitler's personal Chancellery, organiser of the 'euthanasia' murders of the mentally ill and handicapped, killed himself and his wife on 1 May 1945.

LEONARDO CONTI, the *Reich Doctors'* leader, was arrested and hanged himself in prison on 6 October 1945.

THEODOR DANNECKER had been responsible for the deportation of many Jews from different countries to Auschwitz. He was arrested in Berlin on 9 December 1945. The next day, he hanged himself in prison.

HERMANN GÖRING hid in a hideout of Berchtesgaden on 9 May 1945, where he was found by American soldiers. Eisenhower moved him to a prison, subjected him to interrogation, weaned him for days from drugs. He was condemned to death by hanging, but obtained a poison capsule, probably through one of the guards, and killed himself on 15 October 1946.

KONRAD HENLEIN, leader of the Sudeten German Nazis, killed himself after having been captured by American soldiers.

HEINRICH HIMMLER escaped, managed to cross the Elbe and ran into a British checkpoint where he and his companions were arrested. He was put in an internment camp of Lüneburg. He bit into a glass cyanide capsule and was dead within seconds. Other leading officers of the SS followed his example: Odilo Globocnik by poison, Ernest Grawitz blew himself and his family up with 2 hand-grenades, and Friedrich Wilhelm Krüger, the SS and Police Chief, who had made such trouble for Hans Frank in the Polish General Government also committed suicide.

HANS KAMMLER, the senior SS officer who had been a key figure in the recruitment for the *Dora Central Works Rocket factory*, and who had received the *title Plenipotentiary of the Führer for Jet Aircraft* was shot in Prague by his adjutant, on his own command.

ROBERT LEY, the German Labour Front Leader, hanged himself in prison, while awaiting trial.

Field Marshal WALTER MODEL shot himself in a forest near Düsseldorf at end April 1945, to avoid the shame of surrendering.

*Reich* Minister BERNHARD RUST committed suicide on 8 May 1945.

Regional Leader JAKOB SPRENGER of Hesse-Nassau, committed suicide with his wife, as soon as he heard of Hitler's death.

*Reich* Justice Minister OTTO-GEORG THIERACK was arrested by the British. He killed himself in an internment camp on 2 November 1946. .

In all, 8 out of 41 Regional Leaders committed suicide, 7 out of 47 Higher SS and Police Leaders, 53 out of 554 Army generals, 14 out of 98 *Luftwaffe* generals, and 11 out of 53 admirals killed themselves.

There was a wave of suicides in Germany. 238 suicides happened in Berlin in March 1945, 3,881 suicides in April, 977 in May 1945. Suicide rates rose almost everywhere, also in Catholic regions. In Upper Bavaria took place 421 suicides in April and May 1945. There were mass suicides in Pomeranian towns.

The German people had been told officially in a radio broadcast at 10h30 on 1 May 1945 that Hitler had died, defending Berlin against the Bolshevik hordes. The German commander in Berlin told his troops to lay down arms on 2 May 1945.

Hitler rewarded Grand Admiral KARL DÖNITZ for his loyalty by making him *Reich President*.

JOACHIM VON RIBBENTROP was replaced as Foreign Minister by Arthur Seyss-Inquart.

KARL HANKE, still resisting the Red Army in beleaguered Breslau, became Himmler's successor as *Reich SS Leader*.

ALBERT SPEER was replaced as Armaments Minister by Karl-Otto Saur..

WERNER NAUMANN, Goebbels' State Secretary, became Propaganda Minister.

Dönitz tried to win time to allow the troops still fighting the Red Army to withdraw to the west. He agreed to surrender in Northern Italy, North-west Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands. The German Armies in Austria and Bavaria capitulated under Albert Kesselring. Dönitz' tactic allowed 1 and 3/4<sup>th</sup> million German soldiers to surrender to the Americans and British instead to the Soviets (just 1/3<sup>rd</sup> to the Soviets). Dönitz's bid to negotiate a separate general capitulation with the Western Allies met with a brusque rejection. Jodl agreed to a total and unconditional surrender, effective end of 8 May 1945.

The full text of the surrender was signed by all 4 Allies at Marshal Zhukov's headquarters outside Berlin the day after, back-dated 1 day. The war was over.

## Malou Vincius in the Fall of Berlin

Berlin had fallen begin May 1945, not yet Germany. In the night of 2 to 3 May 1945, General von Manteuffel and General von Tippelskirch, respectively the commanders of the German 3<sup>rd</sup> *Panzer Army* and the 21<sup>st</sup> Army, surrendered to the US Army. General von Saucken commanding the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Army surrendered on 9 May. He had still been fighting in the Vistula Delta. When on 7 May the defences of the 12<sup>th</sup> Army's bridgehead began to collapse, General Wenck and his troops passed the Elbe Stream in the afternoon under enemy fire, but merely to surrender to the US 9<sup>th</sup> Army.

The defences of Berlin had cost the Soviet Forces more than 80,000 dead, whereas over 280,000 Soviet soldiers had been wounded or were sick. The Soviets lost almost 2,000 tanks and other armoured vehicles to Berlin. The Germans suffered about 100,000 men dead and many more wounded or missing. About 125,000 civilians may have perished during the operations in and around Berlin.

The Soviet authorities took the necessary measures to restore the essential services in the city. They repaired the sewers that had been destroyed by bombs at several places and that had contaminated the city water supply. They appointed German civilians to clean up the city blocks. They also organised the food supply and set up kitchens on orders of Colonel-General Berzarin. The Soviet soldiers went from house to house, arresting anyone in uniform, in whatever German uniform.

The Soviet troops engaged in pillage, in murder and in the mass rape of German women. Wasn't the city theirs? A million people were homeless in the ravaged city. Piles of rubble blocked roads. Starvation remained a problem. It is impossible to know the figures for raped women in Berlin. Data amount from 100,000 to 2 million, though this last amount must be exaggerated. Many of the women were raped several times. Most of the rapes may have happened in the early days of the capture of Berlin, from 23 April to 9 May, and then diminished. The first units to occupy the centre district of Berlin were the 8<sup>th</sup> Guards Army and the 1<sup>st</sup> Tank Army of General Zhukov. Zhukov's headquarters were at the Schulenburggring, near the Manfred-von-Richtofen Strasse.

Colonel-General Berzarin introduced penalties up to the death penalty for rape and looting, but such acts continued. The preferred female preys of the Soviet soldiers were girls and young woman, but also somewhat plump women were sought after. The Soviet soldiers may have regarded the German women as their rightful booty and who deserved to be taken by force, maybe as a revenge on German men. Rapes were considered not so very bad acts, as compared to the atrocities committed by the Germans in Russia and as compared to the casualties of the war and the crimes inflicted by the *Wehrmacht* in Russia during *Operation Barbarossa*.

Malou Vincius all that time lived alone in the large, splendid Vincius villa of Hubertushöhe. Her villa stood far from the centre of Berlin. She lived even far from the nearest towns and villages such as Königs-Wusterhausen, Storkow and Fürstenwalde. Hubertushöhe lay near Bad-Saarow-Pieskow or even Beeskow. From these places, from its farmers, Malou bought what she needed to live.

Malou had already seen in the far, in the direction of Berlin centre, red glows over the trees, as in April the bombings by vast numbers of airplanes ruined the streets of Berlin. Since the

beginning of the year, from January on, the aerial bombings of Berlin had intensified so much, she did not dare to get to Berlin anymore. She had then stopped to going to work in the *Charité* Hospital. She still had some money, not a fortune, but sufficient to live from for many months. She felt very lonely then, alone in the villa, almost always in fear, feeling abandoned. She began to regret not having followed her parents to Luxemburg.

Then, at the beginning of April, she remarked no airplanes anymore, no fires in the city. The skies at night didn't colour red in the darkness. No searchlights sought airplanes in the night sky to shoot upon by Flak canons. She heard now, first, explosions of canon shells on the city, more fires even than before. She supposed then the Allies did not bomb the city anymore, but supposed the Infantry and Tank Battle for Berlin was on. She calculated it would last one to two weeks before Berlin was taken. When the shelling stopped and an ominous silence fell northwest of her over Berlin, she understood Berlin had fallen.

This would be the high point for Soviet soldiers in the city. They would have found much alcohol in the bars, and have served themselves. It was the most dangerous time for her, she knew. She did not go out, then, stayed in her villa, and ate the food she had been able to store in her cellar. Food was hard to come by, but in the farms between her Hubertushöhe and the villages, there would always be food to find, albeit at outrageous prices. She thought such a situation would only last one or two months. Nevertheless, by the 15<sup>th</sup> of May, she realised she had only food for about one week left. She would have to go out, several times, preferably in the evening or at night. She could do that. She still had her bicycle, hidden also in the woods.

The villages around her were seldom bombed by airplanes, for the region lay covered by dense woods, and no industrial sites of great war interest lay in the environs. In any of these places, she would ignore the alarm sirens of Berlin and environs for bomber airplane attacks. Hubertushöhe lay hidden in the woods. So, when Soviet troops would finally enter Berlin, the soldiers would be first and all by attracted by the wealth of the city of Berlin itself.

One of the fears of Malou was that when the S-Bahn around Berlin would be re-opened to trains, some of the Russian military might be inclined to move east again. The station of Hubertushöhe might be used by some soldiers to arrive at a calm, peaceful site, discover her villa and rape her. Some military, she speculated, might come via the sideline to Senzig, Zernsdorf to Kummersdorf, and finally to Hubertushöhe. Malou thought about how to avoid or escape from Russian soldiers, no doubt out for women, young women, as she still was. Malou was 28 in this year 1945. She had become an even greater beauty than in her youngest years of an adolescent. She was a woman in the splendour of her finest age, a true beauty, as her mother had been and still was! Malou considered she could get in her boat as soon as soldiers came to the villa. She could row to the middle of the Storkower See. She discarded rather soon the idea, for the boat could be shot at. One who fled had something on his or her conscience, so might become a desired aim for sharp-shooters. Malou wanted to live. She was a fine swimmer, but maybe not good enough to swim in ice-cold water so long as to reach other banks. She dreaded drowning.

The best, she surmised then, was to hide inside her house, probably the higher the better. The soldiers coming to her villa would immediately notice the signs of an occupied house. There was new food in the cupboards, new fruit and legumes in the cellar, meat in the coolest place, potatoes in abundance, and wine, from German white wines to French Bourgogne and

Bordeaux bottles, not to mention the finest schnapps made of fruits. There would be open books in the living-room, and upstairs her bed obviously slept in, the bathrooms and toilets used, and well cleaned. Malou hid already food in the chauffeur's little house, and in her boathouse. Malou could hide for a few weeks in the woods, sleep in a tent when the soldiers came in and found the house left alone.

Would they find the villa so easily? It stood in the wood, not close to the roads, isolated. The path that led from the roads to the villa winded several times, so it was not easy to see the villa from the roads, but equally difficult for Malou to see and hear the soldiers coming until they were almost upon her. No, the best place to hide remained in the farthest corner of the attic! The staircase led to the attic directly, though, easy to reach. Malou would see the soldiers only when they would be practically on her. They might even spot her before she heard them coming. The best also, she calculated, was to have a rope and even a ladder close at hand to escape from the attic in the event the Russians would set fire to the house, or reach her, although such events Malou found extremely improbable.

Malou didn't think organised gangs would come to her villa. More likely only a few young men would stumble upon her villa by the purest of chances! And bad luck to her, then! So, the only thing Malou did was to stop heating the villa except in the late evening, in the dark, as smoke from the chimneys might be noticed from the far. She indeed took ropes and a long ladder to the attic, to escape in extreme danger. She looked for the best place to climb out in such an event. Weapons she had not, except for very sharp small and large kitchen knives. But then, Malou thought judiciously, defending herself with a knife, threatening soldiers who were out for a woman, might only make matters worse. It would be safer and simpler to give to the men docilely what they wanted, endure the humiliation, not resist, and live. To aggression from her side, the soldiers might answer with aggression, and Malou wanted to live on! Soldiers reaching her here, would leave rapidly when given what they sought!

What Malou had feared, did happen, though! By the end of May, in the afternoon of a particularly bright, sunny day, she heard a group of people shout hard songs outside, near her house. They made a lot of noise, she couldn't miss them. She went to her large windows and saw two Russian soldiers inspecting her villa, bottles of alcohol in their hands. Suddenly, a face appeared at the window, right in front of her. Another man had climbed to near the window, and pressed his head close, to see what was inside. Malou was inside, right before his eyes! He looked straight at her. She screamed and ran back into her corridor, up the stairs, into her attic. She heard a pane of her front door shatter, and then the door open. A voice was calling hard, 'Weib, komm!'

The Russian soldiers spoke no German. Malou hid in a far corner of the attic, empty cartons in front of her. She kept very silent. It didn't take long, before she heard steps on the stairs to the attic. She had locked the attic door, but that lock didn't resist more than a few good foot kicks. Soon, two soldiers threw aside whatever stood in their way to her corner, until another soldier stood right before her, grinning and laughing. She could smell the alcohol on his breath. The man had wide-open eyes, and he seemed not to stand so well on his legs. He leaned on the beams of the low, wooden ceiling. The man drew her out, talking gibberish to his two friends. Malou was by then utterly frightened, but she made no move of hostility. She showed merely she was afraid. That seemed to amuse the men even more. If these men wanted her, the three



of them, she could offer no resistance. Better offer no resistance and not been beaten around. She just stood there, in the middle of the attic, being weighed and looked over, up and down, by eager eyes. If the three men wanted to take her, they could have her. Take her, and be done with the affair! Malou only did not want to be beaten, and not be killed. She had already given up any hope of remaining unscathed. The men grabbed her by the arms, drew her down the stairs, and pushed her into the bedroom, to her bed. Malou understood rapidly what they wanted, though she understood nothing of what they said. She had to impose some, now. She stood there, in front of the three soldiers, who had remained standing, as if frozen in time. It seemed to her as if she had indeed impressed them with some form of arrogance. Eager eyes continued to move over her. Before one of the men could throw himself on her, she drew her heavy pull over her head, let it drop on the floor, aside, unbuttoned her dress slowly, and let that slip to the floor. How many times had she seduced lovers this way? She opened her brassiere, offered her generous breasts, threw her head back, laughed, took off the rest of her underwear, and stood before them naked. She did bring her hands over her breasts and then over her pubis. One man, the bulkiest, probably the strongest, then pushed the other men out, closed the door, and pushed Malou on the bed.

When the first man had finished, he stood, went to the door, opened it and invited a second man in. The other two men took turns. They used more time. The three men raped Malou several times that afternoon. When they had enough, they left her on the bed. She bled a little below, and ached about everywhere on her body. The men went back downstairs. They probably needed more alcohol. Malou drew blankets over her, and continued hearing what happened under her room. The men discovered the cellar and the food, and also the bottles of wine and Cognac, the wines of her father. They seemed to hold a feast, downstairs. Late in the evening, the men came upstairs again, one after the other, and she had to go through the same sufferings as earlier on. They took more of their time. They acted more clumsily. Malou underwent passively what they wanted. She disgusted from their sweat, their body smells, their violence. But she didn't move.

Early in the night, the three men were so drunk none could have done anything further to her. In the middle of the night, the soldiers must have left the house. She heard the door of the villa open and close. The soldiers must have left in the first hours of the morning, when all was still dark. Malou stood from her bed. She washed herself with several times new, very cold water. Then, she went cautiously downstairs. She heard no noise in her house anymore. She went through all the rooms, saw no sign of the soldiers. Malou had been raped by the three men several times, but she had survived and she had not been beaten. She had blue places on her body, but not from having been beaten. She knew she would not be pregnant, for she was in the first period after her bleedings. She was hurt, had been humiliated, had loathed the men, had been hurt, but she would survive.

The rest of the week, Malou remained in deadly fear for more groups of soldiers coming to her villa. Had the men boasted about their finds in the villa in the woods? Had they been ashamed of what they had done? Malou would never know, and the men never returned. No other soldiers came to the villa that week. For Malou, it had been the worst week of her life.

In the beginning of June, Malou was walking on the path that led from the road of Hubertushöhe to her villa. She enjoyed the warm sun that day. The path winded a few times, so that the villa remained well hidden from the road. The trees were thick in larger leaves. Malou had almost reached her house, when it seemed she heard a horse arriving behind her, and men talking, many men. She stood in the middle of the path, frozen in panic. She had come out of her fascination and wanted to run into between the trees, when a phantasy image appeared before her eyes.

A rider on horseback approached her. Malou saw at least ten men, stepping three in a row, who followed. They seemed at leisure, and talked among each other. The rider was a young, Russian officer, leading a detachment of men. When he saw her, he stopped his group and came alone up to her. He said something to her in Russian, but Malou understood not that language. She froze. The officer didn't seem angry. He was so young! He had a fine, smiling, slightly reddened face under his large kepi. A rifle hung on his back. A large revolver stuck in a holster on a belt. Malou noticed a few medals on his breast. The young man had been a hero, or just a lucky warrior. Malou thought he was under thirty, maybe in his early twenties. She was older! He was slim of body, regular traits in his face, handsome, a proud man, blue eyes that pierced through her. He was a Caucasian man, no Mongol.

Malou rather thought of him as an apparition than as a real man, so handsome was he of body, limbs and face. She had never seen such a proud man in her life. Her loins stirred. She immediately imagined her with this man naked on her, an image that would certainly come true within little time. She smiled, teased and dared him. The man smiled back. What sort of an officer was he? Malou tried to read the stripes on his epaulettes. He was a major or a colonel of the Soviet Army. He would have been a Communist, born in a family of early Communists, a man of the higher circles in the Army and in the political life, maybe of Saint Petersburg. Malou was dreaming images up, and laughed at herself for that. The officer smiled even more, showing white, undamaged teeth. A man like this, Malou speculated, would have been born and educated in a family that had lived and maybe even directed the first uprisings of Communism. Malou felt her belly and body grow warmer, her face reddened. The man noticed how she was maybe feeling, an effect he no doubt had been used to remarking on girls and women when they looked into his eyes and went over his body too.

The officer descended from his horse with one sway of his legs and body, never taking his eyes off Malou. She too stood there, red hair swirling in the wind among the green and brown of the trees. She knew she was enchanting in beauty. She continued smiling. The man said something to her in Russian. She shook her head. He repeated in German. She understood, but still smiled and didn't react. Finally, the man repeated in French. What he asked was so trivial!

The officer asked, 'I'm sorry, Madame, I tried Russian, German and French now. You seem to understand no language. Is something wrong with you?'

'Not at all, Monsieur,' she told, then. 'I understand French and German. I'd prefer French. At least, that is no language for war, here.'

'Oh, you do speak French, then. I do too. I agree. Let's continue in French. None of my men understands that language. I assure you we mean no harm to you. I noticed the smoke on a roof, a little in the woods. I was curious, please forgive me. It seems to me it will start raining, soon. I would like some shelter and we have food. We have been marching all the time. Purely by exercise, though.'

‘You can follow me. My villa is a little farther, down the path. I suggest for your men to stay in the pavilion of the drivers. Alas, I have no car and no driver, but your men will find ample dry place, a fire and room to eat. We could stay in my villa. I have to drink for your men. Wine, a little beer, stronger alcohols, though not much. You are welcome.’

The officer held his horse by the reins, shouted a few words in Russian to his men, and then, leading with Malou, they stepped on and walked to the villa. The officer did not seem very aggressive. He didn’t push Malou on, did not grab her by the arm, as if she were his prisoner. In fact, she thought he rather acted very politely.

When they arrived at the villa, the officer stood, his men still behind him. They relaxed. The officer looked around. Malou showed the three parts with a wide gesture of her hands.

‘The driver’s cottage, the boathouse, the villa. Would you care to come in?’

‘Yes, I would. Please show me,’ he said. But he turned to his men first, shouted something in Russian, and the men went to the driver’s cottage.

‘Wait,’ Malou said, ‘the keys are in the villa. No need to break open doors!’

The officer shouted something again, and the man waited at the doors. He and Malou went inside. Malou took the keys and wanted to return to the men waiting.

‘No,’ the officer commanded. ‘Please allow me’. He took the keys out of Malou’s hands, went to his men, and opened the door to them. He gave the keys to one of the men to guard them. Then, he came back to Malou.

‘They will like something to drink,’ he said, before continuing to visit the house with Malou.

‘By the way, my name is Anatoli Fedorovich Lenikov,’ he continued, ‘please call me Anatoli. May I know your name?’

‘I am called Malou Vincius,’ she answered.

‘Vincius? No truly German name, that. Pommeranian? Lithuanian maybe?’

‘Both,’ Malou answered. ‘Pommeranian first, from near Stettin, then Lithuanian, then back. Our family originated from Lithuania, as far back as I heard from our family members. We come from Vilnius and then Thorn, finally Berlin.’

The officer stood, held his steps. ‘Lithuanian? We originate from Lithuania too, then from Moscow, of course. Members of my family still have some lands near Thorn, Torún!’

‘Yes, Torún now, again,’ Malou agreed.

‘Well then, we seem to have something in common at least. You still seem frightened. Don’t! I am no rapist, and my men will behave. If not, they shall be punished severely. Not all Russians are rapists, Madame.’

‘Mademoiselle,’ Malou corrected. ‘I am not married. My family left Germany. I refused to follow them.’

They went to the cellar, where Anatoli took a few bottles of wine and gave them to Malou, asking to hold them for him. Then, he too took a few bottles of Cognac and German schnapps. ‘That will do,’ he said.

They went back upstairs and brought the alcohol to the men. Anatoli then looked through two sacks. He brought out a few tin cans of meat and legumes, gave two to Malou and took two more for him. ‘We shall have to spend the night here, so we shall need something to eat. My men can take care of themselves.’

They went back to the villa.

‘Would you want to eat now?’ Malou asked, looking at the cans in the kitchen.

‘Why not? Can you cook?’

‘Sure,’ Malou answered, ‘you’ll find wines in the cellar, pick us a couple of good ones.’

Anatoli looked at her, hesitated, then just nodded and went back to the cellar. Later, when she had already opened the cans, she heard him set the table in the dining-room. He was moving a table, and even putting fire to the hearth.

Malou prepared a dinner, as best as she could. When she went to look for the Russian officer, she saw he had set the table in the dining-room with a clean, white linen, plates and glasses and silver cutlery. He had poured a red wine in a carafe. He stood there, grinning, as if showing off with his work.

Malou brought in what she had prepared, first a light soup, but of a fine taste. She even had a salad later, for she held a garden. Then, she brought the potatoes and the meat. Anatoli talked all the time about his family, which must have been rather well-to-do in Leningrad and Moscow. The officer told he was a member of the staff of Marshal Zhukov. Malou listened to him. She told about her family, the first time since long. They laughed at a few situations of the war Anatoli related about in much colouring of scenes. They had a good time. They drank the wine. They had a large glass of Cognac afterwards. As the evening fell and night set in, Anatoli became a little more nervous. Finally, he stretched out, smoked a cigar and Malou a cigarette. He asked whether he could sleep in the villa. Malou said of yes, there were several rooms upstairs. She invited him up the stairs, showed him a room, told her room was beside that one. Anatoli thanked her, but he had to return to his men for a few moments, to explain they would stay here till morning. He seemed embarrassed. Malou nodded. They went back downstairs. Anatoli then went to the driver’s pavilion.

Malou went to her room, undressed, and went in her bed. It was some time later when she saw light passing her room, the light of a petrol lamp, for electricity had been cut off a long time ago, and her generator was out of fuel. She heard steps, the door next to her room open, and the Russian officer thrown himself on the bed. She hesitated then. But she stood, remained in her night shift, and went to Anatoli’s room. She opened the door, could see the bed in the light of the moon, and a form that immediately stirred in the bed. Anatoli had not just thrown himself on the bed. She noticed a heap of clothes near. He looked up, saw her form, and opened the blankets. He lay naked. She drew off her shift, and slid beside him. He seemed not inclined to making love. He had drunk too much, this evening, she surmised. He drew her in, though, and brought an arm around her, a hand on her naked breast. They slept.

In the morning, in the first light, she woke. She saw Anatoli next to her, studying her and playing with her red hair. He brought his head close to her, kissed, and the they made love. They took the time, and Anatoli was tender, warm, everything but violent, and she found herself strangely happy.

In the morning, Anatoli sent his men out of the domain, probably back to where they had come from. Anatoli said he had sent them to Storkow. They remained alone. The next days, they walked holding hands and arms. They made a trip in the small boat on the water. They were two still young people who had seen a lot in the war years, but who now could spend some peaceful time together, at last. Malou was in love, and Anatoly kept touching her, caressing her, studying her, listening to her, laughing with her. They made love several times that day, satisfying their hunger for warmth and tenderness. After two more days of happiness as probably both would have dreamed of for months if not years, Anatoli said he would have to

go back to his headquarters in Berlin. He left. Malou asked him to return to Hubertushöhe, but he just kissed her.

Anatoli did come back the day after. Malou jumped onto his breast. He took her up in his arms and brought her to her room.

Anatoli and Malou lived together for several months. It became a little easier to find fresh meat, to find new legumes, potatoes that were not all spotted and wasted. They prepared feasts, just for the two of them. Malou did ask how it was Anatoli could stay with her and did not have to return to his Army Group. He told her not to worry. He had asked for some time off. His time off lasted, though, and Malou did not complain. With Anatoli, she would be safe. No roaming Russian soldiers would bother her. Twice, however, such groups found the villa. Anatoli chased them off.

After their time of happiness together, Malou noticed Anatoli looked worried. He confessed he would have to move away from Berlin soon, and he could not take her with him. He was not needed anymore at headquarters, he told Malou. He was ordered to past Siberia, to very far in the east, past China, to take up the command of a garrison there. He could not take Malou with him. He promised to come back for her, but didn't know when. He said he would write. The moment of their separation was heart-tearing for both of them, and Malou was sure he was sincere in his sorrow. Malou once more remained alone.

She received letters for six months still, and waited. She began to think of joining her parents in Luxemburg. A year later, a Russian soldier came with a letter, Anatoli's last, and with another letter from a general, a completely neutral, official letter, announcing her Anatoli Lenikov had died in Vladivostok. Malou never knew how or why she had been warned of her lover's death. Maybe Anatoli had not instantly died, and asked somebody to do so. He had then not forgotten her! What had they been more than two young people, caught in the mazes of the greatest conflict known to have happened in the world ever?

Malou cried for two days long. She mourned her lover. Then, she decided she could no longer stay in Berlin. She had been to the city, lately, and had found it totally in ruins. As for young men, she had only seen dazed cripples wandering head down in the streets. There was no life for her left in this Berlin, nothing she wanted to work at. She hated everything she saw. She could not stay in Germany. She felt all courage and energy had left her. She always saw Anatoly before her eyes, Anatoli laughing, holding hands out for her, Anatoli on her and in her.

Malou would have to die, or seek another life, to live again, far from here, away from her memories. Her villa lay in the Russian sector of occupation of Berlin. Twice already, Russian officials had come to her villa, saying they needed the house. It was too large for her. Other people needed housing. She would have to leave soon, anyway.

Malou then brought together a few, personal things she had particularly cherished in the villa. She bought an old car, an old Audi again, a very old Audi, though one of which the owner promised her it would last still many kilometres. She doubted that, but nevertheless set off. The car would just have to hold until Luxemburg. She used some of her jewellery to buy fuel for the car. Strangely, finding fuel was no issue now in devastated Berlin. She still had a few, small gold coins to buy more fuel along the way. She set off for Luxemburg, rode without stopping, remaining on the larger roads, seeing only extreme poverty, hunger and desolation on the way,

and arrived a day and a half later of relentless driving at her parents' home. She felt a very old lady at thirty. She was convinced life could not bring her anymore anything nice or interesting. Her only true loves, Berlin and Anatoli, were gone forever. Though she lived many years longer, first at Luxemburg and then in Gembloux of Belgium, where she had joined her brother Anton, she too would never return to Berlin.

#### Aftermath.

Werewolf units organised originally by Himmler and Bormann, did the final executions when all was definitely lost for the Army of the *Third Reich*. Strong feelings of guilt had begun to haunt the consciences of many Germans well before the end of the war. The Allied forces, including even after the first weeks the Russians and the French, proved less vengeful and more sympathetic than ordinary Germans had feared. But then, many began to remember the Nazis had never won more than 37.4% of the votes in a free national election in Germany!

The International Military Tribunal of the Allies met at Nürnberg. Death sentences were given at Nürnberg for Bormann, Hans Frank (the General Governor of Poland), Wilhelm Frick (Reich Interior Minister, Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia), Hermann Göring, General Alfred Jodl (Head of Operations at the Combined Armed Forces Supreme Command), Ernest Kaltenbrunner (Head of the Security Service of the SS from 1943 on), Wilhelm Keitel (Jodl's superior), Joachim von Ribbentrop, Alfred Rosenberg, Fritz Sauckel, Arthur Seyss-Inquart, and Julius Streicher. All of these were executed, except Göring, who committed suicide the day before being hanged. Rudolf Hess was sentenced to life imprisonment, but also committed suicide by hanging himself in the Spandau jail in 1987.

Hans Anmeier and Arthur Liebehenschel and Doctor Hans Münch were acquitted. The Engineer Kurt Prüfer, designer of the gas chambers, was arrested in Erfurt 1946 and died in a Soviet labour camp in 1952. Ludwig Topf, who built the crematoria of Auschwitz, and who was the co-owner of the firm of Topf&sons, committed suicide. Ernst Wolfgang Topf, his brother, escaped conviction, set up a new business in Wiesbaden, making ovens for crematoria. Of the manufacturers of the Zyklon-B gas, the owner and chief executive of the Hamburg firm Tesch und Stabenow, was condemned to death and executed by a British military court. Gerhard Peters, General Director of Degesch, was acquitted. Still others: Friedrich Jechelen, Otto Ohlendorff, Werner Naumann, Karl Daluge, Jürgen Stoop, Oswald Pohl, Arthur Greisser, Albert Forster, Erich Koch, Felix Landau, and Austrian SS officers, were executed.

Nürnberg was the trial of the major war criminals still alive. Twelve other trials were held, involving 184 defendants, organised by the American occupying authorities, to deal with lesser offenders. Victor Brack and Karl Brandt, senior medical men on trial, were sentenced to death. Hermann Pfanmüller got 5 years imprisonment in 1951. Friedrich Mennecke, under sentence of death, committed suicide. Ernst Rodenwaldt, Martini, and Joseph Mengele were equally sentenced. Other names who had sombre fates were Franz Stangl, and Adolf Eichmann. Millions of Germans were required after the war to fill in and submit lengthy forms on their activities and beliefs under the *Third Reich*. They were brought before tribunals, which heard audience from interested parties, and then categorised the persons as Nazis or as implicated in Nazism, fellow travellers, or uninvolved. On 3,600,000 people in the western zones, 1,667 were

classified as ‘chief culprits’, 23,000 as ‘incriminated’, 150,000 as ‘less incriminated’. Many years later, another term was applied to them, the word of *Mitläufer*. Should one punish all such *Mitläufer* in Germany? Under 5% were judged to have been hard-core Nazis. 27% or 996,000 were categorised as merely nominal members of the Nazi Party. 783,000 remained unchanged, 358,000 were amnestied; 125,000 remained unclassified.

One question always remained unanswered, then was posed to humanity. How had the madness, cruelty, inhuman treatment, the killings of the Holocaust been possible to exist? Why and how had so many intelligent people, among the most intelligent in the world, followed and helped to make the madness possible? How much cruelty was hidden in every person? Many reasons and causes were presented with time, but no solution to the problem presented. If this was part of human nature, it could happen again! But any true manager in the world knew by then that if one did not know how a disaster could come to be, what elements lead to it, then a similar disaster would happen again! In fact, no modifications were made to the political systems to guarantee a repetition of what had brought the Germans to the second World War could not be repeated! Maybe the only hope lay then in a fundamental change in the peoples’ minds, but such a change was not ready to be formed.

Similar trials happened in the Soviet Union: 83,000 men were banned from further employment altogether; more than 300,000 were dismissed from their jobs.

The denazification could not ban all 6.5 million members of the Party from employment in positions of responsibility. The need for the expertise of judges, doctors, lawyers, scientists, engineers, bankers, etc. was too great. The professions closed ranks and deflected criticism on the behaviour of their members in the *Third Reich*. A veil of silence descended over the complicity of these men, not to be lifted until after the leading participants retired, towards the end of the century.

The superficiality of the denazification process failed to change many of the Nazi views held by those it affected. But these Nazis blended again in the normal society of Germany and in the other European countries, all of them, probably even in Russia and in the USA. Overall, despite everything, despite its weaknesses, in view of the now so blatant horrors, the denazification action in Germany seemed a success. Was it truly? Attempts at revising Nazism in the form of neo-Nazi movements never won more than marginal popular support. Some former Nazi men continued to work underground for their movement. For instance, a man called Werner Best organised help for former Nazis, and campaigned for a general amnesty – which never came.

Emil Jannings, Carl Orff, Richard Strauss, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Leni Riefenstahl, Veit Harlan, Werner Egk, Arno Breker had careers and continued working, some to additional and international fame. Wernher von Braun, with 120 men of his staff, surrendered to the US Forces and would lead projects at later NASA in the US, the *National Aeronautics and Space Agency*. Johannes Stark, Werner Heisenberg, Otto Hahn, Philipp Lenard, Dr Zygmunt Klukowski, Victor Klemperer (who was Jewish), Luise Solmitz and her husband Friedrich became well-known names in Germany and in the world after the war.

Nazism was from the very beginning a creed based on violence and hatred, born out of bitterness and despair. The depth and radicalism of the political, social and economic crisis that assailed Germany under the Weimar Republic spawned a correspondingly deep and radical response. Germany's enemies within and without were to be utterly destroyed in order that Germany should rise again, to unprecedented heights of power and domination, taking up the First World War, to be definitely defeated, humiliated and chastised.

Hitler and the Nazis were living out the fantasies that had impelled them into politics in the first place: fantasies of a great and resurgent Germany, expunging the stain of defeat in 1918 by establishing an imperial domination on a scale the world had never seen before. Germany's economic resources were never adequate to turn these fantasies into reality, from 1933 to 1945, even when the resources of a large part of the rest of Europe were added to her. The mass destruction of German towns and cities that began in earnest in 1943, turned people against the Nazi regime, even more than the realisation after Stalingrad and Kursk, that the war was lost. The violence at the core of Nazism had in the end turned back on Germany itself. But, as always, what was done could not be undone.



## Part VI. The War in the Pacific

## The Japanese Attack on Pearl Harbor

The war between Japan, the United States of America and Great Britain and its Commonwealth was part of World War II and a war by itself. As there was little coordination between Japan and the Axis countries, it was a war fought between the armies of Japan on the one side and mainly the United States of America and Great Britain with its Commonwealth on the other. The war with Japan has been added to the conflicts in Europe, but may be considered entirely separate from the war in Europe. One should rather talk of the World Wars II, plural, than just of World War II.

The war of expansion began early for Japan, already in 1931, with the conquest of Manchuria and the Province of Jehol. The then Commander-in-Chief of the Chinese armed forces was Marshal Chang Kai Shek. The resistance of the Chinese people remained strong after the Japanese invasion. Thanks to the weight of Hitlerian Germany on France, Japan concluded on the 21<sup>st</sup> July of 1941 a treaty with the French Vichy Government, giving them the control over Indochina. Immediately, about 40,000 Japanese soldiers disembarked on the peninsula, on which then lay as main regions from North to South the then called Tonkin, Annam (or Vietnam and Laos), and Siam (now Thailand). Indochina was of strategic importance to Japan, as it formed an excellent base for the invasion of Indonesia. And Indonesia had what Japan needed: oil and minerals.

Some protests were heard. Sumner Welles, the US Secretary of State for Foreign Relations, declared in the United Nations that the occupation of Indochina was an issue for the security of the United States of America, and the US President Roosevelt announced the politics of appeasement versus Japan had ended.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of July 1941, the Governments of the United States and of Great Britain froze the Japanese assets in their countries. Japan became more than ever isolated from the rest of the world. President Roosevelt sent a military mission to China to better assess the situation. He asked the abrogation of the *Neutrality Act* as regards Japan. Japan produced only 10% of its oil needs. In July 1941, the USA also embargoed oil exports from the USA to Japan. These exports accounted for over 80% of Japan's pre-war oil consumption. When the war began, Japan therefore had only 1.5 years of oil reserves.

At the beginning of World War II, and after the declarations of war between Japan and the USA, none of these countries could directly reach the other. Any war would be played in the Pacific Ocean.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of October, Prince Konoye ceded power in Japan to General Tojo. This seemed a move towards war, but Hideki Tojo did everything to keep up appearances to the contrary. Tojo even sent a delegate of Japan to Washington to discuss and negotiate on the differences in points of view between Japan and the United States.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 1941, Cordell Hull gave to Japan's delegate, M. Kurusu, a firm note stating the re-establishment of normal relations between their two countries could only be restored after the total, unconditional retreat of all Japanese forces from China and from Indochina. The American conditions were rejected by Japan in a note handed over by M. Kurusu to Cordell Hull. As the diplomats were talking to each other, 300 Japanese airplanes were already bombing the US fleet at anchor in the bay of Pearl Harbor on Hawaii.

The United States were then the largest military force in the Pacific Ocean.

The Japanese fleet had 10 *dreadnought*-class battleships, the *Kongo*, *Huso*, the *Ise* and *Nagato* to name a few of those battleships of about 30,000 tons and more of water displacement. Japan had built 9 carriers. These could be escorted by 12 cruisers of from 7,000 to 10,000 tons, by 25 lighter cruisers, 127 destroyers and torpedo-boats and 69 submarines. The US Navy had 15 battleships, among which the *Arkansas*, the *New York*, the *Nevada*, the *Pennsylvania*, the *Mississippi*, the *California* and the *Colorado* of 30,000 tons or more. They were slower than the Japanese ships, mostly because the American ships had heavier armour. The USA had added 6 newer battleships of about 35,000 tons of water displacement. The first of these was the *Carolina* and the 6<sup>th</sup> and last the *Alabama* dating from February 1940. More and heavier, larger battleships were being built, both by the USA and by Great Britain, but these could only be launched into the waters much later. The US Navy had then only 6 carriers, but 2 of them, the *Lexington* and the *Saratoga*, of 33,000 tons each, could each launch up to 90 airplanes. They could make speeds of 34 knots at sea. The *Yorktown* and the *Enterprise* were smaller carriers, of 19,900 tons. They could move at 34 knots too, transporting 60 airplanes. The *Ranger* and the *Wasp* were smaller carriers, ships of 14,000 tons. The US Navy had added 15 heavy cruisers of 9,000 to 10,000 tons, 253 destroyers and torpedoboats and 112 submarines. The United States had formed the greatest military force in the Pacific Ocean. The British were engaged in a great war in Europe and in the Mediterranean. The British admiralty relied on their forces at Singapore to defend India.

Singapore was the Gibraltar of the Pacific Ocean. Commander of the fortress' defences was Lieutenant General Arthur Percival. He had about 100,000 Dominion defenders, of which almost 1/3<sup>rd</sup> consisted of British and Australian soldiers. The Japanese General Tomoyuki Yamashita, later executed after the war for war crimes, led the Japanese forces that attacked the city. He had 35,000 Japanese soldiers. That amounted to only 1/4<sup>th</sup> of the defenders, yet, finally, he prevailed. Morale on the island was bad. Despair had set in when a part of the British Navy, 1 battleship, 1 battle cruiser and 4 destroyers, were sunk by Indochina-based Japanese torpedo bombers and high-level bombers when these attacked the ships. A battleship without air cover was always a negligible asset! Yamashita went on land on 8 February 1942, though his army was nearly exhausted by the jungle and sick. In one week, the Japanese forced the British to collapse! General Percival surrendered with only 5,000 men killed or wounded, with still over 700 artillery pieces and field cannons. It proved the most humiliating surrender in British history! Singapore fell in February 1942.

In December 1941, The United States Admiralty had brought its *dreadnoughts* together at Pearl Harbor on Hawaiï. Eight large ships lay at anchor, the *Maryland*, the *West Virginia*, the *California*, the *Tennessee*, the *Oklahoma*, the *Nevada*, the *Arizona* and the *Utah*, plus numerous cruisers and destroyers. They were under the command of Admiral Kimmel.

The Japanese attacking fleet had arrived unhindered at 200 kilometres of the Hawaiian Islands in the morning of the 7<sup>th</sup> of December of 1941. It consisted overall of 6 aircraft carriers and their escorts consisting of 2 battleships, 3 cruisers and 11 destroyers. The Japanese Imperial Fleet that attacked Pearl Harbor consisted of 4 airplane carriers, the *Kaga*, the *Akagi*, the *Soryu* and the *Hiryu*. They had in total 240 airplanes. The fleet had departed in secret from the Bonin islands. The Japanese destroyers had on board several small

submarines, which could infiltrate the harbour. The first Japanese airplanes attacked as of 07h55 in the morning. The Japanese flew torpedo-planes as well as bombers. These immediately dropped their loads of torpedoes and of bombs on the US Navy. Of the submarines sent into the attack, none returned. They were all destroyed. Of the Japanese airplanes, only half of them would return to their carriers. The First Japanese Air Fleet, 353 airplanes, attacked in 2 waves. These destroyed the battleship strength and much of the US air power of the American Pacific Command. They killed over 2,400 American soldiers, sunk 4 US battleships and damaged 4 more. The Japanese losses in this were 64 men killed!

The US military were utterly surprised by the attack. They were aware of no declaration of war between Japan and the US. Nearly 250 of their airplanes were destroyed on the ground. The American anti-airplane canons shot down 60 Japanese airplanes, but could not stop the destruction of part of their Navy. In all, five cruisers and 3 torpedoboats were sunk, 4 more cruisers and 5 other ships were damaged.

Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo did not order 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> strikes to ruin the port facilities, destroy all the US fuel supplies, to sink more ships and submarines, and blow up all the workshops. The Japanese fleet was playing it safe. Nagumo avoided more Japanese losses.

With one stroke, the Pacific Fleet of the USA had been destroyed or immobilised for months. The battleships *Houston*, *Marblehead*, 13 torpedoboats and 29 submarines of the USA were still out in the Pacific Ocean, and had thus been saved from the ordeal. Only hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese forces bombed other Allied forces in the Pacific, on Manilla, Hong Kong and Singapore.

The next day, of course, the USA declared war on Japan. Both Great Britain and the forces of Free France joined the USA in its declaration. Then, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States of America. The three largest fleets in the world, the British, American and the Japanese, would thus collide in the Pacific Ocean.

The result of the attack on Pearl Harbor was that for several months, the USA could not use its 7 best *dreadnought* battleships. The balance of power could be counted as 15 to 10 in favour of the American before Pearl Harbor, and then 10 to 8 in favour of the Japanese Navy after the attack. But the battleships and cruisers that were left undamaged to the Americans were older and less well armed. In one day, the US Navy had been severely damaged. The USA were in one stroke pushed into the defensive in the Pacific Ocean.

But Japan had few friends in the world. It had alienated the western powers in the 1930s, invaded China in 1937, fought the Soviets in 1939, and it had showed an aggressive stance against India. The other countries in the Pacific disliked and distrusted it. Japan occupied Vichy-held Indochina, although both Japan and Vichy-France were nominal allies both of Germany. Japan was also unable to partner effectively with its own Axis Allies, though those did not represent a great power in the eastern oceans. The bulk of the Japanese ground forces, over 600,000 men at any time, was fighting in China. More than half a million Japanese soldiers would eventually perish in China! After its non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union in 1941, Japan had seen its Chinese front stalemated. It never envisioned the possibility that the attack on Pearl Harbor could lead to a three-theatre conflict, in which Japanese soldiers would be fighting China, the USA and the Soviet Union. And leaving

China was deemed unacceptable by the Government and its Prime Minister Hideki Tojo. Did Japan realise, that in any existential war, only the country that had the ability to destroy the homeland of the other would win? Most probably not. Japan merely joined the side of strong Allies that might be likely to win, and then divide the spoils. But there was never any close coordination between the Japanese and the Axis commands! Fighting a common enemy separately was not really the same as fighting the Allies in a coordinated, complementary fashion. There was no strategic coordination between Japan and Germany.

Japan could attack and destroy the British garrisons dispersed over the islands in the Pacific Ocean. The Japanese troops disembarked on the peninsula of Luzon on the Philippines. Siam was captured practically without any resistance, as was Hong Kong. The Japanese had thus taken the three largest naval bases in the ocean, Manila, Singapore and Hong Kong, before the British and the Americans had been able to reinforce them. The Japanese took Kelantan in the Gulf of Siam, and cut the railways to Burma to stop reinforcements being sent by the Allies out of India. The British resisted where they could, so Japan directed more troops to the beaches south of Kelantan. When the British Navy sent a fleet to counterattack, the Japanese fleet sunk the British battleship *Prince of Wales* of 35,000 tons, with the *Repulse*.

Two days after the raid on Pearl Harbor another tragedy indeed happened to the Allies in the peninsula of Malacca. The British fleet of Singapore lost its 2 most powerful warships. Great Britain had sent two new *dreadnought* battleships to Singapore, the *Prince of Wales* of 35,000 tons and the battlecruiser *Repulse* of 32,000 tons. These ships had reached Singapore on the 7<sup>th</sup> December of 1941. The two ships already left the harbour at 20h00 in the evening of the 8<sup>th</sup> December, accompanied by 3 destroyers. The next day, a Japanese submarine remarked the flotilla, but lost them in the night, because the surface ships moved much faster. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of December, another Japanese submarine found the warships near Cape Kuantan. Japanese airplanes took off and found the British ships. Because of intense anti-air fire, these planes turned back.

Around 12h45, the first wave of Japanese bombers arrived above the British flotilla. The attacking planes dropped as well torpedoes as bombs. The *Repulse* was hit first. The *Repulse* rapidly sank under the onslaught of torpedoes and bombs. A Japanese torpedo-plane then could not redress after its dive, and flew straight into the prow of the *Prince of Wales*. It exploded, forming an enormous hole in the British battleship. A little later, the *Prince of Wales* got hit by 18 torpedoes and by numerous bombs. The tragedy had not lasted longer than half an hour. The *Prince of Wales* sunk in the Pacific Ocean and disappeared.

Hong Kong fell on the 25<sup>th</sup> December, after 3 weeks of Siege. The Japanese forces captured and invested the islands of Guam, Wake and the Gilbert Islands. At Luzon, the weak forces of the US General Mac Arthur had to move to the peninsula of Bataan.

Japan was now master of the seas and of the air. Its troops advanced to Malaysia. General Mac Arthur was called back from the Philippines to take the command of the American operation in the Southwest Pacific. In January of 1942, Japan took Tarakan and its oil wells on the west coast of Borneo. They conquered Rabaul and Kavang in the Bismarck archipelago of islands. Finally, they took Kieta on the island of Bougainville. One Japanese thrust descended to New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Another contingent moved to Malaysia.

After the tragedy of Pearl Harbor and Kuantan, the Dutch High Command decided to concentrate their naval protection south on the line Java-Timor. Their light forces, the Dutch hoped, could then send raids against enemy convoys that tried to pass the islands by the Strait of Karimata and Macassar, on each side of the Island of Borneo.

The Dutch Admiral Helfrich had a few destroyers and submarines with the cruisers *Tromp*, *Java* and *De Ruyter*. The American Navy reinforced these groups with the cruisers *Houston* and *Marblehead*, and 3 British cruisers joined them, the *Exeter*, *Hobarth* and *Perth*. Admiral Hart commanded the whole. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of January, he attacked and inflicted heavy losses to a large Japanese convoy that passed by the Straits of Macassar. As of mid-February, the Japanese Air Force was already solidly installed at Celebes and at Sumatra. In the night from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> of February, Vice-Admiral Doorman attacked a Japanese convoy in the Straits of Bandung. The losses of the Japanese were considerable, but the Allied fleet lost the Dutch destroyer *Piet Hein*, while the cruisers *Java* and *Tromp* and the destroyer *Steward* were heavily damaged.

The Dutch East Indies could satisfy all Japanese wartime planned consumption of oil. That was the reason Japan first attacked and occupied these territories. At its best, however, Japan obtained 35% of its annual consumption from these oil fields and refineries that had not yet been destroyed by the Dutch. The Japanese problem was also how they could transport the oil through the US air and submarine blockade from the Dutch East Indies to the Japanese mainland.

On the other hand, the USA produced 90% of the Allies' aviation and fuel requirements. It produced 3 times as much fuel of all kinds as the other Allied and Axis nations combined!

On the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 1942, the Japanese military arrived at the extreme end of the peninsula of Malacca. About 100,000 British soldiers defended there the Island of Singapore, its large docks, arsenals and warehouses. Most of the British guns waited for an attack by sea. They had been directed to the seaside. The Japanese came from behind, from the land! The Japanese troops passed the Canal of Johor and disembarked in the northeast of Singapore Island. The 100,000 men garrison of Singapore surrendered on the 15<sup>th</sup> of February!

The island of Java was held by 100,000 Dutch and British soldiers. A navy under the command of Vic-Admiral Doorman, the Dutch military, held guard of the island. Japan immediately took Sumatra and Palembang, even before Singapore capitulated, by the 15<sup>th</sup> of February. The main attack would come from the east, surprising the Allied defences, turned to the northwest.

End January, the Japanese forces conquered the coasts of Borneo and Celebes after the tough battles in the Straits of Macassar, defended by weaker Allied forces. The Japanese had concentrated their large convoys at Balikpapan. Admiral Demoor tried to thwart the Japanese project by destroying the rests of the Japanese fleet in the Java Sea. The Japanese forces there were very aggressive. They bombed Allied bases, including Port Darwin in Australia! The Japanese troops landed at the Island of Bali.

After hard fighting in securing Malaya in February of 1942, the Japanese secured the Philippines for them in April 1942. The Japanese took Bali and Timor. They bombed Darwin in Northern Australia. Outside the Philippines, Malaya and Burma, there were few British or

American ground troops around. By January 1942, the Japanese Army had successfully invaded Guam, Wake Island, the Dutch East Indies, New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Kuala Lumpur and Rabaul, while conducting offensives in Birma and sometimes even in China. By May 1942, the Japanese had cut the Birma road, isolating Chinese Nationalists from easy re-supply by the British and American forces.

### *Considerations on the War in the Pacific Ocean*

The aim of the Japanese High Command was to secure supplies of food, oil and strategic minerals for a new Pacific Empire. Mostly in the first 6 months of the war in the Pacific ocean, the Japanese had occupied the coast of mainland Asia from Northern Manchuria to Indochina, and the Pacific Ocean from northern New Guinea to Wake Island and the Aleutian Islands. Later, it took the British and US troops nearly 4 years to reclaim what Japan had grabbed in just those few months. Gradually, the Japanese lost the ability to land wherever they wanted. That was after the naval battles of the Coral Sea (May 1942), Midway (June 1942) and Guadalcanal (August to November 1942).

The US Navy's aim in 1942 was to destroy the Japanese ability to wage war. It was not to win one large and symbolic blow, as the Japanese had favoured. The war in the Pacific proceeded in several distinct phases.

First, from 7 December 1941 to 1 January 1943, the US fleet was outnumbered in the Pacific Ocean by the Japanese Navy, in almost every category, and especially in the number of fleet carriers. By the end of 1942, the Japanese still enjoyed rough parity, as it had destroyed as many ships as it had lost.

From 1 January 1943 on, a renewed US fleet fought a fossilised pre-war Japanese navy, hampered by oil shortages and losses of highly skilled carrier pilots. The US Navy had grown to double the size of the entire Japanese Navy! The US had by then 17 large Essex class fleet carriers, 122 escort carriers and 9 light carriers, with Hellcat, Helldiver and Avenger fighter airplanes and torpedo and dive bombers aboard. The US Navy had trained by the war's end over 60,000 naval pilots. It could ultimately deploy 90,000 naval aircraft!

The USA built many smaller escort carriers, with from 8,000 to 11,000 tons of displacement, speeds of from 16 to 19 knots. From 3 to 4 of such escort carriers matched the airpower of a standard fleet carrier, but they were cheaper, and needed but 850 seamen instead of 3,500. The USA launched 122 of such escort carriers!

Attack Japan was impossible at the beginning of the war in the Pacific, because the Allies had not the air and naval superiority to attack the Japanese mainland. This remained so until early 1944! The vast Pacific was a better barrier for large troop movements than the Rhine or the Oder-Neisse line in Europe. The Allies did not simply have the requisite number of ground troops to invade Japan until the war was over in Europe. And the ability to bomb or blockade the Japanese towns and industry required air bases within reasonable air range to the mainland, and thus the production of far more bombers and crews than the USA and the British could bring to the area.

The initial US strategy could thus only be to wage a series of naval battles and air campaigns, to regain free access on the Pacific Ocean around Japan, to peel off layer after layer from the Japanese Empire, so that the new US multi-engine bombers and naval air forces could mine the sea routes, support the leapfrogging amphibious operations on island after island, and then to bomb the industrial centres of Japan. The US submarines and Allied surface ships could in the meantime destroy most of Japan's merchant shipping and blockade Japan's recently conquered islands.

There were some disagreements about this strategy, mainly between Admiral Ernest King, the irascible and brilliant Chief of the US Naval Operations Forces and Commander-in-Chief of the US Fleet, and General Henry 'Hap' Arnold, the Commanding General of all US Army Air Forces, who insisted on Mediterranean priority for aircraft allotments. The Anglo-American cooperation in the Pacific remained loose. British colonial interests came into conflict over priorities with the American sense of greater proximity to the hostilities. For instance, the British and their Commonwealth sea, air and land forces deployed about one million soldiers in Birma under Supreme Allied Commander General William Slim. They would not be directly joined with the US Army until at the final months of the war.

The US Higher Commanders were divided over matters too, mainly General Douglas Mac Arthur, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in the Southwest Pacific Area and Admiral Ernest King with Chester Nimitz, the Commander-in-Chief of the US Pacific Fleet. They had a dispute over a more western approach, through the Philippines or by a northern route from Guadalcanal to Okinawa. In the Philippines remained 300,000 Japanese troops at the beginning of the hostilities. The US forces had to hop from island to island, with the US Marines and 20 Army divisions. The island hopping from Guadalcanal started from August of 1942 to its end at Okinawa in April to June of 1945. At Okinawa fell 12,000 American soldiers and 38,000 got wounded! The US Navy introduced radical improvements in amphibious operations. Admiral Nimitz leapfrogged many islands, such as Tarawa, Makin Apamama in the Gilbert Islands (November 1943). Then to the Kwajalein atoll, Majuro and Enewetak of the Marshal islands (January to February 1944). In June to August 1944, the Marianas Islands were taken. Then, the US forces pushed through the Bonin Islands at Iwo-Jima (February to March 1945). Last, Okinawa in the Ryukyu Islands was captured, about 600 kilometres from the Japanese mainland coasts.

General Douglas Mac Arthur simultaneously executed the *Operation Cartwheel*. After the campaign to take the Solomon Islands, he rushed eastward along the coast of New Guinea (June 1943), through the Bismarck and Admiralty Archipelago (December 1943) to Peleliu (September 1943), and then to the Philippines (October 1944). The campaigns on Okinawa and the Philippines cost the US Forces over 150,000 soldiers.

On this island-hopping campaign, the US Marines suffered 100,000 casualties and the Army lost 200,000 soldiers killed, wounded or missing. The US Air Force lost 24,000 men in the Pacific Ocean. Despite serious losses and quagmires in Italy and the Philippines and on Okinawa, the Allied expeditionary forces won all their campaigns, largely because of their far superior naval and air forces.



### *The Battle of the Java Sea*

The Dutch Admiral Doorman attacked the Japanese ships in the Java Sea. The Dutch Navy soon lost a torpedoboat and 2 cruisers, damaged at sea. On the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> February, Japanese bombers coming from Sumatra, Borneo, Celebes and Bali bombed the 7 Allied airfields of Java. About 100 Allied airplanes were destroyed on the ground. Soon arrived from the Java Sea a fleet that would disembark Japanese troops, under the protection of a surface fleet. Admiral Helfrich could not abandon to the enemy the splendid Dutch colony of Java, even though the superiority of the enemy fleet was large. Helfrich ordered Admiral Doorman to attack in the night.

The ensuing battle has been called the *Battle of the Java Sea*. When Doorman's ships arrived, the Japanese directed powerful rays of light on them. The Dutch war ships attacked the convoy. They could sink several large transport ships, but were themselves attacked by bombers and torpedo-planes. The flotilla of Doorman was practically totally destroyed. Five cruisers: the *Java* and the *De Ruyter*, the American *Houston*, the British *Exeter* and the Australian *Perth* were sunk by the Japanese, as well as 11 destroyers. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 1942, the Japanese troops could disembark powerful forces on Java. In this way disappeared practically the last vestiges of the Allied ships in the Pacific Ocean. The Allied ships had not been as well led, coordinated and organised as the Japanese fleet. The Allies then ordered their ships out of the Java Sea, but only 4 US destroyers could force their way out of the Straits of Bali, and reach Australia. The American High Command of the fleet had to react!

### After the Shock of Pearl Harbor. Midway

As of the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 1942, a US naval formation was placed under the command of Admiral Halsey. This comprised the 4 heavy cruisers *Chester*, *Louisville*, *Northampton* and *Salt Lake City*, the light cruiser *Saint-Louis* and 2 carriers, the *Enterprise* and the *Yorktown*. About 10 destroyers accompanied them. This fleet attacked the enemy several times in the Gilbert and Marshal islands, inflicting heavy losses to the Japanese convoys.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of February, an operation with the carrier *Lexington* under the command of Vice-Admiral Brown took place in the direction of Rabaul on New Brittany.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, Admiral Halsey bombed the Island of Wake with a formation around the *Enterprise*, accompanied by 2 cruisers and 7 destroyers. After this attack, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of March, they navigated against the Marcus Island.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of February, the Japanese disembarked troops north on Java. The Dutch garrison there surrendered on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March. The Japanese troops then took all the islands between Java and New Guinea. It had only taken the Japanese three months to grab the Dutch Indies.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of March, Admiral Brown took the *Lexington* and the *Yorktown* to attack the Japanese warships and transport vessels at anchor in the ports of Salamaua and Lae in New Guinea. Finally, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April, airplanes from the *Yorktown* and from the *Enterprise* carriers bombed Tokyo. The Japanese Navy was waiting to attack the British naval base of Port Moresby on the south coast of New Guinea, to launch from there an attack on Australia.

With the help of Siamese forces, the Japanese invaded Birma. As they had conquered the Andaman Islands, any intervention from the British fleet would have been useless. The Japanese occupied Rangoon. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 1942, the Japanese Army took Mandalay. Other enemy forces had started from Chiengmai along the Salouen to the Chinese frontier with the aim of cutting the road of Birma, a provisioning route for the armies of Chang Kai-Shek. The Japanese forces stopped at the frontier with India, near Brahmaputra. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of April, Japanese airplanes attacked the remaining British fleet at Ceylon. The British rebuffed this attack.

The date of the 6<sup>th</sup> May 1942 was the nadir of the victory of the Japanese military. The Japanese then took the fortress of Corregidor, the last Allied defending force on the Philippines, after the fall of Manilla.

Corregidor held Fort Mills, the largest and most important of 4 small islands that the US Forces had fortified, together with the forts Dunn, Hughes and Frank, to guard the entrance to Manilla Bay and to ensure true administrative control over the entire Philippine archipelago of islands. Major General Lewis Bereton's air forces in the Philippines got caught on the ground: 16 B17 airplanes, half of the British bomber force, and over 60 P40 and other airplanes, more obsolete fighters, had been destroyed or damaged. By mid-December 1941, the US forces had only antiquated P35 fighters left. The Japanese landing came on 22 December 1941, under General Masaharu Homma with 43,000 soldiers. Homma was later executed by a firing squad for war crimes. Homma rapidly took Manilla.

Corregidor, *the Rock*, was almost invincible with its 56 heavy artillery guns, 12-inch guns, and 12-inch mortars held in sunken pits. The fortress was manned by 5,000 soldiers. Over 20,000 Japanese casualties fell in 4 months of fighting. The fortress fell on 4 to 5 May 1942. The Japanese made 11,000 prisoners.

In sieges in general, the British, US and Italian forces more often surrendered their positions rather than face annihilation. Japanese, Russian and often German forces as well, were more likely to resist to the end. The side with the most bombers, shells, guns and soldiers, and with the will to use these weapons without worrying about civilian casualties, usually won!

In six months, Japan had conquered the Philippines, Birma, Malaysia, Borneo and countless islands in the Pacific Ocean. The Japanese troops stood from the frontier with India to New Guinea. Advanced Japanese ports and garrisons held the Solomon Islands, the Gilbert Islands, the Marshal Islands, Wake, and so many more. But the Allies were still present in Australia, in New Caledonia, on the west coast of New Guinea, on Hawaiï and on Midway. Then two naval defeats stopped the Japanese progress and annihilated their superiority in the Pacific Ocean won at Pearl Harbor.

The US Navy had not been entirely destroyed. Especially the US carriers were still intact. They had been out to sea when the Japanese airplanes bombed and torpedoed Pearl Harbor. The US chose the Marshal and Gilbert Islands for the first retaliations. The American fleet then consisted of the carriers *Yorktown* and *Enterprise*, three battleships and 10 torpedoboats. As of the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 1942, the fleet violently attacked the islands occupied by the Japanese Army. They caused much damage to the enemy island-bases. Such surprises were organised against the Island of Wake on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, the Island of Marcus on the 2<sup>nd</sup>

of March, the ports of Salamaua and Lae on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of March even, a group of bombers took off from the US carrier *Hornet* to bomb Tokyo.

The US Intelligence services of the Navy heard the Japanese forces were concentrated at Tulagi in the Archipelago of the Solomon Islands. The fleet was readying to attack Port Moresby. This would be part of the preparations of the Japanese for the invasion of Australia. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May, the Japanese disembarked troops on the Island of Florida, northeast of Guadalcanal. At that moment, Admiral Fletcher navigated in the Coral Sea with a US fleet composed of the cruisers *Astoria*, *Chester* and *Portland*, with the carrier *Yorktown* and 6 destroyers. Admiral Fletcher changed his route to north, to move towards the enemy ships.

In the morning of the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 1942, Fletcher's *Yorktown* airplanes sank or damaged several Japanese ships at Tulagi. They only lost 2 airplanes in the raid. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of May, Admiral Fletcher received reinforcements from 2 heavy cruisers, the *Minneapolis* and the *New Orleans*, with 5 more destroyers. Then, the heavy cruisers *Australia* and *Chicago*, the light cruiser *Hobarth* and the fleet carrier *Lexington* with 6 destroyers joined.

The Japanese at first knew nothing of the American ships so near to them. They set out to sea. The American bombers meantime caused a carnage to the surprised Japanese forces at Tulagi. Numerous Japanese transport ships loaded with Japanese soldiers lay at anchor. The American bombers caused a carnage on the surprised Japanese fleet. The American bombers attacked all day in several waves. On the 7<sup>th</sup> May in the morning, airplanes from the *Yorktown* and the *Lexington* could launch direct attacks on the 2 Japanese carriers *Zyukaku* and *Shokaku*. The *Zyukaku* was hit, advanced in flames, and sunk. The Allies lost a destroyer, the *Sims*, and a ship transporting petrol. The Japanese aircraft counterattacked and hit the *Lexington*. The Americans counterattacked, and served a defeat to the Japanese Navy. The Japanese lost 23 ships sunk. The US could applaud their first large success in the Pacific Ocean against a Japanese fleet. The naval battle was called the *Battle of the Coral Sea*.

The Japanese Navy wanted to eliminate the Allied bases in the Pacific Ocean, such as Dutch Harbour at the southwest end of Alaska, and in the centre of the Pacific the Island of Midway. The US brought a fleet near the Island of Midway, consisting of 3 carriers, 7 battleships and heavy cruisers, 14 torpedoboats and 20 submarines.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 1942, a large Japanese Armada took to sea in three large formations. Admiral Halsey being sick, Admiral Raymond A. Spruance led the American fleet in the Pacific, always under Admiral Chester Nimitz. Nimitz and Spruance did not believe in a Japanese action against Australia soon, so they concentrated their forces in the Central Pacific Ocean. When the Japanese found out where the American fleet was, they did not abandon their project of attacking the Island of Midway. They organised a diversion. While 3 formations secretly sailed east, they sent a 4<sup>th</sup> group to the Aleutian Islands, hoping the US commanders might believe they were making for Dutch Harbour and Alaska. The Japanese also launched an attack against Midway.

Nimitz and Spruance did not fall in the trap. They held their ships grouped at Midway. They received reinforcements from the fast B26 bombers and of long-range B29 superfortresses sent in from Hawaiï. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June, the American admirals received the message that Japanese airplanes were attacking Dutch Harbour. Admiral Spruance did not move his ships. Three hours later, a reconnaissance airplane announced to the US fleet at Midway it had

perceived a large quantity of dark points in the ocean, 700 miles from the island. The Americans later spotted the Japanese fleet somewhat in more detail. Lieutenant-Colonel Sweeney took off with 9 B29 airplanes. After a trajectory of near 1,000 miles, these airplanes confirmed the news of having seen about 20 Japanese warships and transport ships beneath them. B17 airplanes bombed and damaged about 10 ships. A cruiser and a Japanese transport ship were sunk in this action. Four large waterplanes then left Midway to attack the enemy fleet with torpedoes. Two more Japanese ships were sunk in the attack.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of June, more P.B.Y waterplanes sought for the Japanese fleet and found a large formation of Japanese warships at 350 kilometres west of Midway. They noticed 2 carriers, battleships and cruisers, and numerous destroyers. At the same time, they saw about 100 Japanese bombers leaving their carriers and flying in the direction of Midway.

Once this alert given, all the American airplanes of Midway took to the air. Only 25 Brewsters, American fighters, fell on the enemy airplanes at about 50 kilometres of the island. The American fighters attacked and shot down about 50 Japanese bombers. At the same time, about 180 enemy airplanes attacked Midway from the north. The defence anti-air guns of Midway could down 43 of those bombers. Of the American fighters, only half returned to base.

While the Japanese bombers were attacking Midway, American airplanes took off. Four American airplane groups arrived at the Japanese fleet. They not only damaged a Japanese carrier and touched a second one, causing more damages to other enemy ships. The Japanese assumed these planes had taken off from an airfield on land. The Japanese command insisted on its planned operations, until more American airplanes filled the skies. The Japanese fighters instantly engaged the US bomber planes. Nevertheless, the *Agaki*, a Japanese carrier of 27,000 tons, the largest of the Japanese fleet, tried to navigate from one direction to the other to escape the bombing. But the ship was hit. A few moments later, the dive bombers took aim on the carrier *Soryu*. When the 3 attack groups of American airplanes had dropped all their bombs, a new wave of American superfortresses led by Colonel Sweeney arrived, to damage another Japanese carrier, a battleship and a large destroyer. The Japanese admiral in command turned his ships. Midway was saved, but the success did not satisfy Admiral Spruance. Spruance had neared the Japanese fleet with three carriers, the *Yorktown*, the *Hornet* and the *Enterprise*. The American reconnaissance airplanes soon found the enemy fleet, which navigated in a line of about a length of 15 kilometres.

The Japanese carriers *Kaga* and *Agaki* manoeuvred at sea to allow their airplanes in the air. In a few instances, the *Kaga* was enveloped by enormous flames and sank. Another group of American airplanes took aim on the *Agaki*, equally putting it to fire. A third group of US airplanes set fire to the *Soryu*, a recent carrier of 10,000 tons.

Meanwhile, the *Hiryu*, a carrier of the *Soryu* class, had managed to escape. From its deck, 36 Japanese bombers could take off. At one o'clock in the afternoon, these airplanes could bomb the *Yorktown*. The crew of the *Yorktown* quenched the fires, so that the carrier could continue to move, though at reduced speed. Later in the afternoon, 15 torpedoplanes from the *Hiryu* found the *Yorktown*. They sank the US carrier. At that time, the *Hiryu* was itself moving aimlessly and on fire in the ocean. The American airplanes reached the last undamaged Japanese carrier somewhat later and dropped their bombs on this ship until it was a sea of fire.

None of the largest battleships of both fleets exchanged one salvo from their very powerful cannons. The *Battle of Midway* had been waged and won by airplanes launched from carriers! The *Battle of Midway* was more complex than told here, but it proved a major defeat for the Japanese Navy. At least 28 Japanese ships were sunk or damaged.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of June, the Japanese took the islands of Kiska and Attu in the Aleutians. The *Battle of Midway* had reshuffled the cards in the Pacific Ocean. The balance of forces was re-established in the ocean. Not any more could Japan claim the superiority at sea.

Japan lost 4 fleet carriers at Midway and 250 naval aircraft. The US fleet had sacrificed its outdated Devastator torpedo bombers to divert the Japanese fighters from the higher flying, mostly unnoticed Dauntless dive bombers.

The Japanese Commander Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto lost in the end, due to a lack of accurate information and possible over-confidence. Admiral Yamamoto trusted in military fanaticism and in operational excellence, without proper consideration given to the material means necessary to achieve strategic results. His battleships, additional carriers and cruisers, had been sent on an invasion of the Aleutians. On the other hand, the US Navy had enjoyed good advance warning by superb naval intelligence and code-breaking efforts. They sent land-based aircraft from the island of Midway to harass the carriers of Admiral Nagumo, who commanded the Carrier Striking Task force. The US leaders took risks to win; the Japanese admirals were too careful not to lose. At the end, as the Japanese lost 4 carriers, they could no longer expect naval superiority in the South Pacific.

While these events took place in the Pacific Ocean, the British forces tried to protect their communications between Europe and India. In India, the independence movement had started its agitations. Mahatma Ghandi showed himself intransigent on this issue. He began a vast movement of civil desobeissance. The British arrested him and the Pandhi Nehru. Nevertheless, the British Army could form an important, loyal Indian Army.

The island of Madagascar was still occupied by French troops and civil servants who had remained faithful to the Vichy Regime of France. Fearing a Japanese occupation of the large island, British troops disembarked on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May at Diego Suarez. By the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September, the entire island was in the hands of the Allies. The island rallied to Free France, and soon in November, also the colony of Djibouti on the African mainland joined Free France. The same happened with the Island of La Réunion in December. These territories remained out of reach of Japan for the rest of the war.

The two large naval battles of the *Coral Sea* and *Midway* had weakened the Japanese Navy, but the US Navy was not yet powerful enough to allow a large-scale counter-offensive. The Japanese Fleet had suffered their first large defeat at Midway. It was by then totally dispersed over the islands of the Pacific Ocean, over a surface of almost 4 million square kilometres. The US Navy could now concentrate on each point of the ocean and bring an enormous superiority of means to attack the Japanese forces, at one place after the other. Japan could not compete with the much larger production capacity of the arms industry of the USA. The USA equally had developed new technologies, such as radar, for use at sea. Carrier war was the future of naval battles. Yet, Japan was the only country of the three Axis Powers to even build a carrier fleet.

The Japanese forces disembarked in July 1942 at Guadalcanal, the largest of the Solomon Islands. They built an airbase there. Moreover, starting from the west coast of New Guinea, they traversed the island and moved to Port Moresby. The Allies reacted.

In the previous battles, the British and American ships had worked mostly independent of each other. The Japanese now believed erroneously that the Western seamen, naval aircrews and Marine and Army ground troops lacked the ferocity and martial spirit of the Imperial Japanese Navy. By late 1942, however, the British and American seamen and their ground troops were fighting as audaciously as the Japanese, while Japan's technology and industry ultimately proved inferior by end 1942. The Japanese were brutal soldiers, which did more to assemble their enemies against them than the use of American bombs and shells did to win the Japanese any sympathy as victims. Most American infantry fighting in the Pacific was by definition amphibious, relying on ship landings, followed by expeditionary army units and Marines attacking on the islands. The Allies targeted the Japanese navy and its merchant fleet, hoping thus to starve the vast and over-extended Japanese marine-based empire and force it into submission. The Pacific Naval War saw over 40 separate engagements between Japanese and American warships. The Japanese always hoped to lure the American Navy into a trap, and by decimating their fleet, bringing about the end of the USA war fleet. The flaw in the Japanese hopes was, that even while in victory, the Japanese fleet remained quite unable to match the US resources of manpower and of production of ships and other war means.

The USA produced in terms of battleships 2 large *North-Carolina* class Battleships of 36,000 tons, with 9 16 inch canons. They put to sea 4 new faster *South-Dakota* class ships of 35,000 tons with 9 16 inch canons, and they built 4 huge *Iowa* class battleships of 45,000 tons with 9 16 inch canons. And also 14 new heavy *Baltimore* class cruisers of 14,000 tons each, with 8 9 inch canons. Moreover, in lighter tonnages, the USA produced and sent to sea 175 *Fletcher* class destroyers, 58 *Sumner* class destroyers, a few of the *Gearing* class ships out of the 98 ordered ships of this category. They also put to sea no less than 400 destroyer escort ships of 1,400 tons, 24 knots of speed, 3 inch and later 5 inch canons on some, anti-aircraft support for the fleet, with torpedo launchers and launchers of depth charges against submarines. Moreover, the USA sent 70 *Gato* class submarines to the Pacific, 122 *Balao* class submarines, and other, later of the *Tench* class. In total, that was 228 new submarines!

With this armada, the USA submarines would sink half of all the Japanese ships lost, so that they shut down the Japanese supply lanes in the Pacific Ocean. The net result was the strangulation of the import-based Japanese mainland economy. Thousands of Japanese soldiers were left as orphans on scattered islands, without hope on supplies or even evacuation. There was no alternative for these troops but to die or surrender, and surrender meant total loss of honour. Japan ended the war utterly ruined in a relatively brief period of time

## Guadalcanal

Guadalcanal meant a series of naval battles and smaller engagements:

8-9 August 1942: the Battle of Savo Island

24-25 August 1942: the Battle of the eastern Solomons  
11-12 October 1942: the Battle of Cape Esperanza  
25-27 October 1942: the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands  
12-15 November 1942: the Battle of Guadalcanal  
30 November 1942: the Battle of Tassafaronga.

The result for the US Fleet were 20 ships lost, the carriers *Saratoga* and *Enterprise* damaged, the carriers *Wasp* and *Hornet* sunk, 440 airplanes lost, and 5,000 sailors killed. With the losses of the *Lexington* and the *Yorktown* in previous large sea-battles, the USA had at that moment no more undamaged carriers. The *Enterprise* was in repair. The newer *Essex*-class carriers would only arrive at mid-1943. The US could not aggressively use any carrier forces for much of the rest of 1942 and 1943. Yet, the Japanese still lost Guadalcanal! Japan could not cut the supply lines from the USA to Australia. And Japan's destroyer and naval air power had been irreplaceably damaged.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of August of 1942, the US Marines disembarked by surprise at Guadalcanal and at Tulagi in the Solomon Islands. The attack surprised the Japanese Army. As many Japanese submarines navigated in the area and as enemy airplanes could easily reach the zone, the US High Command decided to withdraw its carriers. In the Straits between the islands of Salvo, Florida and Guadalcanal solely remained the naval forces charged with the protection of the disembarked US soldiers.

In the night of the 8<sup>th</sup> of August, Japanese warships penetrated the sea route between the islands. They surprised the US convoys. In a few minutes, they sunk 4 cruisers, the *Quincey*, *Vincennes*, *Astoria* and *Canberra*. They damaged four more units. Nevertheless, the US troops continued to disembark. As happened often now, the Japanese navy did not entirely profit from its local superiority to destroy completely the Allied forces in the sector. They withdrew northwards. The Japanese concentrated their power at Rabaul, the Americans southeast of Guadalcanal. The US carriers *Saratoga* and *Enterprise*, accompanied by their escort cruisers, lay there. The Americans spotted a Japanese fleet on the morning of the 23<sup>th</sup> of August. A new naval battle ensued when the American ships attacked. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of August, the *Saratoga*'s airplanes severely strafed a Japanese carrier and other Japanese warships. During an aerial counterattack, the US *Enterprise* was severely damaged. Although they had the advantage in this naval battle once more, in the *Battle of the Solomon Islands*, the cautious Japanese Navy broke off the battle and withdrew. The two Navies reinforced their troops on Guadalcanal.

In the night of the 11<sup>th</sup> of October, the US Fleet surprised a large group of Japanese warships in the proximity of Guadalcanal and inflicted many losses on it. Nevertheless, the Japanese Navy could disembark an army division on Guadalcanal. The Americans brought 2 new battleships to the area, the *Washington* and the *South Dakota* of 35,000 tons each. The US Navy continued to inflict heavy losses to the enemy convoys sent to provision the Japanese forces on Guadalcanal. Nevertheless, the Japanese kept control over the waters of the Archipelago of the Solomon Islands.

Guadalcanal could become an important stepping-stone for the Japanese conquest of Australia. In the night of the 23<sup>rd</sup> to the 24<sup>th</sup> of October, the Japanese ground troops began their offensive against the US forces south of the River Matanikau on the island. The US

forces suffered heavy casualties. Two cruisers and 4 torpedoboats opened fire on the US soldiers. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of October, the Japanese Navy threw the bulk of its Navy against the island. The Americans had been waiting for this development. The airplanes of their carriers *Hornet* and *Enterprise* attacked the enemy ships.

As at Midway, the *Battle of the Island of Santa Cruz* developed into an air and naval battle. The battle lasted the entire day. At the end, the US airplanes damaged two Japanese carriers, one battleship and 2 heavy cruisers. The Japanese fleet found the position of the *Hornet*. One of their bombers threw itself voluntarily on the US carrier, setting it to fire. Knowing the ship lost, the American sailors sunk it. The *Enterprise* also had been damaged by 2 Japanese bombs. At the end of the battle, the US forces had lost the *Hornet* and a torpedoboot. The *Enterprise* had been damaged. The Japanese suffered 2 carriers and several other ships damaged. They lost many airplanes.

On the Island of Guadalcanal itself, the toughest fights had developed around the airbase of Henderson. The US armed forces could hold their positions. The Japanese managed to disembark 1,500 men as reinforcements on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November, east of Kuli Point. The US Navy bombed the beaches and destroyed Japanese warehouses, while the US infantry began to clear the jungle of enemies.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> November, the US troops, still inferior in naval power, with insufficient airplanes on the island, tried to reinforce their troops. They suffered terrible losses from the Japanese air attacks.

The Japanese forces prepared a large offensive out of the sector of Rabaul-Buin, to grab more control of the Pacific Ocean. The American troops could only be saved if they could reinforce their own troops in the region before the arrival of the Japanese units.

When the Japanese High Command decided on the naval offensive near Guadalcanal, the Americans reacted once more. Admiral Halsey split his forces in 3 large groups. The Admirals Turner and Callaghan commanded the naval divisions charged with the protection of the disembarkments of the American reinforcement for the ground troops. Admiral Kincaid commanded the principal group, constituted of battleships, cruisers and carriers. His mission was to intercept the disembarkments of new Japanese troops. In the night of from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> of November, the forces of Turner and Callaghan engaged the Japanese ships that accompanied and protected the Japanese convoy coming from the northeast.

The *Laffey* sent its torpedoes against a Japanese cruiser, which was hit. Then, a Japanese destroyer exploded. A few moments later, the *Laffey*, hit in her turn, sank in the waves.

The *San Francisco*, the command ship of Admiral Callaghan, fought a Japanese cruiser at close quarter and reached it with 6 salvoes of its guns, until an enemy battleship appeared, closing in on her. Then, this ship was hit by the torpedoes of the *Laffey*. In the ensuing rest of the duel, Admiral Callaghan lost his life. The Japanese battleship hit the *San Francisco* several times, but then the *Helena* and the *Portland* came to her aid. The enemy battleship ceased firing, turned and disappeared north. The action lasted only a little over a quarter of an hour, and in that time the Japanese Navy lost 2 cruisers and 4 destroyers!



In replacement of Admiral Callaghan, Commander Mac Candless took command of the fleet. He sailed in to put the ships out of reach of the coastal batteries of Guadalcanal. The US Fleet sunk another Japanese destroyer that had lost all caution to approach the American vessels. The US airplanes sought for the damaged Japanese ships and a Japanese battleship of the *Kongo* class. They found it, navigating at reduced speed with 5 destroyers following it. They warned the bombers and the torpedoplanes. Hit by a large bomb, and somewhat later still also by 2 torpedoes, the heavy battleship could flee. Only in the afternoon, other groups of US airplanes found it once again, launched their torpedoes, of which 3 reached the Japanese battleship and sunk it.

The Japanese convoy had not yet disembarked its reinforcements. The Americans found it on the 15<sup>th</sup>, around noon, at about 150 miles of the island. They engaged it.

The American bombings of the nights of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> had caused such heavy losses to the Japanese, no real Japanese group could take off to accompany the convoy, except a few planes of a small Japanese carrier. Eight of those airplanes were downed. The US pilots then saw the escort ships abandon the transport ships, leaving the large cargo ship without any last protection. The American attack then turned into a complete massacre. All the Japanese cargo ships were sunk. The sea filled with men and corpses. About 20,000 Japanese soldiers drowned.

While the American airplanes finished this massacre, they noticed suddenly the main Japanese fleet arrive and advance in the direction of the Island of Savo. The fleet arrived too late to save the convoy. But the fleet opened a terrible fire on the American positions on Guadalcanal and crunched the American soldiers there under the shells of its heavy guns. The US warships arrived also, among which the battleships *Washington* and *South Dakota*.

The US battleships opened fire at 23h00 in the evening. Of the 3 enemy battleships of the *Kongo* class, 2 almost immediately erupted in flames and sank when their load of munitions exploded. The 2 American battleships could open fire together on the last unlucky *Kongo*. Over 100 shells fell on the ship, which sank in a few seconds. The Japanese cruisers were hit. Two more Japanese cruisers exploded. In this battle, the Japanese force of the Pacific Ocean seemed entirely annihilated.

The battle that had thus developed in the ocean ended at the complete victory of the US Fleet. The Americans troops attacked the Japanese ground forces on Guadalcanal. The Japanese garrison knew itself on its own, but fought on until the last resistance stopped on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 1943.

Guadalcanal was the turning point in the Pacific naval war! By mid-1943, the tide had turned on the Japanese. By the end of 1944, the USA could bring the largest naval air power in the world to the Pacific, and the overwhelming superiority of its carriers.

## The Philippines

Admiral Nimitz concentrated other forces to attack the occupations of other enemy island-bases in the Central Pacific, to prepare for the invasion of the Philippines. Admiral Spruance, who had brilliantly led his carriers in the *Battle of Midway*, received the command over the

US Pacific Central Fleet. This group could start its decisive operations against the Japanese troops in the Philippines.

Meanwhile, General Mac Arthur moved to the Archipelago of the Philippines from the south. He disembarked troops on the Carolinas on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February of 1943, then on the Admiralty Islands on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March. At the beginning of May, the Japanese ceased resistance on New Guinea. The war in the Philippines could begin.

The war in the Pacific Ocean had thus entered a new stage. Japan could not keep up with the US industry in the production of carriers and other ships. The USA created a huge new fleet, thousands of airplanes and armoured divisions. This changed the balance of the military forces in the Pacific, to the advantage of the US Army. 1943 was the year the US troops in their turn truly advanced in the Pacific. It was the time the US assault against the Japanese power in New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, the Gilbert and the Marshal islands, Attu, Kiska, and so on, started. This conquest was everywhere difficult, as the Japanese had built airstrips and bunkers to defend what they had conquered. The Japanese had lost Guadalcanal. Their aim nevertheless remained Australia!

The Australians on New Guinea defended the line of the Mounts Owen Stanley on the island. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of December of 1942, General Mac Arthur disembarked new troops, which took the Japanese air bases of Buna and Goma. The US Navy and her aviation played the same role in the destruction of the enemy airbases of Munda on the southeast coast of New Georgia and of Kolombangara.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of February, the Americans disembarked on the Island of Russel. A few days later, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March, US airplanes almost completely destroyed a convoy of 21 Japanese ships that were provisioning the Japanese forces on New Guinea.

As of the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 1943, the US forces took the islands of Woodlark and Tobriand, east of New Guinea. They disembarked at Rendova Harbour. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> of July, the American troops disembarked on New Georgia and at Vanguru. Two days later, they invaded the islands of Enogai and Bairoko.

The Japanese tried to send reinforcements to New Georgia, but their transport ships were intercepted and sunk. On the 6<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> July of 1943, heavy naval battles took place in the Gulf of Kula. Both sides suffered heavy losses, but the route to Kula got closed to the Japanese. They could not anymore provision their garrisons at Vila and Munda. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of August, the US troops could take the Japanese airbase of Munda. Japan could only hold its positions in the area of the port of Bairoko near Munda, and its base of Vila south of the island of Kolombangara. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of August, a strongly protected Japanese convoy tried to break out of the American embargo. They were spotted, and the Americans sank 3 Japanese torpedoboats. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of August, the US troops invaded the Island of Vella Lavella. The same day, they took Bairoko and put an end to their campaign in New Georgia. The Japanese evacuated their soldiers, but once more suffered heavy losses at sea. Finally, the US troops were the masters of the Solomon islands!

Three weeks later, the Americans assaulted the island of Bougainville. They took the Island of Mono in the Treasure islands on the 26<sup>th</sup> of October, Stirling on the 27<sup>th</sup>. On the 28<sup>th</sup>, US forces invaded the Island of Choiseul. The US Army bombed massively Bougainville and put

their troops on land there on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November. In December, the US troops took the Island. Several naval skirmishes happened around the island, but without great conviction on the side of the Japanese.

While the battles in the Solomon Islands continued, the US forces began a vigorous campaign south of New Guinea. In the night of the 30<sup>th</sup> June 1943, the US soldiers disembarked in the Bay of Nassau, 15 kilometres south of the large Japanese base of Salamaua. The motorised US infantry moved along the beaches. The US Air Force and the US Navy destroyed the enemy positions. Japanese reinforcements were intercepted. After terrible combats, the US troops captured Salamaua. Five days later, Lae was taken by airborne troops.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September, Allied amphibious forces disembarked north of Finshaven, another large Japanese base. After heavy fighting, Finshaven fell on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October. End December, the American troops disembarked still at Asawe, southeast of New Brittany.

The American Army continued its conquest towards the north. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1944, they captured Saidor. They entirely took New Guinea around the 13<sup>th</sup> of February 1944. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of November 1943, the Americans launched their troops onto Rabaul, the powerful port of New Brittany. For many weeks, attacks and counterattacks followed. Rabaul was of strategic importance to Japan for the protection of other positions more to the east: the Carolinas, the Moluccas, and the Philippines.

The Japanese lost the initiative in the ensuing battles, as everywhere in the Pacific the US troops went to the assault. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of February 1944, US and New Zealand troops could occupy Green Island without any opposition. Rabaul would soon be occupied by the Allies. Their operations, led by US military in the Solomon Islands, New Guinea and Rabaul were part of a vast, strategic plan of the Allied to take back the islands Japan had taken in the Pacific and thus to reach Japan itself. The US High Command realised it would take long and many casualties to capture all the territories Japan had occupied, vast territories conquered by the Japanese troops. The operation would have led to terrible losses of men and material. While these campaigns took place, General Mac Arthur directed troops to the Philippines.

Admiral Chester William Nimitz, the commander of the US Fleet in the Pacific Ocean, assembled other forces to chase the enemy out of the Central Pacific. Already on the 31<sup>st</sup> of May and on the 15<sup>th</sup> August of 1942, the fleet of Vice-Admiral Rockwell had cleaned the North Pacific and approached Japan by taking the islands of Attu and Kiska in the Aleutians, invaded earlier in 1942 by the Japanese Army. The campaign then in the Central Pacific Ocean began end of August 1943.

During 3 months, the US aviation bombed the islands of Tarawa, Marcus, Wake, Apamama and Marshal. The US troops sought to destroy the defences built by the Japanese Army, and to keep them on the wrong foot as to where the next disembarkments of troops would happen.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> November of 1943, the invasion forces of Admiral Spruance sailed to the islands of Tarawa and Makin, coral islands in the Gilbert archipelago. Tarawa was in fact a series of small islands linked together at low tide. Betto, the largest one, was no more than 9.5 kilometres long by 400 metres wide. Half of the Japanese garrison had been killed by the preliminary US bombings. The Japanese who were left, inflicted heavy losses on the American Marines that disembarked in small boats. The fights lasted for four days and were

among the toughest the US troops had felt since then. The Americans captured the Island of Malein on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November without such heavy resistance.

After having taken the Gilbert Islands, the Americans bombed the Marshal islands and Nauru. In January 1944, the American attacks became more insistent and the Marines disembarked. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 1944 fell Majura. Roi and Namy fell on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, Kwajalein on the 5<sup>th</sup> and Eniwetok on the 17<sup>th</sup>. By the 18<sup>th</sup> February, the occupation of the Marshal islands had been completed. On the same day, the US forces bombed Truk in the Carolinas. The Japanese naval and air forces had to take severe losses. Then, the Americans attacked the Mariana Islands.

To the west, General Mac Arthur continued his offensive too. On the 29<sup>th</sup>, his forces took the Admiralty Islands, by mid-March he was master of the Saint Matthew Islands northeast of New Guinea. Hollandia in the same area fell on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April.

The hardest remained to be done. The Japanese still held Wake, the Carolinas, the Marianas and the Philippines! In May 1944, General Mac Arthur took the islands of Wake and Biak, Noemfur also, and in July Sansapur. New Guinea was almost completely liberated from the enemy. In September, Mac Arthur took Morotai, the easternmost islands of the Moluccas. Only 500 kilometres separated him from Mindanao on the Philippines.

In the second week of June 1944, the American carriers attacked with their bombers the islands of Tinian, Saipan and Guam. The US flying fortresses, the B29 airplanes, began to bomb near Tokyo the large industrial centre of Yawata, causing a panic in the capital of Japan.

On Saipan remained a garrison of 20,000 Japanese soldiers. When the American troops disembarked there, terrible fights followed. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of July, the Japanese stopped all resistance, after having inflicted severe losses to the US troops. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of July 1944, the Americans took Guam, which had been in Japanese hands since the 7<sup>th</sup> December of 1941. The Americans took the island of Tinian on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August. The US troops thus conquered the Marianna islands. In October of 1944, another invasion army took the Palaos Islands and Peleliu at 1,000 kilometres southwest of the Philippines. As of the beginning of October, the US armies could begin their assault on the Philippines.

The US Navy had now the absolute superiority in the Pacific Ocean. They had more than 100 carriers to support and protect the transport ships that brought in men and tanks, trucks and guns necessary for the invasion of the Philippines. General Mac Arthur disembarked his troops on the island of Leyte. At Leyte had assembled hundreds of American ships of all sorts. This immense American convoy had to be destroyed! One of the largest naval and air battles was to develop in Leyte Gulf. The Battle was called simply the *Battle of Leyte Gulf*.

As soon as Admiral Nimitz could install his headquarters at Guam, as soon as Mac Arthur had occupied New Guinea completely, the Carolina Islands and the Admiralty Islands, the US forces could attack the Japanese on the Philippines. Admiral Halsey operated in the direction of Formosa. The 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet, commanded by Admiral Kincaid, worked near the Philippines and could send its bombers as of the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1944 to destroy the more than 100 Japanese airplanes on the islands. He concentrated his raids on the Peninsula of Luzon to have the Japanese assume the main attack would be launched against that place.

While the enemy rushed to there, General Mac Arthur disembarked his troops on Leyte. This happened on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October, in the very heart of the archipelago, not on Luzon.

The Japanese forces were indeed surprised. But soon, the US submarines that patrolled near Singapore, where the Japanese fleet had kept imposing naval powers, signalled that many enemy ships had left on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October to sail north. Immediately, the Admirals Kincaid and Halsey conferred to agree on a battle plan. The Japanese fleet that advanced from Singapore consisted of 2 battleships, the *Fuso* and the *Yamashiro*, 2 heavy cruisers, 2 light cruisers and 13 destroyers. The principal Japanese fleet, however, moved in from the northeast, coming from the Bay of Camsang in Indochina. This fleet consisted of 5 battleships, 2 super-dreadnoughts of 45,000 tons, the *Yamato* and the *Musashi*, with 3 more battleships of from 30,000 to 33,000 tons, the *Nagato*, the *Kongo* and the *Haruna*. They were accompanied by 7 heavy cruisers, 1 light cruiser and 15 destroyers. A 3<sup>rd</sup> fleet arrived from the north, descending from Formosa with 2 cruisers, the *Isse* and the *Hiuga*. Of these, the Japanese had made small carriers by mounting take-off platforms in front and behind. Moreover, 4 carriers came, the *Zuikaku*, *Chitose*, *Chiyoda* and the *Zuiko*, with 6 cruisers and 6 destroyers. The Japanese admirals wanted to encircle and destroy the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> American fleets, and then to annihilate the US forces disembarked by General Mac Arthur at the Island of Leyte.

## Leyte Gulf

To reach the 7<sup>th</sup> American fleet of Admiral Halsey cruising east of Leyte, the Japanese groups of warships of the south and of the centre had to cross entirely the archipelago of the Philippines and then surge, the first group out of the Straits of Suriago and the other out of the Straits of San Bernardino. Admiral Halsey reckoned it was necessary to attack the Japanese ships before they had the occasion to deploy in the open sea. He therefore directed his own ships to the exits of these Straits, forcing the enemy to accept the battle before the situation became less favourable for him.

On the 23<sup>th</sup> of October 1944, Halsey sent his Hellcats, Avenger and Helldiver aircraft against the 2 groups of the enemy centre and south. The Americans did at that moment not yet know that a 3<sup>rd</sup> group of the Japanese Navy descended from Formosa.

The sea-battle was extremely violent! In a few minutes, more than 150 Japanese airplanes were downed by the anti-air guns from the US ships and by American fighters. A Japanese bomber dropped a bomb of 500 kilograms on the *Princetown*. After a terrible explosion on board of that ship, the Americans had to send torpedoes from their own ships to sink their own carrier! Almost all of the Japanese bombers had been destroyed in the attack.

Admiral Halsey was worried. His submarines and reconnaissance airplanes had found the two fleets of the centre and of the south, the one in the Sea of Sibuyan and the other in the Sea of Sulu, but those groups of vessels had not been accompanied by carriers! There had to be carriers! Where were they? A reconnaissance group of airplanes flying on the 23<sup>rd</sup> north of Luzon, would provide the answer! The airplanes found another Japanese group of warships at about 320 kilometer of Luzon.

Halsey and his staff deemed the two Japanese groups of the centre and of the south had been battered sufficiently by his aerial attacks and by the actions of his submarines. Halsey made the main group of his ships move north in the night of the 23<sup>rd</sup> to the 24<sup>th</sup> of October. He left the fleet of Admiral Kincaid to deal with the rest of the Japanese centre and south enemy groups.

Halsey had the *Wasp*, the *Hornet* and the *Lexington* carriers, new carriers having the names of the large carriers sunk in the previous sea-battles. The Japanese commanders assumed Halsey would engage in the Straits of San Bernardino. They were surprised with Halsey's move. Their reaction in the air was too small. Most of their air force was destroyed, most of their airplanes, before these had even the chance to take to the skies! Halsey thus defeated the Japanese north group of ships.

The south group, coming in from the Sea of Sulu, reached the north edge of Mindanao. Before midnight, torpedoboats of the US Navy, placed south of the Straits of Surigao, signalled the arrival of enemy forces. They attacked, launched their torpedoes, but persisted in their route. Three hours later, the Japanese group, making 20 knots, came in view of the American destroyers. The Straits of Surigao were only 12 miles wide at certain places. The American destroyers moved to the attack. Halsey's ships crossed the T, a well-known tactic for battles at sea, causing terrible losses on the Japanese. The American ships held their formation with the *California*, the *Tennessee*, the *Maryland*, the *West Virginia* and a few older ships. Most of these had escaped from the ordeal of Pearl Harbor and could here take a terrible revenge. For 40 minutes, the Japanese Navy ships tried to resist. They exploded one after the other under the crossfire of the American warships! A Japanese cruiser sank, another was damaged. Three cruisers blew up, as well as 5 destroyers. The Japanese column turned and escaped. A damaged cruiser more was caught and sunk somewhat later, as well as the last cruiser of the line. This battle cost Kincaid only one torpedoboat and one destroyer.

The attack of the US ships against the south group of Japanese ships had led to a disaster for the Japanese Navy. The Japanese centre group obtained better results. While Kincaid engaged the southern group, the centre Japanese formation found in front of it, protecting Leyte Gulf, but a cover left by Halsey when he moved against the north Japanese group. This consisted of 6 escort carriers, 7 destroyers, a number of submarines and a few small torpedoboats.

Although the Japanese had lost ships in the Sea of Sibuyan, they still brought here 4 battleships, 6 cruisers and 13 destroyers! On the 25<sup>th</sup> of October, these made contact with the US forces. The American much lighter armed and smaller torpedoboats and destroyers, went into the attack against the Japanese battleships and cruisers. The US Navy sank 2 heavy cruisers and 2 Japanese destroyers. But they lost themselves 2 destroyers, an escort destroyer and 2 smaller vessels. The Japanese losses were not of the sort to be able to stop the rest of the Japanese ships from entering Leyte Gulf.

At 9h30, the Japanese battleships had arrived at merely a kilometre from the American escort carriers, eager to finish off all their enemy ships, when Halsey's airplanes suddenly filled the skies. Halsey had abandoned the pursuit of the Japanese north group, when he had heard of the dire situation of his weaker forces, defending Leyte Gulf. He navigated at full speed towards the centre of the ongoing naval battle there.

Instead of seeing the carriers of the northern group, which had to attack the US fleet from behind, the Japanese admiral saw converging on him the airplanes of Halsey's carriers. The airplanes dived down to the Japanese warships. At the same time, he heard of the destruction of his southern group. The Japanese admiral's combined attack had completely failed. The defeats of the other two Japanese groups put the enemy admiral himself in close danger of being attacked hard by the combined forces of Halsey and Kincaid. The Japanese warships hence turned and fled to San Bernardino, pursued and harassed by Halsey's airplanes.

The Japanese ships were not in a state to fight on. Admiral Nimitz could therefore continue his offensive and prepare even the invasion of Japan, without fear of important naval operations of the enemy.

The defeat of the main fleet of the Japanese allowed General Mac Arthur to multiply his points of disembarkments. Leyte Island fell at the end of November. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of December, the American troops came on land at the island of Mindanao. Then, the 9<sup>th</sup> of January 1945, the Americans went on land at the peninsula of Luzon. The attack on Japan proper could start!

A preliminary bombing of Okinawa, only at 600 kilometres from Tokyo, was executed by 11 heavy cruisers, 15 carriers, 10 cruisers and 32 destroyers. Powerful British units had arrived by then to reinforce the US fleet. The British brought the super-dreadnought battleships *King George V* and the fleet carrier *Illustrious*, led respectively by Admiral Sir Bruce Frazer and Admiral Vian. The French dreadnought *Richelieu* sailed with the British fleet.

The Allied fleet now cruised with impunity in view of the Japanese coasts and 1,500 airplanes joined the B29 Superfortresses in the bombing of Tokyo and its industrial areas.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of July of 1945, the Allies attacked the remaining Japanese carriers in the ports of Yokosuka and Kure. Aerial photographs showed 4 battleships, among which the *Ise* and the *Hiuga*, 2 carriers and 3 cruisers damaged or set to fire near the harbour. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of August, the American High Command could announce their air force near Japan could with 1,200 huge bombers launch in one sole raid at least 8,000 tons of bombs on their objectives in Japan.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1945, the first atomic bomb hit Hiroshima, obliterating the town and harbour. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of August, a second such bomb ruined Nagasaki.

We must go back to Leyte Island. The battle on the island lasted for over 2 months. It took until the 24<sup>th</sup> of December 1944 to subdue the Japanese troops. The US Army lost 11,000 casualties, of which 2,200 soldiers were killed. The Japanese lost 113,000 soldiers, 2,748 airplanes, 41 transport ships and 27 warships.

The *Battle of Leyte Gulf* was the largest sea-battle in naval history. About 370 ships had assembled! In 4 days, the USA destroyed the Japanese navy's ability to ever again wage conventional naval operations.

While the *Leyte Gulf Battle* lasted, the US Air Force continued to bomb the war manufactories of Tokyo, the airfields and Japanese ships near the island of Luzon on the Philippines. On the 17<sup>th</sup> December, General Mac Arthur passed the Sea of Subuyan and disembarked troops on the Island of Mindoro, south of Luzon. His troops took control of the

Gulf of Manilla. Mac Arthur launched his grand offensive on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 1945. His troops went on land at 4 miles of the Gulf of Linguayen, surprising the Japanese Navy and the Japanese Air Force. Heavy bombings preceded the disembarkments. The US troops took the grounds of the Gulf of Linguayen. The communications of the islands with Japan were cut. It was the beginning of the *Battle for the China Sea*. The US troops advanced rapidly, until they reached the peninsula of Bataan. More US troops disembarked then at Cavite and cut the Japanese troops in two groups. More American soldiers went on land of the island of *Jolo*. Flying fortresses bombed Kobe in Japan.

At that time, the Allied Armies in Europe were advancing to the Rhine, and the Russian troops had reached the Oder River.

In Birma, the Allies had launched an offensive in December 1944. Their troops moved on rapidly. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1945, the route of Birma that supplied China was free again and junction was made with the Chinese armies that were fighting the Japanese. To the west, the Allied took Akyab and threatened Mandalay.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of February 1945, after the capture of Manilla, Admiral Nimitz set on land a considerable contingent of troops on the rocky Island of Iwo Jima, south of the Bonin Archipelago. Terrible fights lasted there for about a month. The American invasion had to allow the US Air Force to launch decisive attacks against the Japanese mainland. The island was only fully captured on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 1945. Already on the 16<sup>th</sup> March, US troops disembarked on Kerama Island and 3 days later on Okinawa in the Ryu-Kyu Archipelago. More than 70,000 Japanese soldiers defended Okinawa. But the USA sent 1,400 ships of all types, their formidable Air Force and more than 100,000 soldiers in an amphibious operation, the largest so far in the Pacific, to conquer the island. The Japanese Forces and the US Forces fought a bitter war for an entire month to win the island, both with unseen violence. The Japanese could not anymore bring in reinforcements by sea to the island. They dropped airborne soldiers with the mission to blow up American warehouses. Their suicide bombers tried to defeat the US war ships. Despite successes, the Japanese troops were being ground down. As of the 21<sup>st</sup> June 1945, the last Japanese troops were cut in several isolated groups and could not resist any more to the American presence. The American troops could set up their flag on Mount Suribachi, the highest mount on the island. The *Battle of Iwo Jima* had lasted for about 82 days. The US troops lost 9,600 killed men and 25,500 casualties, 32 ships and 54 damaged ships. The Japanese lost in all 90,000 casualties, one battleship, two cruisers, 3 torpedoboats, 3 destroyers and 4,096 airplanes.

## Japan surrenders

Japan was by then a politically totally isolated nation. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of April, the Soviet Union denounced the *Pact of Neutrality* with Japan, concluded in 1941. Germany capitulated on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 1945. In China, in Birma, at Luzon, on Borneo, the defeat of Japan seemed close. Nevertheless, Japan refused to surrender. The High Japanese Command prepared to resist the invasion of the Allied troops, mainly the US armies. The American troops continued to advance, taking the Island of Kume on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 1945. As of the 9<sup>th</sup> of July, the US Air



force massively bombed Japan in wave after wave. On the political front, Italy declared war on Japan. Japan evacuated Singapore on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> July of 1945, US President Harry Truman sent an ultimatum to Japan demanding its unconditional surrender. If not accepted, Japan would be rapidly and totally destroyed. The deadliest single day in military history had then already occurred over Japan. During the 10 March 1945 firebombing of Tokyo, more than 100,000 people had lost their lives. The Japanese Government rejected the ultimatum.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of August in the evening, the world heard of the most terrible bomb that had been dropped and that exploded on the large Japanese naval base of Hiroshima. The first atomic bomb had the power of 20,000 tons of TNT ignited at once. Hiroshima lay in ruins. US President Truman repeated his menace of destruction of Japan. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of August, another atomic bomb exploded on Nagasaki, a few hours after the Soviet Union had declared war on Japan.

The atomic bombs dropped in the war had killed more than 100,000 people at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The horror was incredible, unbelievable. Mostly civilians had died by tens of thousands, and subsequently, even more died from radiation exposure.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of August, the Japanese Government announced by radio it had accepted the American ultimatum, as far as the surrender did not change the prerogatives of the Emperor. The surrender of Japan was officially confirmed on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September, the solemn signing of the Japanese surrender took place on board of the American cruiser *Missouri* in the port of Tokyo. General Mac Arthur presided the ceremony. The main delegates of Japan were the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, M. Shigemitsu and the Chief of the Imperial Staff, General Yoshihiro Umezu.

World War II thus ended everywhere on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 1945. World War I had caused about 17 million casualties, among which about 60% combatants, about half of each among the European Western Allied and Central powers. World War II caused about 60 million casualties, among which 70% to 80% were no soldiers. Death was commonplace in World War II, because of the Fascist self-justification of violence, because of its racism and its punishment of civilians.

Examples of collective punishment were equally due to the victors, such as the firebombing of German and Japanese towns, and the dropping of 2 atomic bombs. Also, the Allied sanctioning of the ethnic cleansing of millions of German-speaking civilians living in Eastern Europe, with the end of even the idea of the ever existence of a territory still called Prussia. These deeds had caused no shred of remorse from the victors. All the belligerents subordinated military decision-making to civilian leaders, whereas generals are usually more sparing with their troops.

Georges Clémenceau once said war was too important to be left in the hands of the generals. It was certainly more deadly in the hands of civilians!

The war had caused the three greatest holocausts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Soviet Union had entered the war just after killing about 10 million of its own people, without foreign intervention, in the Red Terror and in the Great Purge following World War I. Many Soviet civilians died after the collectivisations and the ensuing famines. Hitler slaughtered 6 million

Jewish people in the heart of Europe. Mao Zedong, having come to power after the liberation of China from the Japanese, starved to death and murdered about 40 to 70 million Chinese people in concentration camps, purges, famines, in the *Great Leap Forward* and in the Cultural Revolution. These were Mao's post-war toll over the subsequent 2 decades after World War II.

## The Armies

In the Pacific Ocean, the US submarines had sunk over 200 Japanese warships and 1,300 merchant vessels. This was over 30% of all Japanese ships. The allied British and American Navies ended the Axis countries' ability to move materials and soldiers across the seas. After 1942, the Allies, and not Germany or Japan, decided on where the war theatres of World War II would be fought. The Allied superiority at sea thus ensured they could not lose the war anymore. By late 1943, the Allies matched the fighting ability, the weapons and the supplies of the Axis countries that had started the war. Total Allied naval construction exceeded that of the Axis countries by 7 to 10-fold. Japan and Germany could not anymore, if they ever had possessed that ability, invade and occupy the USA or Great Britain, while the Allies could do that to their enemies, and finally did. But Hitler's land forces had reached by 1943 about 5 million active soldiers. As the Nazi leaders fanatically would fight to the bitter end, these troops would have to be destroyed before the *Third Reich* would vanish from Germany. This obsession and unwillingness to accept defeat, was what the Nazis shared with Japan.

## The Infantry

The infantry was since always the main force in land battles. By late 1942, the gas-operated M1 Garand Calibre 30 rifle, had 8 bullets in its magazine. It was a precursor to the Russian AK-47 and the American M16. The M1 already had far less recoil than earlier rifles. The M16 was a light, general-issue semi-automatic rifle.

In 1944, the Germans issued the frightening *Sturmgewehr* StG-44, of which 400,000 were produced. It was the world's first true assault weapon, with an accurate range of about 200 to 300 metres, a rate of fire of 500 to 600 rounds per minute in bursts of 25 to 30 shots.

The German *Mashinengewehr* MG42, of which 400,000 were produced from 1942 to 1945, could shoot 1,200 rounds per minute. It was the most feared infantry weapon of the war. But the German soldiers had not been equipped with it from 1940 to 1942.

Grenades were thrown from rifles to over 300 m. Hand-held flamethrowers equipped many assault teams. Equally so were anti-personnel mines up to large anti-tank mines.

The infantry was motorised in the war. A typical American infantry division had 1,400 motor vehicles! The backpack the GI's wore was at about 50% of their body weight; the Japanese packs could go to 100% of body weight! The steel helmets covered more head and neck area than in previous wars. The USA mobilised about 12.2 million men, but only 4 million men in the First World War. Of these over 12 million men, however, it sent only 2.2 million to land combat units. To invade the Soviet union, Germany sent about 4 million men on the move.

Logistic concerns were crucial for the German, Italian, British and American efforts in North Africa, and equally in the invasions of Italy, southern France and Normandy. The Japanese expeditionary forces were only successful until late 1942, as long as Japan enjoyed a window of superiority in the air and at sea. Later, Japan failed in almost all of its amphibious efforts. On the other hand, after late 1942, the USA soldiers were never repelled in their amphibious operations, and that because of their careful attention to detail to ensuring the material superiority, aerial bombing, naval gunfire and superiority in arms overall.

Of all ground forces, the German Army had with its infantry the most effective fighting power in the war. Yet, it was far outnumbered by the armies of Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the USA. German soldiers were sent far abroad to fulfil strategic objectives actually impossible to achieve with means they had, given their finite numbers and shortages of equipment and supplies. Germany tried to resolve the issue by its armoured warfare, but it was out-produced by the Allies.

Mass drops of parachutists or *Fallschirmjäger*, proved unrealistic. On 20 May 1941, during *Operation Merkur* of the German invasion of Crete, 350 aircraft were destroyed. The Germans suffered in all 7,000 casualties, of which over 3,000 paratroopers were killed. Nevertheless, in the D-Day landing in Normandy of the Allies, the parachutists succeeded in securing the critical Orne River and Caen Canal bridges.

The most infamous *Operation Market Garden* of the Allies against the bridges over the Rhine in the Netherlands, in September 1944 failed utterly due to flawed planning. General Montgomery had ignored his own intelligence, telling him that the British drops of parachutists on Arnhem would land amid German troops. These troops were 2 *Panzer Divisionen*, the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, led by the capable German Field Marshal Walter Model. Other airborne drops over the Rhine proved to be almost unnecessary actions. *Operation Varsity* was the most professional of the Allied drops. It did not much matter, however, to the Allied crossing of the Rhine.

### *The US Army*

Foot soldiers decided over every theatre in World War II, except for the final defeat of the Japanese forces. Soviet Russia relied on overwhelming numbers of men and material. The US Army excelled in organisation and planning, in logistics, and in superb air, tank and naval support to the infantry. The ferocity of the Japanese soldier was not matched by adequate support or weaponry. German soldiers offered terrible lethality to enemies. The country had the most effective infantry fighting power. That led to Hitler's overrated expectation that their combat superiority would overcome the superior numbers and supplies of their enemies. But when the war was truly on, the *Wehrmacht* lost its advantage relatively rapidly, with disastrous results.

Nevertheless, the kill ratio, the percentage of casualties suffered versus caused for the best armies of the war were for those armies that had marshalled the most material and human assets, and used them wisely to win the battles, and finally the war. These were the US Army and the US Marines. By May 1945, the USA deployed 60 infantry and armoured divisions, 90 divisions in all, including those deployed in Italy, the Mediterranean and the Pacific Ocean.

Combat fatigue for the infantry set in generally after about 200 days of fighting. As the advancing US Army was almost exclusively an expeditionary Army, constantly moving forward, the US military invested much in air and sea power, in logistics and in mobility. Only about 16% of all of the US uniformed men fought on the ground in combat.

In 1939, the American Army was ill-equipped. The Springfield was the standard rifle, and a Point 50 machine gun was considered an anti-tank weapon! When the war ended, the US Army had grown to 8 million soldiers and airmen. It had grown from the 19<sup>th</sup> largest Army to the 2<sup>nd</sup> place. Actually, the US Ground Forces had the smallest number of actual combat divisions, by late 1944 about 100 divisions. The US forces had the highest ratios of non-combatant personnel. In 1943, the Italian Army of 3 million men was nearly as large as the American Army stationed in ground and air combat theatres, about 3.7 million men. Italy's population was a mere third of the USA's. The reason was, that many human resources of the US troops were devoted to supply, to logistics, to air and naval power. The Soviet Union had over 500 active divisions to stop and later defeat about 3 million Axis ground troops. Specialisation among the 3 Allied forces was an under-appreciated reason why the Allies could turn the tide of war after 1942.

The US Army was the best-supplied force, with excellent air and artillery support, food and fuel, and medical services. The American Army had the lowest percentage of fatalities of all armies, with less than 3% of all US soldiers killed. It treated its soldiers more humanely. It could afford to do so. The artillery barrages, air support, food, medicines and supplies in general made the armies truly effective. The USA made sure the soldiers were adequately supported with materiel, food, supplies. They had fine leaders, who had the expertise to defeat adversaries and could assure soldiers had a good chance to survive the conflicts. The system of logistics and support put in place was what made them win the war.

What made an army effective was not so much the heroism of individuals, but the degree of assets at his disposal, such as artillery and air support, logistics. The US Army, with some exceptions, won its offensives with fewer losses than almost any other infantry force in the war. The US Marine corps, 6 combat divisions in all, along with their auxiliary forces in the air, plus with 21 Army divisions, led the ground war against the Japanese on the correct assumption that Pacific amphibious operations required more integration with the naval forces.

The Marines did not fight in Europe. Initially the US forces were sent for 70% to Europe and 30% to the Pacific. The Navy and the Marines mostly were active in the Pacific, the Army divisions and their armoured divisions were first in Europe. In the Pacific, the battles at Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Iwo Jima and Okinawa were very bloody. The combat on the islands occupied by the Japanese were cruel, and involved most often hand-to-hand, individual face-to-face encounters.

No Army had so many trucks at its disposal as the US one. The soldiers thus moved faster and could cover more ground than other land forces. The German Army killed about 1.5 American soldiers for every German soldier lost. But the US Air Force has a 3 to 1 superiority over its German counterparts. Neither the German Navy nor its Air Force matched the kill ratio of the US Army.

No Army committed so few war crimes in ratio to its size as the American Army, maybe with the exception of the British Army, and then with the exception of the British Commonwealth

Armies. The US did not allow hundreds of thousands of military prisoners to die, as did the Germans on the Eastern Front. The US Army did not rape, loot, or murder civilians on the scale of the German Army, the Soviet Red Army or the Japanese forces. The *Wehrmacht* executed well over 25,000 of its own soldiers for all reasons, among which psychiatric disorders, and the Soviet Army executed even more than 100,000 of its soldiers. Still, the US Army fought heroically.

The USA applied hyper-efficiency in its managing of the progress of the war. At home, it brought women and the unemployed into the workforce in record number. By 1940, over 7 million Americans were out of work. The USA increased the work hours during the war. It improved techniques of mass production, and built for larger and more modern factories. It stepped up worker productivity. The industry could tap into vast domestic supplies of cheap oil. It could raise and free up enormous amounts of capital.

Great Britain exceeded German aircraft production. It outpaced the *Luftwaffe* in every year of the war, save 1944. The British fleet, the largest in the world in 1940, saw more war surface ships and merchant ships built during the war, including battleships and carriers, than the entire naval production of the 3 major Axis powers. Japan built 16 carriers of all sizes and categories during the war, but the USA deployed more than 150 light, escort and fleet carriers in the same period.

The *Third Reich* mobilised about 10 million combatants in active service, almost as many as the USA. The result was, that Germany ran out of labourers.

The German *Wehrmacht* emphasised heroism, unit loyalty, pride and honour, and had extensive combat training. The German soldier took pride in what he did. The Germans prided in the Panther tank, which was technically superior to the *Sherman* tank, but could never be built in similar numbers, nor with the same reliability and ease of use. The war on the Eastern Front of Europe was far harsher than the war in the west. The main German advantages in the war were superb weapons and leadership on the battlefields.

### *The Red Army*

The Red Army was already huge in 1941. It had then about 5 million men in the western and eastern theatres of war. It deployed on the Western Front more than 100 combat divisions, and over 100 additional divisions spread over the entire Soviet Union. The Soviets called up over 10 million conscripts during the entire course of the war. At its maximum, the Soviets had 12 million soldiers in the Red Army. It could then deploy about 500 divisions! Their losses were also the greatest. At the end of the war, the Soviet Union had lost about 7 million soldiers killed in action. Together with the diseases and the soldiers made prisoners, they lost about 11 million soldiers. The greatest loss came for the Red Army in 1941, when 4.5 million Soviets died, a number almost the size of all the then German Army.

Between 70% and 80% of all the German Army soldiers were killed, wounded or captured due to Soviet actions, about 5 million casualties in all. The Russians had excellent tanks, of over 80,000 T34 tanks of all types. They had a large number of howitzers, rockets, artillery canons and anti-aircraft Flaks, over 500,000 pieces, much more than any other Army. The

Soviets built almost 200,000 heavy trucks, and they received another 375,000 trucks imported from the Lend-Lease program. By 1943, the Soviet Army could throw more than 20,000 tanks on its fronts, and they added about 2,000 tanks per month! The USA and Great Britain sent over 14,000 tanks to the Soviet Union between 1942 and 1945. These were upgraded Diesel-engine *Sherman* tanks, with 76 mm guns. This was more than all the German *Panther* and *Tiger* tank production combined.

The Soviet Union produced over 6 million very good PPSH-41 submachineguns for their soldiers, and 1.6 million SUT-40 semi-automatic rifles. By mid-1944, the Red Army had ten times more large canons than the Germans. By January 1945, the Red Army threw more than ten times the number of large canons against the *Wehrmacht* than the Germans could bring to battlefields, about 100,000 large artillery pieces and heavy mortars, plus a million more in specific artillery units.

The Germans attacked the Soviet armies. The initial Soviet force slowly disappeared between 1941 and the spring of 1942, with over 4 million casualties in the first year of fighting. The Soviets had to retreat about 1,500 km to Russia's interior. But then, they stepped forward again!

The Soviet Army of the second generation came with 4.5 million men, new T34 tanks, more artillery, more semi-automatic weapons, and better fighter aircraft. The Soviet salvation of its forces was due to a number of factors: the Communist Government remained largely intact and in command, the industrial regions behind the Ural remained intact, the Soviet leaders demanded and obtained sacrifices as were unimaginable in the west. They governed a people used to deprivations of the worst kind, and it fought a desperate, existential war, in which both sides knew very well that defeat meant global death. What the Red Army did to the *Wehrmacht* in 1944-1945 frightened the European powers for the next half century.

### *The British Army*

As for Great Britain, from 25 June 1940 to 22 June 1941, the British and its Commonwealth Army were the only active land forces facing the Axis Armies. The British Expeditionary Forces in France had been defeated rather quickly, humiliated, and evacuated before and at the Dunkirk operation. It had then 60,000 soldiers killed, wounded or captured. It also lost most of its equipment.

But in the year before the German Operation Barbarossa started, the British military alone took on the Italian and German Armies in North Afrika, in the Balkans, and they could maintain mastery over the Atlantic Ocean and in the Mediterranean. British assets during the war were the British industrial power, naval and air strength, morale, the professionalism of the army under supreme command.

From July 1940 to the autumn of 1942, the British Army suffered withdrawals and surrenders at Singapore, in Greece, Crete, and in North Africa. The Japanese surprise attacks after its 8 December Declaration of War drained huge assets from the British empire, but could not ruin the Army. Then, in November 1942, the US Army entered the European war theatre. The British Army won a final victory there, except for the *Market Garden* fiasco. The British Army suffered the fewest soldiers died in combat of the 6 major nations at war: about

144,000 soldiers killed, about 240,000 wounded, about 37,000 missing and over 152,000 men captured. Key for its Army were high morale, its professionalism, and a workmanlike Officer Corps.

The British infantry wore the Lee-Enfield gun, of which over 4 million were produced, and the water-cooled 303 Calibre Vickers machine-gun. It was far more motorised than its enemies. It used US *Sherman* tanks. It had its *Spitfire* and *Hurricane* fighter airplanes and the *Typhoon* fighter-bombers. General Montgomery made errors, but he was a favourite soldier for Winston Churchill and for General Alan Brooke, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. Churchill and Brooke agreed Montgomery was irritant, a disrupter of their alliances, a plodder, but not a man to suffer a disastrous defeat. That made him precious. Great Britain suffered tactical defeats, though without offering strategic advantages to their enemies. Their main assets were their strategic bombing capacity, and their practical immunity from attacks on its industrial areas.

### *The German Army*

A great issue of World War II for the Germans was just how much they could transform the superior fighting power of the German infantry into strategic, permanent victories. The *Wehrmacht's* operational excellence was often wasted by bad decisions of its supreme command. Examples of these were Hitler's redirecting entire armies on the Eastern Front in 1941 and 1942, the no-retreat and no-surrender orders at Stalingrad and El Alamein, the doomed offensives such as the Ardennes offensive late 1944, and the *Operation Spring Awakening* relief at Budapest in March 1945.

Few of the best German generals could think in terms of grand strategies and geopolitics. As of late 1941 the *Wehrmacht* no longer delivered spectacular victories and advancements in Russia, Hitler ordered the removal of some of his most excellent generals, Gerd von Rundstedt, Erich von Manstein and Heinz Guderian. By 1943, the *Wehrmacht* had evolved from an aggressive and competent offensive force into an outmanned, out-supplied occupation army that could no longer win ground in the wars started, and that often and increasingly was at the mercy of superior enemy air and naval power. It had evolved into a defensive army!

In the German higher command were vicious high- and medium-ranking Waffen SS officers such as *Oberst-Gruppenführer* Sepp Dietrich (a general), *Standartenführer* Joachim Peiper (a colonel), and *Obersturmbannführer* Otto Skorzeny (a colonel). Inspired officers were von Manstein and Rommel. Officers who were dull and lacked imagination were the Generals Alfred Jodl and Wilhelm Keitel and Walter Warlimont, the leading figures at OKW or *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, and Hitler. These were no more than sycophants. The Army was highly trained and very professional. It was chronically short of men, however, stuck in a militarist doctrine, but brilliantly led on the battlefields, though often deployed for stupid so-called strategic ends which were not strategic at all.

The German Army manual for unit command in the war was called *Truppenführung*. Officer initiatives, hailed in the *Wehrmacht*, was *Auftragstaktik*, the freedom to fulfil a mission as

they saw fit on the battlefield. The autocratic Nazis in fact gave more initiative to their junior officers than the democratic British and Americans gave to their own majors and colonels!

In *Operation Barbarossa*, Heinz Guderian's Second *Panzer* Gruppe had only 930 tanks for about 150,000 soldiers. He had 75 divisions, with 15,000 Polish peasant wagons drawn only by horses drawing different types of often obsolete vehicles. He had 73 different models of tanks and 52 different producers of anti-tank aircraft canons. A standard German division that went to war had begun the hostilities with 900 trucks and 5,000 horses! Strange for a pre-modern Army! When the Allies worried about gasoline supplies, the German Army was dependent on grass and hay! The firepower of a German division was of 24 howitzers, 135 mortars, 442 machine-guns.

The German 37 mm anti-tank canon was ineffective against heavy French tanks and useless against the Russian T34 tanks!

Hitler was the head of the Army. Hitler prohibited tactical retreats to the German Army, which would have saved in certain instances hundreds of thousands of German lives. The failure to destroy the British Expeditionary Force at Dunkirk, probably due to Hitler ordering the army units forward at a critical moment, may have been his most calamitous mistake before the invasion of the Soviet Union.

Only 3 out of about 36 full generals survived the war in command. Only 1 of the German Army's 17 Field Marshals retained a command at the end of the war. The other 16 had been relieved of their command, been executed, or had been killed in action.

The German Army in the Second World War held up to 5 million men. Paradoxically, it was in chronic shortage of manpower! Far too few were sent to battles for the grand strategic objectives that Hitler had defined for the *Wehrmacht*. There were, in fact, two German armies.

The first was a small elite of about half a million soldiers, equipped with the best weapons and led by brilliant officers. These units were mostly employed on the borders of the country. The other Army was vast but uneven, underequipped, poorly supplied, sent to operate in far and distant foreign lands, lacking everything, from adequate air support, corrupted by auxiliary death squads, based on reluctant conscripts, poorly trained and too young or too old. The German Army of the World War II was of more than 5 million men. In the first 7 months of *Operation Barbarossa*, the regular German Army saw on average 10,000 Soviet prisoners being eliminated a day, nearly 2 million deaths by end 1941. Soviet soldiers surrendered rather eagerly in the beginning of the war. The killing of prisoners was a war crime! The killing could happen, because the Slavs were considered *Untermenschen*, subhumans, who were not to live in the post-war Nazi-occupied Soviet Union.

### *The Japanese Army*

The Japanese Army was a military and a political force that set national policy in the war. The Minister of War was subordinate only to the Emperor. The naval and air divisions were better equipped according to Western standards, than the Army. In all, the Japanese Army had 1.7 million soldiers in 57 combat divisions and various auxiliary units. It was larger at the



beginning than any Allied land force, other than the Soviet Army. Most Japanese soldiers were stationed along the Mongolian border and in China. Japan had a population of 70 million people. Of these, about 20% were eligible to fight in the Army, but this was a smaller mobilisation ratio than for instance for Nazi Germany. The decision of the Japanese leaders to start another land war with the Soviet Union, although fighting on the side of Nazi Germany, may have saved Russia and did not save Japan.

The Japanese soldier was no braver than the American Marines, much less well supplied, fed and armed. Japan never produced a medium and even less a heavy tank that approximated even early British and American models. It never really understood well the value of centrally coordinated heavy artillery. Japan was, moreover, far behind in self-propelled canons, in numbers of transport trucks, jeeps, heavy machine guns, and radio-directed artillery fire. It lacked motorised divisions. Japanese commanders thought in operational terms, as if tactical successes would per se result in strategic victories. It was an island power, but the Japanese lacked the amphibious crafts and the logical support to ensure the Army easy passage and adequate supplies. The Japanese mode of operation was to grab territories relatively unopposed, then fortify the conquered land, and then to demonstrate to the Allies that the cost to recover it exceeded its value. The Japanese Imperial Army remained something of an enigma. It could fight fiercely, in the manner of the German *Wehrmacht*, but it was organised and supplied in the manner of for instance the Italian Army!

The Japanese Army leaders were able to inflict terrible casualties on Allied forces: it had an experienced Army and Officer Corps from nearly a decade-long struggle in China. The Generals Masaharu Homma, Tadamichi Kuribayashi, Mitsuru Ushijima, Tomoyuki Yamashita, and Kejiro Sato were all shot or hanged for war crimes. Japanese militarism originated in the Samurai culture of Bushido and Shinto Buddhism. It was the cult of modern, supposedly racially superior warriors. Of all armies, it showed the smallest ratio of wounded to dead, due to its nihilistic, suicidal Banzai charges. Nevertheless, the Japanese ended up losing ten soldiers for every British and American soldier they killed! The combined Chinese military were of about 7 million men.

Japan was outproduced by her Allied enemies in practically all categories of weapons. For instance, the USA produced 2.5 million machine guns, Japan only 1/5<sup>th</sup> of that number. The USA military had about 4 million British pistols, Japan a mere 8,000. The USA produced 100,000 tanks and self-propelled canons, Japan a mere 25,000.

The Japanese Army was responsible for the killing of 20 million Chinese, Indian and Indochinese unarmed civilians. They killed about 120,000 British and American soldiers, and captured about 70,000 of them. Their own losses amounted to 2 million men dead by enemy weapons. And the Imperial Japanese Army earned the sad reputation of having killed so many civilians in World War II, while having been so inept at killing better-armed enemies.

### *The Italian Army*

The Italian Army of the World War ceased to exist about 3 years after Mussolini had declared war on Great Britain and France. It never won another battle unassisted. About 4 million Italians served in the Army, and half a million soldiers were killed or missing. More Italians died in German Prisoners of War camps, simply as prisoners or as forced labourers in Germany after 1943 than were captured and held in American prison camps. Italy had a population of 45 million people, yet it organised 90 divisions, almost as much as the USA with 130 million of population!

Mussolini and Italy were totally unprepared for the war of 1939 among the Western and Eastern European countries. In every category of military aspects, the Italian Army proved very inferior to the British and French forces. The Italian industry produced little more than 10% of the vehicles built in France or Great Britain. Mussolini had no need to place the Army on its northern borders, where Germany and Austria protected it. Mussolini used his expeditionary forces to send them to East and North Africa, to the Balkans, the Soviet Union and Greece, a role well beyond Italian marine transports and logical abilities, also on land.

Italian craftsmanship was excellent in arms production: the Carro Amato P26/40 was a fine tank, the SPA-Viberti AS.42 armoured car and the Beretta Model 38 submachine gun were fine weapons. But the Italians had no serious concept of mass production.

On 13 September 1940, the Italian Army invaded Egypt. It got soon repelled by a much smaller British Army and forced to retreat about 700 km through Libya, saved for a while by the arrival of Rommel's German troops. The combined Axis army surrendered in North Africa in 1943, in Tunisia. Late October 1940, Italian forces invaded Greece, which turned out as a disaster. Italy lost 90,000 casualties in its efforts to invade and occupy Greece all alone. Mussolini sent 10 divisions on the Eastern, Soviet Front with the German *Operation Barbarossa*. At least 85,000 Italian soldiers were killed in Russia, 30,000 wounded. But 20,000 to 30,000 Italians died in Soviet prison camps. Italy lost 1,200 artillery pieces and 18,000 motor vehicles on the Eastern Front.

When the Allies landed in Sicily, Italy was still an Axis ally of Germany. About 140,000 Italian soldiers were killed, wounded or missing of the 250,000 strong Italian Home Army. By September 1943, Italy had defected from the Axis cause.

### *In General*

The Allies enjoyed superior air supremacy by the quality and quantity of their fighter planes and fighter-bombers and by better training of their pilots. They could rely on vast convoys of freighter airplanes. The Axis troops fought far from home. Yet, they could only rely on a limited industrial base and a vulnerable merchant marine. They fought against stronger enemies, who were far better in waging war in modern warfare, far from home, and which proved to know more sophisticated logistics and mechanised transportation. The Axis countries could ill afford the orders of no retreat of their Fascist leaders, such as at Stalingrad

and in the Pacific Ocean. Germany and Japan may have brought the best soldiers to the battlefields, but not the best Army as a whole.

The French Army crumbled in a few weeks, its defeat in 1940 still remains something of an enigma. The Army was still large, could have retreated beyond Paris, and continued fighting. The paradox was, that in 1940, Germany feared France more than it did the Russians in 1941! France had a population of 50 million, and a GDP of about 186 billion dollars. Germany, with its population of 80 million people, had a GDP of 351 billion dollars. The French Army counted 3 million men, with 3,500 tanks. The Western Allies were less than 20% in surface of the landmass of the Soviet Union, but they had fine roads and standardised rails. In May 1940, the *Wehrmacht* invaded France, Belgium and the Netherlands with over 3 million soldiers, 2,500 tanks and over 7,000 artillery pieces. But 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of their tanks had already proven obsolete after just 9 months of war. The Mark I and Mark II *Panzers* were clearly inferior to the majority of the French armoured vehicles! The German victory so soon, so fast, was due to the concentrations of force, to tanks and airplanes blasting away all resistance, also in night movements and autonomous mobile columns that drew their own fuel and food with them. Great Britain kept its air and expeditionary land commitments at about 300,000 soldiers by 10 May 1940. But the BEF divisions were of largely untried, mobilised in haste, ill-prepared and untrained troops.

When the German Army grinded up its neighbours in Europe, it earned the support of opportunistic partners such as Italy, Japan, and even the Soviet Union for a while. Germany put its resources into its ground Army, while the British and the Americans invested more in strategic air power and in carriers on the seas. Great Britain produced more airplanes of all categories, about 177,000, and artillery pieces, about 226,000, than did Germany, respectively 133,000 and 73,000. The Allies outproduced the Axis Countries in every category of weapons.

## Tanks and other Weapons

In September 1916, the British Army first used gasoline-powered primitive tanks at the Battle of the Somme. One year later, in November 1917, in the First Battle of Cambrai, waves of nearly 400 British Mark IV tanks broke through German defence lines. When World War II broke out, every major power in the world had armoured forces, or was trying desperately to acquire them. Military visionaries then saw armour replacing heavy cavalry as shock groups. By the end of World War II, the effectiveness of tanks not just depended on the quality of the machines, but also on the sheer numbers thrown into the battles.

Archetype tanks by the end of the war, in 1945, were the upgraded Russian T34, The German *Panther*, the US American *Pershing*, and the British *Comet* tank. These weighed over 30 tons, but less than 50 tons. They had long-barrel canons of between 76 mm and 90 mm. Their silhouettes were low, with cast iron turrets. They had wide tracks, sloped armour of about 100mm thickness, or even over that measure. The Germans sought craftsmanship and size. The US sought reliability and practicality. The Russians sought mass production, and Great Britain sought specialisation. The most uncomfortable tank was the Russian T34.

From 5 July 1943 to 16 July 1943 was fought the epic *Battle of Kursk*. Superior Russian number of tanks were matched by German marginal quality and training. The two armoured forces neutralised each other. The Russians suffered three times as many casualties, and 7 to 10 times the number of tank losses. But the Russians ensured a tactical and strategic German defeat. The largest production of tanks in the world was the *Stalin Ural Tank Factory No. 183*, relocated to and expanded at Nizhny Tagil. The Soviets broke the back of the Wehrmacht with 2,000 US locomotives, 11,000 railcars, 500,000 wheeled and tracked vehicles. By the end of the war, the USA had devoted from 15% to 20% of its own war production to military aid to Great Britain and the Soviet Union, in addition to very high amounts of foodstuffs.

The PzKpfw IV, the *Panzerkampfwagen IV*, was the first fine tank produced in respectable numbers in Germany of about 9,000 tanks. Mark IIs and Mark IVs were the best models of tanks of Germany that entered Russia. Over half the German *Panzer Force* was far worse! Guderian told by 1942-1943, Germany lacked sufficient materials, especially Bauxite, to copy the T34's aluminium Diesel engine and its high-quality steel armour.

The *Panzerkampfwagen VI Tigers* first appeared in August 1942. They showed a 700 HP engine, a vastly superior 88 mm main canon, up to 5 inches of armour. The T34's success came from the Russian ability to produce it in enormous numbers. On the other hand, the German *Tigers* were too large for many bridges and roads. They quickly wore out their tracks and transmissions gear. They were expensive to transport and consumed fuel at record rates. They were costly and time-consuming to produce. These tanks required extensive training from crews to operate and maintain them. Only 1,450 such tanks could be produced. The deadliest tanks of the war were the *Tiger II* or the *King Tiger* tanks. Fewer than 500 of these were produced by Germany. It was the deadliest tank of the war. The *Panther* was a better answer to the T34 than the huge Tiger. The *Panther* was heavier than the T34 at 45 tons, but better armed with a 75 mm gun and better armoured by 4 inches of steel.

By 1944, each German Tank Division had only one to two tank battalions of fewer than 90 tanks each. These had superior crews. US armoured divisions typically deployed 3 battalions of from 200 to 300 tanks each! The lesson from the 1940 German invasion of France was that superior morale and training allowed the German tanks to almost ignore the quality of enemy armour. But Germany vastly under-appreciated the extent of the Russian pre-war arms build-up.

The Russian T34 tanks were constructed on principles of mass production, using simple designs for tanks of moderate cost, easy to operate and simple to maintain. By the end of 1942, the Soviet Union was exceeding the German tank production. It yet deployed tanks of comparable and sometimes of superior quality. The KV-1, the *Kliment Voroshilov* tank of 45 tons, 90mm of armour, a 76 mm main gun, a 550 HP engine, outclassed any heavy German tank until the appearance of the *Tiger* in late 1942. On average, the Germans destroyed about 3 to 7 T34 tanks for each German tank lost. Besides, German handheld *Panzerfausts* and *Panzerschrecks* were the most effective handheld anti-tank recoil-less rifles and rocket launchers of the war. Yet, the Soviet Union produced more tanks and artillery platforms than all 3 Axis Powers combined!

The US *Sherman* tanks appeared in 1942 and early 1943 in North Africa and Sicily. They were perhaps the best tanks in the western theatres. They were deployed in the thousands, but they were clearly inferior to most German tanks. In two years, the US would build tanks at the rate of more than 20,000 per year! In late 1942 came the new M14 *Sherman* tank. The great killers of the *Sherman* tanks were not the German tanks, but rather anti-tank guns and the *Panzerfausts*. The reputation of the *Sherman* tank lay on its ability to support the infantry, rather than in overcoming enemy tanks. The US Army also used roaming tank-destroyers, lightly armoured but fast-moving gun platforms. These platforms shot, and then scrambled away. The US M36 Jackson gun, of which about 1,400 were built, had a 90 mm high velocity gun and new anti-tank shells that could penetrate most German tanks at great distances. The Germans even used their 88 mm Flak artillery as anti-tank weapons. The British meanwhile, failed to incorporate lessons from the battlefield into one standard model. Britain's total tank production reached about 30,000 tanks, quantitatively comparable with the German *Panzer* output.

The Japanese never produced an adequate tank in World War II. So, there was less pressure on the British to upgrade their tanks. Their earlier models were still superior to the Japanese lighter types of tanks the British met in Birma. The huge Soviet tank force, with its thousands of T34s, ensured that the majority of the first-rate upgraded PzKpffw, *Tigers* and *Panthers*, would never be used in full force on the Anglo-US fronts. When finally, the British *Centurion* tank arrived, the first British tank that was clearly superior to the *Panthers* and the T34, the war was over!

Tanks were death-traps for their crews! Over 80% of the T34 were destroyed or disabled. They were as much incinerators of crews as a refuge. They had limited visibility, were not very fast, nor particularly mobile, and relatively easy to spot. They were also hard to climb in and harder to escape from. Their worst threat were the presence of the stored high explosive shells and the armour-piercing shells, with large-calibre machine-gun ammunition just inches away from the internal combustion engine. Effective against the T34 were the *Luftwaffe* fighter planes, and the dive-bombers, the *Tigers* and *Panthers*, the *Panzerfausts* and *Panzerschrecks*, and 88 mm mobile artillery. The German *Firefly* was a late model airplane. It could deliver lethal shells to a heavy tank.

The German advances were almost always spearheaded by upgraded PzKpffw III and IVs, with absolute *Luftwaffe* superiority, plentiful of mobile artillery, adequate fuel supplies, fine tank crews and superior numbers.

By late 1942, the eastern front was costing the *Third Reich* about 100,000 casualties each month. In 1942 alone, the German Army lost 5,500 tanks, 8,000 canons and 250,000 vehicles. The war was a war of attrition too!

The great killer of both Axis and Allied soldiers was the artillery. The Germans produced the most practical and lethal artillery pieces of the war. No gun in the war was as versatile as the German 88 mm. The last German weapon to enter the war were the *Panzerfausts*. These were forerunners of the rocket propelled grenade or RPG.

At the beginning of *Operation Barbarossa*, the Soviet union deployed about 33,000 canons, already over 4 times as many artillery units as the German invasion forces brought with them. At the end of the war, the Soviet troops often enjoyed artillery superiority of 7 to 1. The

*Katyushkas* or Stalin Organs were mounted in groups of from 14 to 48 launchers on trucks or even cars. Of such platforms, about 10,000 were produced, with calibres of from 82 mm to 300 mm. They were not accurate, not as guns or howitzers.

The US entered the war with the best system of synchronised artillery fire, using time-on-target methods. They allowed different batteries in varied places to concentrate their fire on shared targets. Late in 1944, during the *Battle of the Bulge*, US troops were allowed to begin the use of top-secret new proximity fuse shells. These could be programmed to burst at determined heights above enemy targets, making it extremely difficult for infantry soldiers to find safety from shrapnel in fox holes or field fortifications. Such fuse-shells showered shrapnel downward.

### *Leaders*

On the eastern front, about 15 million Soviet and German soldiers perished because of Hitler's insistence on attacking the Soviet Union and Joseph Stalin's naiveté about the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, later by Stalin's initial paralysis in June-July of 1943.

A single supreme mind in war, whether good or evil, can lead to millions of deaths incurred or avoided, in a way unrivalled by scores of subordinate generals and admirals.

US President Truman's determination to use the atomic bomb probably precluded the need for a more costly invasion of Japan in human lives, and by abruptly ending the war in the Pacific Ocean. This probably also limited somewhat Stalin's ambitions in post-war Asia.

Mussolini was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Italians, Ethiopians and Libyans in his attempts to create a new Roman Empire in Africa with entirely inadequate forces. He was deposed after the successful invasion of Italy by the Allies.

During conflicts like World War II, democracies run by a single, powerful, and yet legitimate, chosen leader, became the most effective war-makers.

As to Hitler, had he stopped before the invasion of Poland, the Allies may well have conceded to a huge German-speaking empire, longer-lived and more influential than at any time since the beginning of the German state. The *Wehrmacht* and the German economy at the outbreak of the war were lacking the resources to build Hitler's dreams in a global war. Hitler, with his great ambitions and hateful ego, did not realise he could never achieve the material means to his grandiose aims. Hitler was blinded by his antisemitic hatred, without seeing the appreciation of centuries of Jewish landmark contributions to European culture and science. Hitler's hatred was military unsound and savage. He suffered from the symptoms of the autodidact: he had only superficial knowledge without depth, energised by a forceful character dulled by lack of subtlety, introspection and comparison. After July 1944, Hitler was a sick man, jaundiced, suffering from coronary disease, plagued by an array of psycho-somatic sicknesses, as well as the possible onset of Parkinson's disease. He only found quack doctors in which he placed his confidence.

Hermann Göring was a drug addict, corrupt, and a delusional sybarite. Mediocrities of the Nazi period and sycophants were men like Göring himself, Goebbels, Bormann, Himmler,

Jodl and Keitel, von Ribbentrop. Absolute pro-Nazi generals were Walter Model, Sepp Dietrich, and Ferdinand Schörner.

Mussolini was the least qualified of all major war leaders to conduct the war. That was a catastrophe for Italy, as it had the least resources to wage such a war. Mussolini grew up among the resentments of the Italian lower middle class. He envisioned nationalist Fascism to the degree it had some coherence for Italy, as a meritocratic means of allowing real talent to emerge and give a chance. But Mussolini's megalomania for Italy and his naiveté about the world outside Italy, ensured the destruction of his country in his third decade of rule. Hitler only ruled over Germany during a dozen years, from 1933 to 1945.

Hideki Tojo ruled over Japan from October 1941 to July 1944. After the loss of Saipan, Tojo was forced to resign as Prime Minister in July 1944. Tojo had been previously a second-rate staff officer offering bureaucratic and organisational dependability. He lost control over the military catastrophes in the Marianas and Birma. Tojo was not competent in waging war. He was executed by hanging for war crimes in 1948.

It was hard for abject racists such as the Japanese ruling class to appeal for sympathy on the basis of the suffering they had so often inflicted on others. And Tojo suffered from the same delusions of grandeur that would in the end also doom Hitler and Mussolini.

Other important names in Japan were Tadamichi Kuribayashi, who organised the defence of Iwo Jima, Yosuke Matsuoka, a pre-war foreign Minister of Japan, and Isoroku Yamamoto, the commander of the combined Japanese fleet.

The Prime Minister of Great Britain was Winston Churchill. He saw Britain through the war, but he would be removed from office by his own people before the war ended, on 26 July 1945, at a moment the conflict still raged in the Pacific Ocean. This was the most beautiful proof of democracy in any country of the world.

There were in Britain as well opposers of Hitler, as admirers. Churchill focused his work on the defeat of the Axis Powers, and on the preservation of Great Britain and the British Commonwealth throughout the war. He remained sensitive to his unpopularity among many in the British political class, of the image of his aristocratic heritage in the age of social welfare, and of the shadow that kept hanging over him for his unsuccessful Gallipoli campaign in the previous World War. His policy had been to gain the partnership of the USA to fight a fully-fledged two-front war. He had a rare foresight of how the war could evolve, a realistic appraisal of the assets of Germany, and of how the war economies of Britain and Germany would develop.

The British were a people of islanders, accustomed to do things their way, unassisted and uninfluenced. Churchill, as many British leaders, had confidence in the surrounding seas being a far better barrier to the *Blitzkrieg* than the Ardennes in Europe. He made it clear to the public that a half-hearted defence was about the same as suicide. As in Kipling's poem *If*, Churchill kept his head when all around people were losing theirs. Churchill's main strategy point was to take advantage of the Axis countries' inferiority in bombers and ships to survive until either The Soviet Union or the USA brought in the means and the manpower necessary to confront the German Army and win the war against Hitler. Churchill was a conservative imperialist for the British people. On the other hand, Roosevelt was an anti-imperialist progressive and Stalin a genocidal totalitarian!

Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, made not always the best decisions. Some examples follow. He did not force the British bomber command to turn over more long-range bombers to reconnaissance in anti-submarine efforts. He diverted important forces from the ongoing war (and successes) in North Africa to the cause of Greece (in which he himself scarcely believed) in March of 1941. Churchill allowed Montgomery to offend almost every high-ranking US officer the man came in contact with after June 1944. And Churchill allowed Stalin to use a free hand in lots of countries of Eastern Europe, ostensibly as the price for saving Greece and Turkey from the Axis troops. Yet, overall, he made many more excellent decisions than bad ones.

The Chiefs of Staff around Churchill proved to be fine choices: Admiral of the Fleet Sir Andrew Cunningham, Air Chief Marshal Charles Portal, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Alfred Dudley Pound, General John Dill, General Hastings Ismay and the South African General and Statesman Jan Smets. Churchill possessed the greatest moral courage of the leaders of World War II. He achieved the lasting victory.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the President of the USA. He was a true politician, and the more Machiavellian the better. He did not insist on a planned or commanded war economy. He outsourced military preparations and its production to private enterprise in loose partnerships with Government bureaucracies. This boosted private enterprise, so that the USA were ready after the war to grow and become the world's greatest economy. But Roosevelt also may have been naïve and vain when he thought he was able to manipulate the even wiliier Stalin.

Stalin, born Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili in Georgia, so not a Russian-born leader, was the stereotypical paranoid, the parochial and bloodthirsty Communist man of the party, an *apparatchik*. Stalin equally made blunders. He could not believe Hitler would renege the cooperation pact on him in 1941, in the German *Operation Barbarossa*. He took quite logically the side of the anti-Fascists of Great Britain and the USA when his Fascist partners, the German leaders, double-crossed him. He should have known better. He too could be a Machiavellian. He gave orders of no-retreat, dooming over 2 million Russian soldiers when the German operation began. He ordered the massacre of over 10,000 Polish officers in the Katyn Forest. He delayed his armies before Warsaw to allow the *Wehrmacht* to kill off his future Polish and anti-Communist rivals. But he also obtained stunning successes in defence at Moscow in December 1941, as well as at Stalingrad in February 1943. Stalin, however, ordered precipitous counter-offensives, that often proved catastrophic, yet also wore out the German forces.

In France, the political and military leaders showed poor morale, social discord and pre-war weariness. The most notable generals in World War II, later than 1940, were Charles de Gaulle, probably more the politician than the general, Henri Giraud, Jacques-Philippe Leclerc, and Jean de Lattre de Tassigny.

There was no master description for generalship in those times, nor any certainty a genius on the battlefield would ultimately decide over the war. What a general needed was a golden mean between youth, daring and experience, education and pragmatism, knowledge and natural talent, audacity and circumspection. Nevertheless, a genius always beat the fool, and a leader with very much money, the best and modern weapons, great manpower, morale and



the finest supplies of everything, would more often than not win the battles and the troop movements to outplay the enemy.

Generals who won against many odds were men such as Hugh Dowding, George Patton, Erwin Rommel, William Slim, Raymond Spruance, Erich von Manstein, and Gyorgy Zhukov. Erich von Manstein may have been Hitler's best general. From 19 February 1943 to 15 March of that year, Manstein fought the *Third Battle of Kharkov*. He trapped over 50 Soviet divisions, recaptured Kharkov, and brought 6 months of respite for his soon to be terribly outnumbered forces. He was a brilliant tactician, without moral compunctions or strategic discernment. The Germans had many fine and gifted planners, such as General Franz Halder, General Walter von Brauchitsch, Fedor von Bock, Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb and Günther von Kluge. *Blitzkrieg* geniuses could have been Heinz Guderian, Erwin Rommel and Erich von Manstein.

For Germany, the elite, the best of the German Officer Corps was nearly wiped out between 1943 and 1945. German generals of or above Major General had been killed in action, committed suicide, or were missing. This did not include deaths from natural causes, incapacity due to illness, or forced retirement on Hitler's orders. The German General Staff and the still existent Prussian military aristocracy, had produced in this generation too the largest group of very competent army leaders! Among these gifted generals were Heinz Guderian, Gotthard Heinrici, Albert Kesselring, Walter Model, Erwin Rommel, Fedor von Bock, Günther von Kluge, Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb, Erich von Manstein and Gerd von Rundstedt. Walter Model shot himself on 21 April 1945, surrounded by Allied soldiers in the Ruhr, aware the end of Nazi rule was over. Rommel was a great tactical army leader, less a strategist or a specialist of logistics. He understood the *Blitzkrieg* as a psychological tool to destroy enemy morale through mobility and surprise.

The Italian General Staff and field generals were mostly inexperienced and overall incompetent. Such was the case for General Marshal Rodolfo Graziani. But competent leaders were Giovanni Messe and Italo Balbo.

Among the Russian generals, over 150 were killed in action, often caught in the huge German encirclements of 1941-1942. Another 50 or so generals could have been shot by the Soviet Higher Command after the fall of Kiev or the Battle for Moscow. Almost all anti-Soviet generals were either killed in battle or executed after the war. Examples were the generals Borisov, Dedaev, Filatov and Kriponas. Most brilliant Russian commanders were Ivan Konev, Konstantin Rokossovsky and Gyorgy Zhukov.

Great Britain's and American leadership in general was very good. This was the case for the Army Generals Bernard Montgomery, William Slim and the leaders in the sea Andrew Cunningham, Bertram Ramsey, and James Somerville. Fine Air Marshals were Hugh Dowding, Charles Portal and Arthur Tedder. After the autumn of 1942, these committed few blunders. The British commanders seemed sometimes too cautious and conservative to their Russian and US counterparts. But they were usually right when they advised what to do not. US daredevil generals, in contrast, were George Patton, Ernest King, William Halsey and Curtis LeMay. The supreme warlords of the USA with flamboyant yet checkered personal lives, giving often blunt and salty language were Hap Arnold, Ernest King and George Patton.

World War II would be won by the greater national wealth, production and capital of the Allies. Allied workers were often guest or coerced workers, but they laboured willingly with national resolve and pride. The Allies enjoyed greater naval and air power. This allowed them to tap global resources and transport them to the front lines, almost wherever they wanted. By early 1943, almost all British, US and Soviet factories, transportation and oil fields, were beyond the reach of German tanks and bombers. Allied air power, augmented with ground forces, began destroying totally all Axis production. Great Britain and its Commonwealth, the US and the Soviet Union possessed the combined population of 400 million persons, more than double the manpower available to the 3 major Axis powers. This, without considering the huge population of Allied China and British held India.

By 1943, the 3 Allies together (the USA, the Soviet Union and Great Britain) were producing an aggregate Gross Domestic Product twice the totals of Germany, Italy and Japan combined. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Japan's population for instance, was at 46 million, but that of Russia stood at 140 million people! Germany was unable to marry technological genius with rapid production. Their country was too small, their resources too little. The Allies may have outnumbered the Axis Powers in well-trained and well-armed Axis soldiers by a ratio of about 5 to 1, and even more in airplanes, vehicles, guns and ships. The German *Wehrmacht* may have killed 7 Red Army soldiers for each German soldier lost in battle, but it was finally crushed.

In critical areas such as bombers, transport airplanes, merchant ships, locomotives, food supplies, medicines, oil production and metals production, the Allies not only outproduced the Axis Powers, but overwhelmed them. Italy had few means to access these sources. Germany could not meet its needs. German oil consumption for instance by coal-to-oil conversion, met only 20% of the German consumption by 1939, and to over 50% in 1940. Still only half!

### *The Victims*

The First World War had been a period of mass death. Between 50 and 85 million people had died in the war. This was about 3% of the then 2 billion people living on earth. The Second World War resulted in 3 times this death toll! World War II was the worst human-caused disaster in the history of civilisation. More people died in World War II than ever before, because there were more people to fight and die. The armies were larger. The flu pandemic of 1918 caused the death of about 20 million people. These losses were probably less than the wartime losses of the Soviet Union alone between June 1941 and spring 1945. The Red Army consisted of more than 500 active ground divisions, more than ever conceivable as infantry forces. There never had been a Navy such as the US Navy of nearly 7,000 warships. The combined Axis and Allied military manpower at its peak were at an aggregate of 70 million people during about 6 years of war.

New technologies to kill had been the Zyklon B gas, napalm, B29 bombers, atomic weapons, proximity fuse shells, land mines, sophisticated tanks and artillery pieces, and ubiquitous semi-automatic weapons. The *Sturmgewehr* 44 and the *Mashinengewehr* 42 shot out bullets at a rate of 1,200 rounds per minute. In World War II were produced about 440,000 military

aircraft, 5 million military vehicles, 80 billion bullets, mortar and artillery shells, 50 million firearms and artillery pieces. A B29 bomber could fly about 2,000 km over the ocean and drop 10 tons in incendiary bombs. More such horrible statistics can be cited. German defensive planners accepted it took an average of over 3,000 rounds from a weapon such as the medium-range 80 mm Flak gun to down a single Allied bomber.

World War II was an ideological war, waged in a new age of modernism and industrialisation. One of the reasons the Eastern Front between German troops and Soviet troops was so horrific, was the totalitarian nature of the two military leaderships. One cannot but remark that material progress probably ensured the moral regress.

The *Wehrmacht* conceded that most Soviet prisoners taken between June 1941 and April 1945 would not survive German captivity. Likewise, the Soviet Union did not bother much about the 1 million German prisoners who perished in Russian camps. The total number of dead people was over 60 million, and the victors suffered from 5 to 7 times more dead than the defeated. The 40 million Russian and Chinese fatalities amounted to 30 times the combined British and American losses. The Russian-German war in the east with 27 million dead, proved the deadliest conflict in the history of warfare after the combined other war theatres of the Second World War.

World War II was the first major war in which civilian deaths far outnumbered military fatalities. About 60 million victims died off the battlefield, 20 million may have starved to death, weakened by hunger and diseases. Starvation, disease and exposure caused around 5 to 10 million dead in Russia. Under the Japanese occupation, about 5 to 6 million Chinese starved to death or died from disease, a number comparable to the European holocaust. When the German Army entered the Ukraine, the collective Soviet system of food production collapsed. It was a deliberate policy of the invading German leaders, the Hungerplan of the Nazi technocrat Herbert Backe, to strip the Soviet Union, and especially Ukraine, of its available food.

In all, 10 to 15 million people starved to death or died, weakened by disease and hunger in China and Russia. From 8 to 10 million people died in Birma, the Dutch East Indies, in French Indochina, India and the Philippines. About 3 million people died on the island of Java alone. And 1 million starved to death in the German-controlled Baltic States, the Netherlands, Poland, the Balkan lands and eastern Europe. Even the Netherlands suffered about 20,000 people dead, Greece up to 400,000 dead. The best estimates gave about 20 to 25 million fatalities of soldiers in combat during the war, of which 15 million German and Soviet soldiers alone. Japan lost over 1 million soldiers in combat in China. Another 1 million Japanese soldiers died fighting Allied troops, 400,000 additionally died in the Navy.

The democracies were often more concerned about incurring losses than inflicting losses, so they suffered far lesser military deaths. Japan imprisoned far fewer civilians than Germany. The Japanese were far more brutal to captured enemy soldiers than was Germany, exception probably made for the Eastern Front in Europe.

The worst death rates of the war happened among the Soviet prisoners made by the Germans: 60%, or over 3 million deaths. Among the German prisoners held by the Soviet Union, about 1 million died. From the Germans fleeing from the Eastern European countries, fell about 2.5 million. Among the German refugees, many suffered death. *Operation Hannibal* was a huge German sea-lift to evacuate about 900,000 German citizens and 350,000 soldiers and other

*Wehrmacht* personnel trapped by the Soviet troops in East Prussia. After the war, Germany would lose these territories completely. This evacuation was three times larger than Dunkirk.

The Soviet Union suffered the greatest number of losses in the war! They lost about 20 to 27 million military and civilian dead. Large death traps happened during the *Operation Barbarossa* from June 1941 to September 1942. In this initial German offensive, 4 million Soviet soldiers were killed in the first 14 months of the war, due to surprise and air superiority. The Germans performed huge encirclements. Around Kiev, nearly 670,000 Russian soldiers got thus trapped. In the Vyazma-Briansk trap remained 660,000 Russian soldiers and from June 1941 to June 1943, about 5 million Red Army soldiers were swept away in German encirclements. The Germans destroyed on their way considerable infrastructure works, without real military advantages. The retreat of the Red Army caused misery and death, perpetrated by the German oncoming troops. And still, Germany was never able to plunder as much food in the war as it had purchased from the Soviets in friendship!

Germany suffered about 2 million civilians dead and 5 million soldiers.

Poland lost about 5.6 to 8 million dead, or 16% of its pre-war population. Poland alone lost more citizens in the war than all the western European nations, Britain and the USA combined.

Japan suffered between 2.6 and 3.1 million fatalities. Its greatest losses occurred during the US conquest of the Philippines, with over 300,000 dead. The British offensives in Burma caused 150,000 Japanese dead, Okinawa about 110,000 Japanese fatalities. US firebombing and the atomic bombs caused about 600,000 dead civilians.

The war cost the USA 400,000 lives. This was the lowest percentage of any state of the Axis and Allied Powers! The USA were never invaded, and never bombed. The US Navy of 3.3 million men lost 60,000 dead. The US Air Force had 2.4 million men and over 80,000 airplanes. They destroyed over 40,000 enemy airplanes. The US formula for keeping a young man alive in the war, was long pre-combat training, access to top-rate weapons, fuel, plenty of good food and fine medical care.

Great Britain lost 400,000 civilians. In the RAF, the Royal Air Force, died about 70,000 men; in the Royal Navy over 60,000 and in Birma died 80,000 British soldiers.

The Japanese may well have caused the death of over 15 million Chinese, Philippine, Indochinese, Indonesian and Korean deaths. The Asian hatred of the Japanese and their cruelty ensured that a billion Asians favoured the non-Asian Allied cause.

Yugoslavia suffered 1 million dead. The Dutch Indies suffered 3 to 4 million people dead. The Philippines lost 500,000 to 1 million dead from famine, battles, mass killings, and forced labourers.

After the war, in some countries, revenge was taken on ethnic Germans living in Central Europe and on collaborators with the German Fascists. In July-August of 1944, Soviet soldiers killed about 1,700 Germans in Lithuania. From 1944 to 1949, about half a million people were deported from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. In Hungary, about 200,000 people were arrested and sent to the *Gulags*, the prison camps in the Soviet Union. By 1948, in Rumania about 250,000 people were political prisoners, about 2% of the population.

Germany stood before an enormous task of denazification, as about 10% of the German population had been direct members of the NSDAP, of the Nazi Party and tens of millions of people had been members of one or more associations led and organised by the Nazis. The food rationing in Germany ended only in 1954. Yet in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Germans could laugh anew at the Köln Mardi Gras wagons on the theme of *Wir, Wirtschaftswunderkinder*, or us, the marvellous children of the economy. German industry had been rebuilt, modernised, and had evolved to one of the most welfare-providing of the world.

After the war, no one in the world believed that the far harsher terms than those of Versailles on the Germans, now forced on all Axis countries, were at all unfair. The final victory in 1945 hinged on air power, the navies, armour and artillery, on leadership and industrial production. By late 1943, the Allies had established superiority over the Axis forces in all these domains. Already in August 1941, Great Britain and the USA had issued the Atlantic Charter on board of a battleship in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. This pact assured the United Nations would seek no territory for their own, and that there would be freedom of self-determination for all after the defeat of the Axis nations. On the contrary, Germany went to war to expand its borders, create a pure racial state up to the Volga River, to exterminate the Jews for all the wrong reasons, to destroy Bolshevism, to reclaim its national pride and confidence, and to place Germany as the highest form of European culture and civilisation. Yet, these aspirations were all flawed by vanity.

The war against Fascism was won, only with the help of the greatest totalitarian power of all: the Soviet Union. The necessary partnership with the Soviet Union blurred the attention of the mass murders of Stalin and the dominance on the eastern Europeans that would follow. Post-war Europe seemed to have forgotten that Stalin had killed almost as many of his own people as did Hitler. Was it really necessary to have such a war with so many casualties to be able to confirm the armies of the USA, the Soviet Union and Great Britain were far stronger than the Fascist powers of Germany, Italy and Japan? The fact was self-evident, and did not need such a bloody proof.

World War II ended in the collapse of European civilisation. It was the final clash of all the economic, ideological and military ideas that had crystallised during World War I and which had caused the instability and the tensions on the continent. The tensions would last during the subsequent 50 years. Europe had destroyed itself as the world leader. Leadership roles in the world now took the United States of America and the Soviet Union, until China would rise.

## Part VII. Epilogue. After 1945

## Epilogue

The German capitulation fell on 8 May 1945.

On 6 August 1945, US bombers atomised Hiroshima and 5 days later Nagasaki. The Japanese capitulation followed in the same month of August 1945.

Great change followed after the war. In the autumn of 1947, 3 million Germans were expelled in a brutal fashion from Czechoslovakia. In all, at least 12 million Germans were deported from Central and Eastern Europe into the occupied zones of Germany. About half a million Germans may have lost their lives during the brutal expulsions, and the fate of yet another 1.5 million Germans living in these zones before the war, is unknown.

The countries of Europe were more than before driven apart by two entirely different views on society. The only dynamic force that remained was the will of the people to live in ease, using a new industrialisation after the destruction. Hope and despair had been drilling into the minds of the societies now. Birth rates declined in Europe, but luckily at a far slower pace than the death rates of the war times.

The Soviet population was in 1946 about 26 million less than it had been in 1941. Mortality rates in the Soviet Union began to drop remarkably after 1945. It was at 28 on 1,000 under the tsars, in 1948 at 11 on 1,000. This was due to things learned from the contact with western societies and their emphasis on public hygiene, on better housing, better health education, improvements in the health of mothers.

Nearly 8 million people had been displaced in Eastern Europe. Life expectancy stood at 55 years in Western Europe, at 37 for Russia, under 35 for Turkey. Still, four years after the war, it was everywhere higher than 65 or more! There were advances in the treatment of wounds, in medicines to fight pneumonia and influenza. There were vaccines and antibiotics. Penicillin was discovered at the end of the war. Infectious diseases came under control. Malaria had been a terrible plague in Italy; the number of yearly dead people fell from 234,000 in 1922 to under 50,000 in 1945. The disease was soon practically annihilated. In 1910, people working in agriculture counted for 55% of the production. This fell to 40% already in 1950.

New inventions fuelled the industry. The jet engine had been invented by the British engineer Frank Whittle and the German engineer Hans von Ohain. Rocket technology was brought to practical uses, invented by Werner von Braun and his teams. The war had brought inventions in radar, radio transmission, the production of synthetic materials and electronic computers. The rationing and distribution of staple foods was better organised. The expectations that the state as yet could provide the framework for material prosperity and improvements in welfare survived the war and were taken up by the post-war Governments. The Franchise to women happened in France in 1944, in Italy in 1946, in Belgium in 1948, in Greece in 1952. And in Rumania and Yugoslavia in 1946, in Switzerland as of 1958 but at the federal level only in 1971, in Lichtenstein only in 1984. Substantial redistributions of land happened in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Bulgaria, despite the understandable resistance from the great landowners.

In Great Britain, the wealth of the landed aristocracy, the country gentry and other private owners of large fortunes in money were often drastically reduced. The aristocratic, patrician lifestyle of from before the war had largely vanished. Domestic servants were hard to find. But

in England and Wales, 1% of the adult population still owned 50% of the capital holdings in 1946 and 1947!

As industrialisation augmented in Germany, the upward mobility into the elites remained uncommon.

German soldiers made prisoners in the war were only released by the western Allies by 1948, 3 million former soldiers. A further 3 million men in Soviet hands, were only released in 1955.

By 1944, no less than 40% of the world armament were produced in the USA. British exports dwindled; American exports soared.

In July of 1944, 700 delegates from 44 allied countries met in an American hotel at Bretton Woods in New Hampshire. The conference aimed at determining the principles of a new global economic order for the post-war world. John Maynard Keynes presented the key ideas and head of the US-delegation was Harry Dexter White. Keynes loathed the Communists, as well as Fascism. His work of the *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* provided the theoretical laws for government intervention through increased state expenditure to stimulate the markets and thus the economy, and create full employment in the state. Bretton Woods established a new monetary order of freely convertible currencies. The exchange rates were determined on the US Dollar, to replace the former Gold Standard. The International Stabilisation Fund, later called the Monetary Fund, corrected the budgetary issues of the individual states, while retaining and guaranteeing the stability in the monetary system. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, later called the World Bank, was to provide the capital for the post-war reconstruction. The international trade relations were regulated under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the GATT. The agreement was signed by 23 nations in 1947. The US Dollar became the pivot of international finance. The next tens of years, would bring for most people living in the west continued and unprecedented prosperity.

As for the Vincius family of Julian Vincius, its members scattered in several groups, living in different countries. Julian Vincius and Charlotte Baraine continued to live in Luxemburg and even built there a new, fine house just outside town. Julian Vincius died in 1952 of an illness he had diagnosed on himself, but knew no cure existed for. Julian Vincius never returned to Berlin. A few of his grandchildren would, though for nothing more but a brief tourist visit, long after the war. The Vincius of Belgium, France and the USA were also not keen on nurturing close contacts. All connections with any remaining family in Berlin, Thorn or Vilnius had stopped since long. The Vincius had formed separate nuclei, in which even the name of Vincius gradually disappeared in part, due to the daughters in the family who married.

Charlotte Baraine remarried five years later with a friend of her youth she had met again in Longwy. She lived until her death in Luxemburg too. Malou Vincius married in Belgium. She did not have a fine married life. Her husband died rather soon. She too returned to Luxemburg at late age.

Anton Vincius remained in Belgium. He had two daughters. The oldest daughter married and moved to Switzerland with her family. The youngest daughter also married, and had a nice career as a Belgian politician. She had two sons. Maxim Vincius and his wife remained living in the United States of America. They had three sons, who also stayed there. Mauve Vincius



married a Luxemburg youth friend and moved to Paris, where she too had three sons, who all stayed living in Paris. The Vincius family would thus continue in France, Switzerland, Belgium and the United States. None of their offspring returned to Germany, and also not to the faith of their forefathers, to the Jewish Faith.

## Author's Notes

The Second World War, especially in the Western lands, was mainly a result of differences in ideology. The terror and the killings inflicted during the war reflected this. The clearest demonstration of the pre-eminence of ideology was the Holocaust of the Jews, the extreme violence on a people, the genocide.

In the same sense can be regarded the elimination in Germany of what the Nazis called the racial degenerates, an essential principle resulting from eugenics. The Nazis secretly halted the euthanasia action on a part of its population in August 1941, after it had become public, which had led to its denunciation by the Bishop of Münster, Clemens August Graf von Galen. Nevertheless, until then, about 70,000 patients of mental asylums had been victim of the programme. After August 1941, the killing moved to the concentration camps. The total number of victims in the camps, other than the Jews, may have amounted to 200,000 victims. The killing of the mentally sick was too aimed to be justified purely by economic savings. The mentally ill were considered a burden to the state.

The same happened to the Jews. The Jews who could work were indeed put to work and the others were killed. Very few survived. Auschwitz, in Upper-Silesia, combined extermination with industrial profit. Auschwitz consisted of 28 sub-camps and held more than 40,000 prisoners in slave labour. These generated about 30 million *Reichsmark* of revenue to the German State.

The German leaders took it for granted that between 20 and 30 million Slav people would die of starvation from the German occupation of the Soviet Union, as well as about 5.7 million Soviet prisoners of war in German hands. 3.3 million died of starvation and cold and diseases and lack of food.

To end on a more optimistic tone, the United Nations Organisation, the UN, was founded on the 24<sup>th</sup> of October 1945 at San Francisco, and Europe could move out of its ashes by the USA-funded Marshall Plan.

I am very aware of the fact this novel may finally seem to relate more the Second World War than contain intricate plots on the lives of the main characters. I apologise for that, but against the grandness and the horrors of the Nazi Regime over Germany, all plots would have seemed utterly unimportant. The heroes of the novel lived, loved and suffered as normal people of the times. No intrigue could have been interesting or entertaining against the background of the greatest tragedy humankind suffered in known history. This book also and thus ends the saga of the Vincius Family.

In novels, it is not usual to refer to individual date or scenes and thus to the authors who gave them or edited them. Nevertheless, as I am no historian, all the dates and events in this book have been taken from the series of books listed hereafter in the bibliography, and that mainly from the books mentioned for the authors Ian Kershaw, Thomas Friedrich, Richard J. Evans, Victor Davis Hanson, Henri Liebknecht and his authors, Jean Gregor and Pierre Pean. As this is a novel, I did not refer by individual references to details given by each of these authors. Just consider the novel as not necessarily the absolute truth, and look for the authors

mentioned as having produced the real truth, not to the writer of this novel. Anyway, I believe the entire story remained compelling.

The series of novels with the title ‘The Family Vincius’ was written for my three grandchildren Aurian, Gatien and Brieuc. May they never have to live through what their forefathers saw and experienced in the years of this novel. Their and our greatest challenge will remain how to avoid choosing cruel psychopaths as the leaders of the people, and stop these of wreaking havoc with thousands or more people’s lives and with their welfare. The political leadership system applied in their countries is all-important in this aspect of realising peace in our world. For a start, none of the leaders should be allowed to rule over any country for longer than four consecutive years in their lifetime, with no exceptions.

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