**World War II Begins – Sept 1, 1939**  
Hitler plans to invade Poland  
 USSR and Germany want to split Poland -- Nonaggression Pact  
 USSR to receive Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania  
   
 Aug. 1939: Hitler uses concentration camp inmates to fake a Polish attack on German radio station  
 “Operation Canned Goods”  
 **Sept. 1 1939: Germany invades Poland**  
  
 W/in 3 weeks, USSR enters eastern Poland  
  
Sept 3 -- England and France declare war on Germany  
  
**Blitzkrieg (lightening war)**  
 Effective German war tactic  
  
 Poles easily taken over – no help from Allies  
  
Hitler/France/England start peace talks  
  
 Meanwhile, Hitler plans to take over France  
  
April 1940 – Germany invades Denmark and Norway  
  
 Peace talks end  
  
 By June 10, both countries taken over  
  
 Winston Churchill becomes Prime Minister of Great Britain, replacing Chamberlain  
  
May 9, 1940 – Germany attacks Netherlands and Belgium  
   
 Both fell quickly  
  
 **British soldiers stuck in Dunkirk, Belgium**  
  
 Royal Air Force and Navy completed heroic rescue of British soldiers  
  
**June 17, 1940 France overrun by Germany and divided**:  
  
 Northern France under German control  
  
 Southern France under French puppet gov’t  
  
 **NOW A WAR BETWEEN GREAT BRITAIN AND GERMANY – Royal Air Force vs. Luftwaffe**  
  
August 1940 Battle of Britain (Germany v Great Britain)  
 Battle of attrition – both sides losing many and gaining nothing substantial  
 German morale wanes after failed battles against London  
 Hitler stops battle to reconvene   
 **WWII BEGINS!** In 1939 Hitler carefully planned his move against Poland. England and France had warned that an attack would mean war. Russia was geographically able to help Poland if it chose. To the amazement of the world (because of the strict political differences between the 2 countries), the Nazi Germans signed a nonaggression deal with the Communist USSR. They agreed to divide Poland between them and the Russians were allowed to take the 3 Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as well.

Hitler now left no doubt of his intentions. In August 1939 he told his officers: “Close heart to pity. Proceed brutally.” Before Hitler attacked Poland however, he needed an excuse. In “Operation Canned Goods”, inmates of a concentration camp dressed in Polish army uniforms “attacked” a German radio station. The Germans attacked Poland the next day, Sept 1. All raid participants were killed to prevent information leaks.  
  
 Hitler hoped England and France would not interfere, but the British and French declared war on Sept 3. For the Poles, this brought little comfort. Hitler's BLITZKRIEG (lightening war) was highly effective. Blitzkreig began with massive air attacks, hitting communication centers, and terrorizing cities. Armored land units then struck before defenders could get on their feet again. The Poles fought with no outside help. The odds were overwhelming. Within 3 weeks, the Nazis had gone past the line they had drawn with Stalin. Russian troops moved into eastern Poland. About 200,000 Poles escaped. Many made it to England where they fought beside the Allies.  
   
 Even though England and France were supposedly at war with Germany, at first there was no fighting. Hitler said: “I have neither toward England nor France any war claims, nor has the German nation.” But not even Prime Minister Chamberlain bought that. He said that England's purpose was “to redeem Europe from the...fear of German aggression.”   
While Hitler talked peace, he planned his next moves. The French stayed secure behind defense line, which guarded French-German boundary. The 250 miles between Belgium and France were unprotected, however. Across from France's 70 divisions and 3,000 tanks were 33 German divisions without tanks. All France needed was the will to fight, but it had none. England's Royal Air Force sat on the ground.   
  
 The German invasion of Denmark and Norway on April 9 1940, ended Britain’s neutrality. Denmark was overrun before anyone knew it. Norway was harder for the Germans to defeat. The Norwegians, with the help of English and French paratroopers, stubbornly fought German troops, but ultimately failed. British failure in Norway doomed Prime Minister Chamberlain, and Winston Churchill replaced him May 10. On June 10 Norway surrendered to Germany.   
   
 On May 9, 1940, blitzkrieg struck again as the Germans attacked the Netherlands and Belgium. The Dutch were easily overwhelmed. Their queen escaped on May 13 and all resistance ended. Belgium received some support from the English and French, but their collapse was so quick that the troops sent to help were trapped and withdrew to Dunkirk. Belgium was lost in 8 days. A heroic effort by the Royal Navy and volunteers using boats of all sorts rescued the 337,000 Allied soldiers at Dunkirk from May 26-June 4.  
   
 A line of defense was set up to protect the rest of France. In some places, it prevented an easy German invasion, but behind the front lines there were no reserves to plug a break in the line. On June 21, the Germans presented surrender terms to the French; the surrender took place in the same railroad car where Germans had signed the armistice in 1918. France was to be divided; Germany occupied northern France, and southern France would be governed by a puppet government. General Charles DeGaulle escaped to England and established the Free French Army.   
  
 On June 17, 1940, the defeated French signed an armistice and essentially quit World War II. Britain now stood alone against the power of Germany’s military forces, which had conquered most of Western Europe in less than two months. But Prime Minister Winston Churchill rallied his stubborn. But Britain’s success in continuing the war would very much depend on the Royal Air Force’s ability to stop the German Luftwaffe’s efforts to gain air superiority. The Germans had major problems: they had no navy left after the costly conquest of Norway, their army was unprepared for any form of amphibious operations, and the Luftwaffe (Germany's airborne branch) had suffered heavy losses in the west. Even more serious, the Germans. They wasted most of July in waiting for a British surrender and attacked only in August.