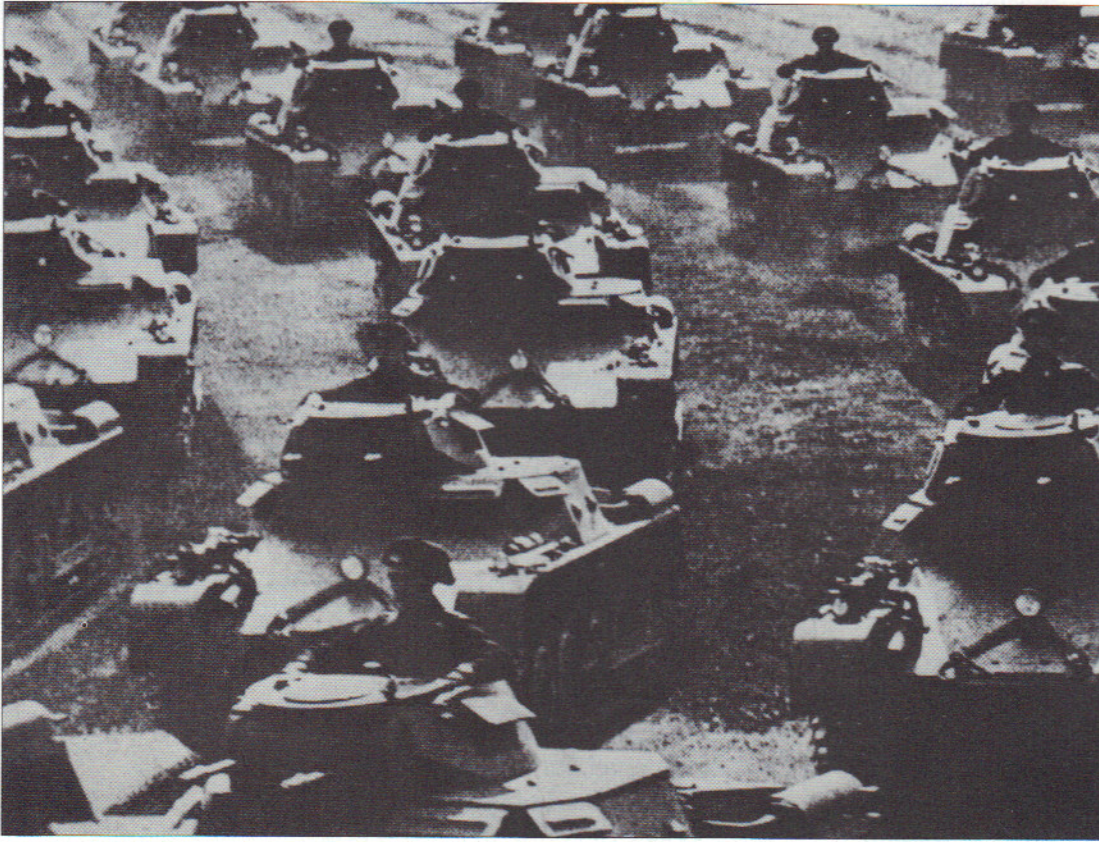


105 BLITZKRIEG



Once Hitler decided to take Poland, his troops moved with terrifying speed and force. Tanks of Germany's panzer divisions [above] roll into Poland during the blitzkrieg of 1939.

The Polish farmer bent to grab a handful of soil from her field. As she did, she heard a sound on the road behind her. Motors! She heard clanking like moving tractor treads. Whose tractor was this? Where was it going? Why was it moving now?

The farmer turned to get a glimpse of the tractor. She soon saw that it was not a tractor at all, but a German tank. Then came another tank, and another. The

farmer hurried toward her house. Oddly, the first thought to cross her mind was the date. It was her son's fourth birthday—September 1, 1939.

These tanks were part of a new kind of war. The Germans called it **blitzkrieg**. Blitzkrieg means speed and surprise—it referred to armies that traveled fast, or Nazi bomber planes that brought sudden death and destruction. The Germans smashed Polish cities and

towns. Dive bombers swooped low and bombed, and shot both soldiers and civilians alike.

On the ground, German tanks and motorcycles raced along Polish roads. Nazi troops, taking orders by radio and telephone, spread fire and death. Polish soldiers fought back bravely, but they had old guns. The Polish army was not prepared for such a war. Hitler wanted to defeat Poland so Germany could have more territories in the East.

Hitler miscalculated world reaction. Britain and France declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939. But they did not help Poland. The Germans crushed the Polish army within a month. Poland's suffering worsened in mid-September, when Soviet armies moved in and grabbed eastern Poland. The Poles surrendered on September 27. Germany and the Soviet Union had signed a secret agreement before the war. They now divided Poland between them.

Military Buildup

To most Americans, the war still seemed far away. They were not in any danger—or so they thought. Still,



Poland was devastated by Germany's attack. These Jewish children of Poland's Warsaw ghetto suffered from starvation and other war horrors.

President Roosevelt was worried. He was sure that Germany, Italy, and Japan planned to take over all of Europe and Asia. FDR did not want the United States to sit back and let this happen.

"When you see a rattlesnake getting ready to strike," he said, "you do not wait till he has struck before you crush him."

Slowly, President Roosevelt persuaded Congress to help the Allies. First, the United States allowed Britain and France to buy American guns. Then the President

asked for—and received—money to start building thousands of warplanes.

In June 1940, the Nazis crushed France. Britain stood alone. If it were beaten, the United States would be without any friendly nations in Western Europe. In September, FDR sent Britain 50 old U.S. destroyers to help its fleet. In return, Britain gave the United States the right to lease naval bases in the Caribbean, and in part of North America.

The United States also began building up the size of its army and navy. Under a 1940 law, all men between the ages of 21 and 35 were required to sign up as candidates for military service. Then certain of

these men were chosen by lot from the larger group and **drafted** (called into the armed forces). This was the first peacetime draft in U.S. history. President Roosevelt approved it because he believed the country had to be ready to defend itself.

Lend-Lease

In the meantime, German bombers pounded Great Britain. German tanks fought the British in North Africa. Roosevelt knew that Britain needed more weapons. He also knew that the British did not have money to pay for them. Roosevelt proposed to Congress that the United States lend or lease weapons to Britain. He suggested that Britain could

pay for the weapons later. Congress agreed to this **lend-lease** idea in March 1941. The United States soon sped weapons to the defense of Great Britain.

In the fall of 1940, Roosevelt ran for president for the third time. His Republican opponent, Wendell Willkie, also spoke "for Britain and against Hitler." Some Republicans said, however, that Roosevelt was leading the country into war. Some Democrats, on the other hand, said that Republicans wanted to ignore Hitler. Willkie campaigned hard, but Roosevelt won easily. He was the first president to be elected to a third term. He is still the only president ever to have served more than two terms.

By 1941, U.S. factories were busy day

Nazi Germany on the March, 1935-1939



In which countries did Germany annex territory between 1938-1939? Why do you think France was upset by the remilitarization of the Rhineland in 1935?

and night turning out various guns, weapons, and other war materials. Our aim, FDR said, was to give Britain any aid "short of war."

Millions of Americans agreed with the president, including a Kansas newspaper editor, William Allen White. Americans, said White, must show that we are "not too blind or too timid to help those who are fighting tyranny abroad."

Fear of German air raids drove many Londoners into stations of "the underground"—their subway system. The crowd gathers at one station in hopes of getting a good night's sleep in safety.



CHAPTER CHECK

WORD MATCH

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| 1. blitzkrieg | a. called to serve in the armed forces |
| 2. lend-lease | b. U.S. policy allowing Britain to borrow weapons, or pay for them later |
| 3. drafted | c. lightning-quick war, characterized by speed and surprise |
| 4. Poland | d. country with which Germany signed a secret agreement promising not to fight |
| 5. Soviet Union | e. country bordering Soviet Union and Germany that Hitler attacked in 1939 |

QUICK QUIZ

1. Which country was divided in two in 1939? Who controlled each part?
2. What was the response of Britain? Of France? Of the United States?

THINK ABOUT IT

1. How was the war in Europe a 1940 presidential issue? What were the positions of each party?
2. The 1940 draft was enacted when the United States was not at war. Do you think a draft could be enacted today? Explain.