

Camp currency



German Enigma cipher



Binoculars

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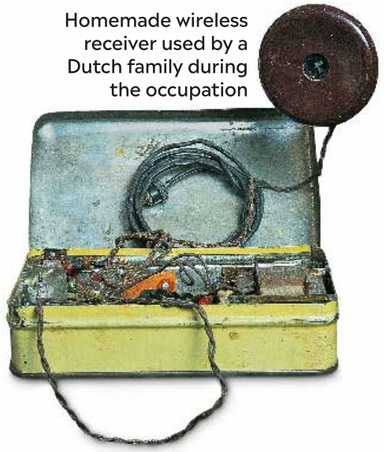
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Homemade wireless receiver used by a Dutch family during the occupation



British fire service badge



Straw snow boots made by German soldiers in Russia



Japanese prayer flag

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A world **divided**

After World War I, the world was split into three main camps: democratic nations – including Britain, France, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, and the US – where people elected their governments; nations ruled by dictators – including fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and nationalist Japan; and the communist state – the Soviet Union (USSR) – meant to be run by workers but really run by the tyrannical Josef Stalin. Conflicts between these three camps led to a world war in 1939.





Italian fascism

Italian fascists used the fasces (an ancient Rome symbol of power) as their symbol. But Italy remained a kingdom, so its flag bore the royal coat of arms.

Spread of fascism

In 1922, Benito Mussolini turned Italy into a fascist (dictator-led) state. By the 1930s, fascist rulers ran Spain, Portugal, Austria, Romania, and Germany – where the Nazi Party took fascist ideas to the extreme.



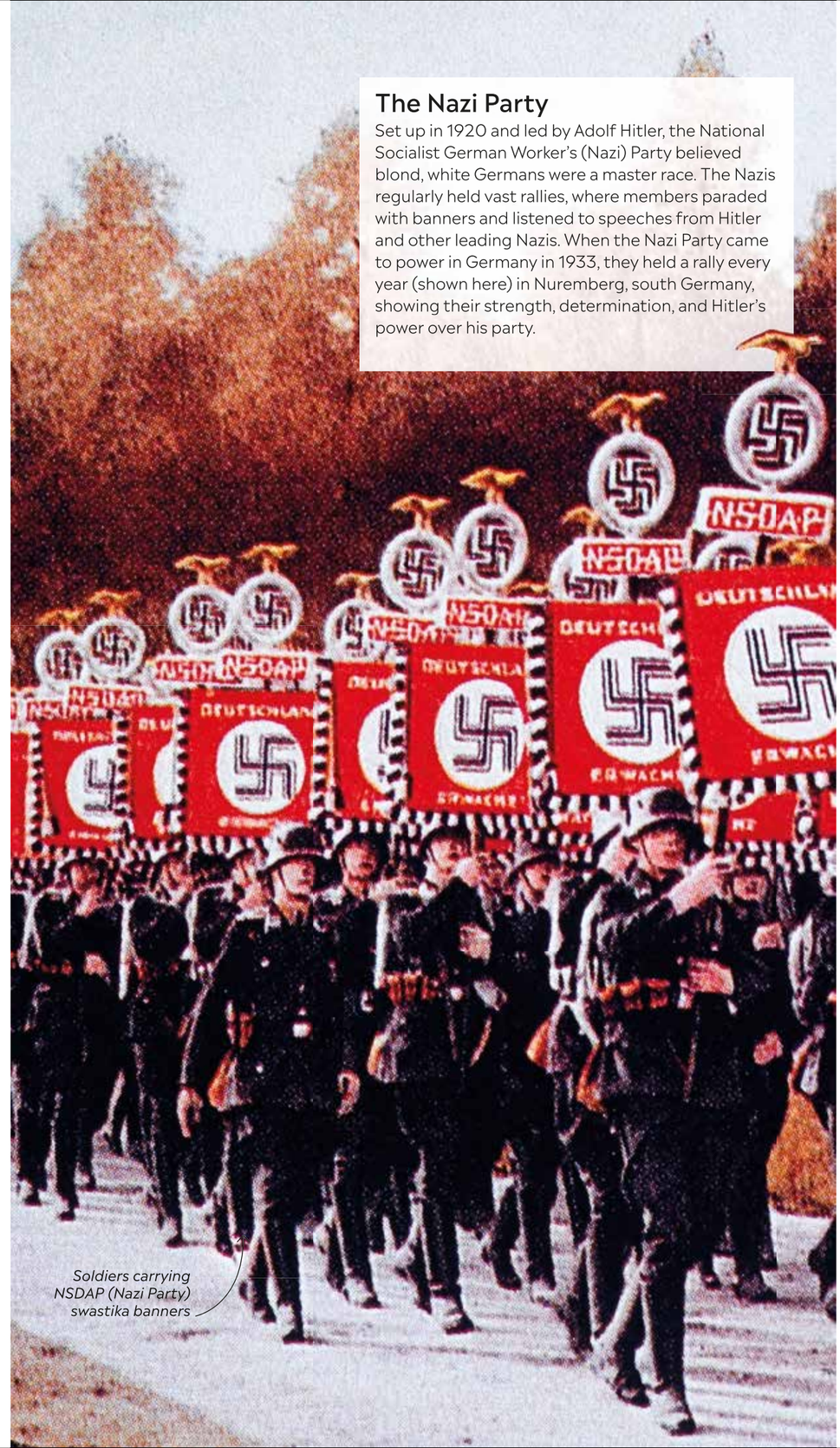
Power to workers

Communists, who were against private ownership, took power in Russia in 1917 and formed the Soviet Union. Few countries trusted it or its leader, and refused to support Soviet beliefs.

Soviet symbol

The hammer (for industrial workers) and sickle (for farm workers) was the Soviet Union's symbol and was on the national flag.

Vera Mukhina's *Worker and Peasant* statue, for the Paris World Fair, 1937



The Nazi Party

Set up in 1920 and led by Adolf Hitler, the National Socialist German Worker's (Nazi) Party believed blond, white Germans were a master race. The Nazis regularly held vast rallies, where members paraded with banners and listened to speeches from Hitler and other leading Nazis. When the Nazi Party came to power in Germany in 1933, they held a rally every year (shown here) in Nuremberg, south Germany, showing their strength, determination, and Hitler's power over his party.



Imperial Japanese army uniform, c. 1930s

Imperial Japan

Japan fought on the side of Britain, France, and the US in World War I, but felt cheated when given little new territory. In the 1920s, nationalists came to rule Japan, wanting to make it an imperial power in Asia.

"After 15 years of despair, a great people is back on its feet."
– Adolf Hitler, 1933



Nazi symbol

The swastika is an ancient religious symbol, common in Greece and India. Adolf Hitler adopted the swastika as the symbol for the Nazi Party, and it appeared on the German national flag in 1935.



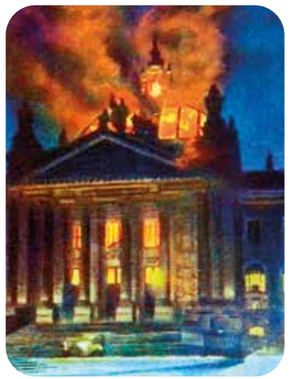
Presentation box for a copy of Mein Kampf

Hitler's manifesto

Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*) in 1924. It was ignored at the time, but clearly stated what he intended to do if he won power, such as creating a large army and persecuting Jewish people.

The Reichstag fire

An arson attack on the Reichstag (parliament) building in Berlin on 27 February 1933 paved the way for the rise of the Nazi rule. Hitler alleged that the communists wanted to topple the government and used this false charge to take absolute control of Germany.



Reichstag fire on 27 February 1933

Heading to war

In 1933, Hitler's Nazi Party came to power in Germany and began to build its army. In 1936, Hitler sent troops to the Rhineland – a German industrial area next to France and Belgium – then took over Austria and parts of Czechoslovakia. Meanwhile, Italy invaded Albania, Greece, and North Africa, and Japan invaded China. Strong ties grew between Germany, Italy, and Japan. By the late 1930s, Britain and France were re-equipping their armies, while the USA watched Japan's rise with concern. The world was preparing for war.



Treaty of Versailles

After its defeat in World War I, Germany was forced to sign a treaty in 1919. It lost its empire and was banned from having a large army. Most Germans supported Hitler's refusal to accept these terms.



Japan invades China

After taking over the Chinese province of Manchuria in 1932, Japan launched a full-scale invasion of China in 1937, seizing the capital, Nanjing, and much of the coast.



Events in North Africa

Italy's leader, Mussolini, wanted to build a new Roman Empire in North Africa and turn the Mediterranean into an "Italian lake". Italy invaded Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) in 1935, sending emperor Haile Selassie, right, into exile.

Nazi-Soviet pact

On 23 August 1939, the Soviets and German foreign ministers signed a non-aggression pact, which left Germany free to invade Poland and western Europe. They met again to confirm the division of Poland between them.





Hitler moves into Austria

In March 1938, Hitler took his troops into Austria and declared an Anschluss (union) between the countries, breaking the Treaty of Versailles. Most Austrians favoured the union, but nearby countries were concerned at Hitler's growing power.



Dictators unite

Italy's leader Mussolini (left) was at first hostile to Hitler (right) because Hitler wanted to invade Austria, Italy's neighbour. Gradually, the countries drew closer and formed a partnership in 1936, the Rome–Berlin Axis, which later included Japan and other countries. In 1939, Germany and Italy signed a formal alliance, the Pact of Steel, and fought together early in the war.



Britain and France together

This 1938 visit of King George VI (far left) and Queen Elizabeth to France marked Britain and France's close ties. They were alarmed by Germany and Italy's growing strength and, in 1939, agreed to help Poland, Romania, and Greece if Germany or Italy attacked.



A peaceful approach

In 1938, European leaders agreed to placate Hitler and signed the Munich Agreement. This let Germans in the Sudeten area of Czechoslovakia unite with Germany. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain (above) said it guaranteed peace. Six months later, Hitler took over all Czechoslovakia.



German forces invading Poland

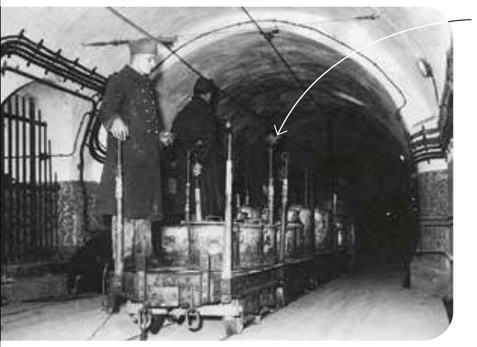
Soldiers destroy the border barrier between Poland and German-controlled Danzig

Invasion of Poland

Hitler demanded the Polish Corridor – a strip of Poland dividing East Prussia from the rest of Germany. Poland resisted, so he took it; German forces here are seen dismantling the border posts in 1939 as they invade Poland. In response, Britain and France declared war on Germany – World War II began.

Preparing for the worst

War loomed 1938–39, so Britain, France, Italy, and Germany prepared for the worst, with plans to ration food and raw materials. France had already built the Maginot Line to defend it from German invasion. Britain expected its major cities to be bombed soon, so took care to protect its people, digging shelters, and issuing gas masks. Once war broke out in September 1939, children were evacuated to the countryside, but it was the German invasions of April–May 1940 that really tested these precautions.



Troops and weapons are transported on the Maginot underground railway

French defence

The Maginot Line, France's main fortification, took six years to construct (1929–34) and stretched along France's eastern border with Germany. It consisted of anti-tank defences, bomb-proof artillery shelters, and forts, many linked by underground railways.



Tin-can mortar bomb

Improvising

The British Home Guard was a voluntary unit that protected defence installations and watched out for enemy infiltration. They had few weapons and so they improvised, using cans to make mortar bombs and bottles for grenades.



Guarding the home front

At the end of the war, all German men aged 16–60 not already in the army were called to the Volkssturm (home guard). They had little training and had to make do with what weapons they could find.



German gas mask

Grenade made from a wine bottle

Gas filter

Gas masks

Everyone in Britain was issued with a gas mask. In Germany, only those considered high risk, such as children, air-raid wardens, and Nazi Party officials, were given masks. Gas was never used by either side, so the masks were never needed.



Air-raid shelters

Most British city-dwellers installed in their gardens an underground Anderson shelter (corrugated-iron tunnel). In February 1941, there were Morrison shelters (steel cages for use indoors) for those without gardens.



Balloon protection

Large barrage balloons protected Britain's cities from air raids. They were launched before a raid and trailed steel cables beneath them. Bombers had to fly high to avoid the cables, reducing their accuracy.



"The enemy sees your light! Make it dark!"

This German poster warns civilians to keep all lights shielded at night or risk helping enemy bombers to find their town. Blackouts were compulsory throughout Germany and Britain.

EYEWITNESS

German rationing

A woman from Berlin recalled how they stood in long queues to get an eight-day ration allowance in honour of Hitler's birthday. She said that no one could afford to miss rations of this type as food was so short. Rationing of food became severe from 1943.



German civilian ration card

British beach mine

Beach defence

Mines were planted to defend possible invasion beaches in southern Britain and northern France.