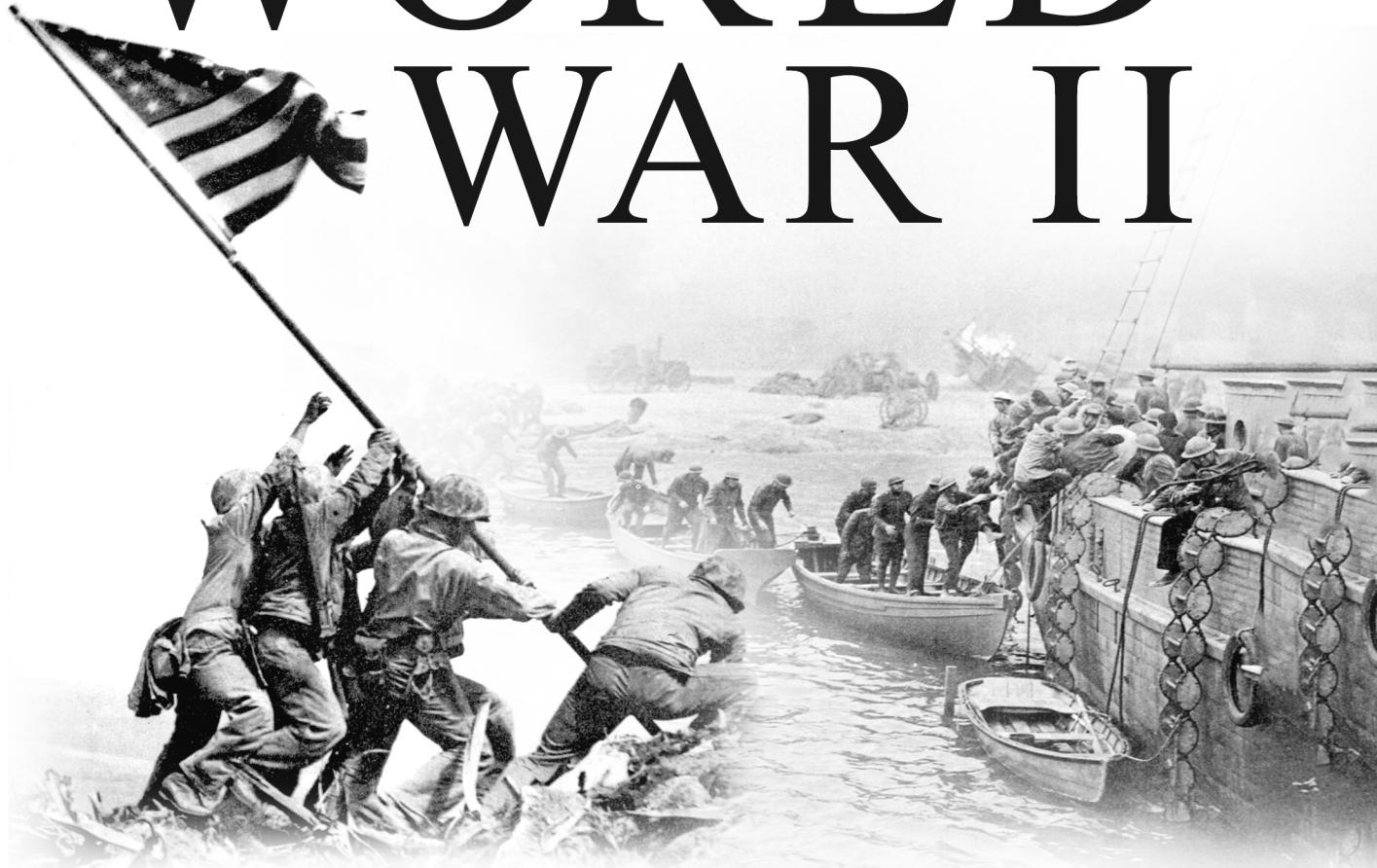
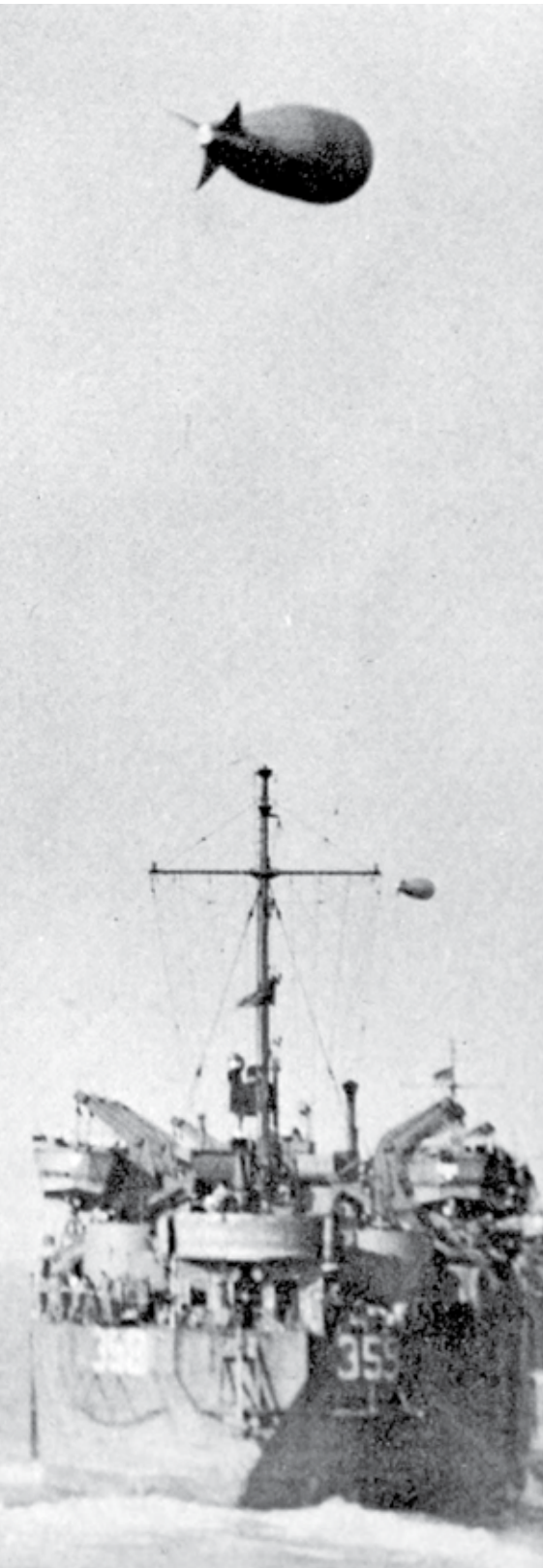


EXPLORE THE GLOBAL CONFLICT  
THAT RESHAPED HISTORY

THE  
FIRST BOOK  
*of*  
WORLD  
WAR II



LOUIS L. SNYDER



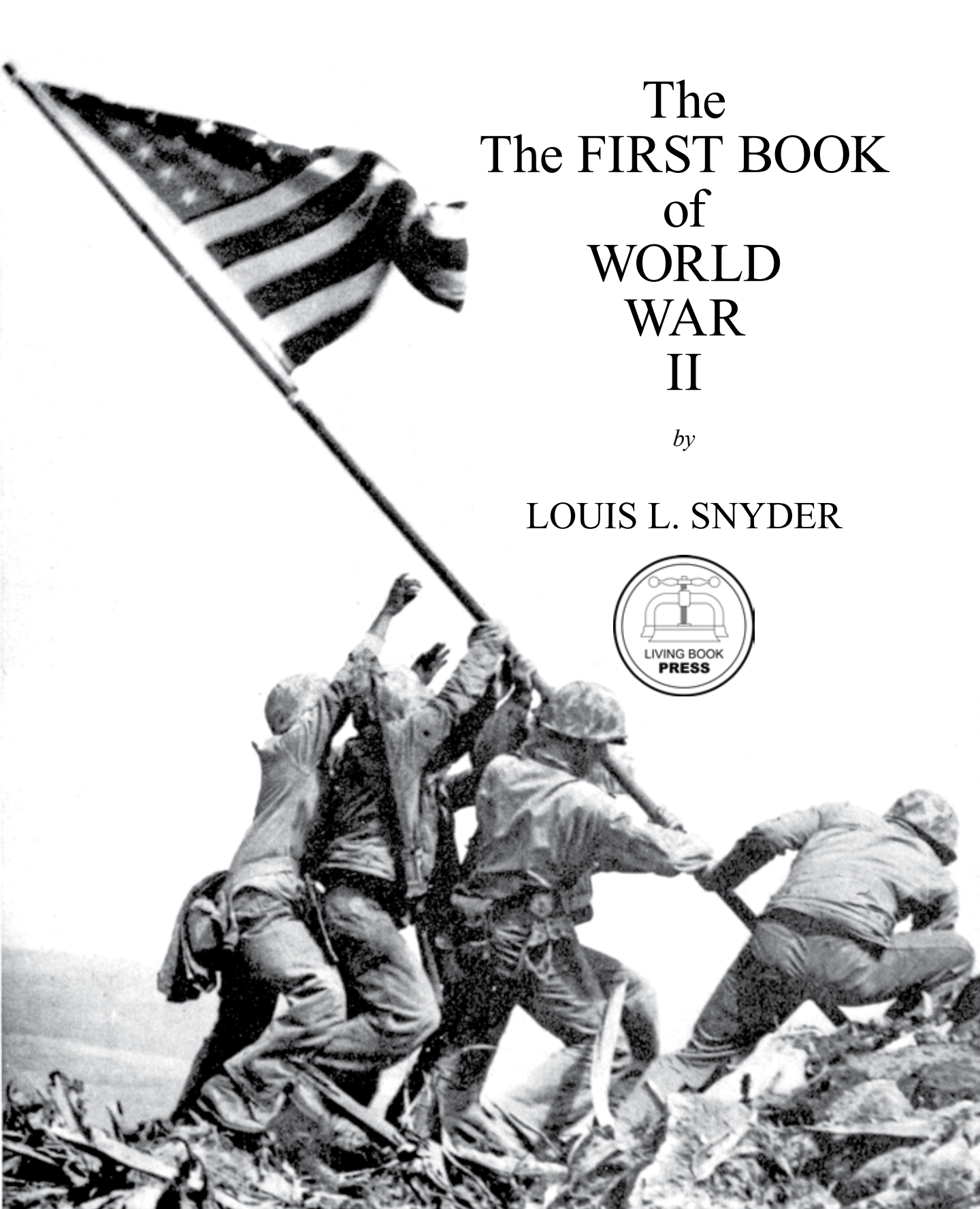
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## ***THE WAR BEGINS***

On September 1, 1939, the German Army crashed across the borders of Poland. First came the *Stuka* dive-bombers, with shrieking whistles in their wings, to blast the Polish planes that were on the ground. Then the German pilots bombed the railroads and highways. They smashed the big cities.

After this came the motorcycle infantry, armored cars, and tanks. Finally, the regular infantry—the foot-soldiers—moved in to finish up the job.

This was a new kind of war that the Germans used. It was called *Blitzkrieg*, which is a German word meaning lightning war. The Germans had the best-trained force in the world with which to wage it. The weather was good. The ground was level and just right for lightning war.

Meanwhile, the Russians were pushing into Poland from the east. They and the Germans had made a treaty to conquer and divide the country between themselves.

Poland had no chance against the mighty German army. Her little army had no time to fight back or even to begin to retreat before it was overwhelmed. Within two weeks, Warsaw, the biggest city in Poland, was surrounded by the Germans. In a little over a month, they had conquered the whole country, and the Russians moved in from the east.

So began the six years of World War II, the most terrible war in the history of the world.



NAZI MOTORCYCLE INFANTRY AND ARMORED CARS ENTER A POLISH TOWN AFTER IT HAS BEEN DEVASTATED BY REPEATED BOMBINGS.

# ***WHAT CAUSED WORLD WAR II***

There was no one simple cause for World War II. Rather, there were many causes. Most of them grew out of World War I.

After World War I, four imperial governments were swept away—those in Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia, and Turkey. The Germans, especially, were bitter about the terms of the Versailles Treaty which ended the war. They lost all their colonies and one-eighth of their European area. They were forced to return Alsace-Lorraine to France. Their navy, second only to Great Britain's, was almost wiped away. Their army was cut down so that it was not much larger than that of Belgium.

Late in the 18th century, Poland had been divided among three countries—Russia, Prussia, and Austria, so there was no Poland when World War I ended. However, in 1919, a new independent Poland was set up in Eastern Europe. To this newly re-created country, Germany was made to give up Posen and West Prussia. This was a huge chunk of territory, 260 miles long and 80 miles wide. So that Poland could have an outlet to the sea, she was given what was called the Polish Corridor, running right through German territory. The Germans never forgave the Allies for splitting their country into two parts.

World War I was known as “the war to end wars.” Instead of healing old wounds, this war actually created new ones. If Germany ever got strong again, she would almost certainly try to get vengeance.

During World War I, the countries allied against Germany had borrowed nearly \$10 billion from the United States, promising to pay it back over a period of 62 years. They expected to get the money from

Germany by demanding reparations, or payments, for war damage.

Starting in 1929, there came a world-wide depression, a time when all over the world many people became poor and jobless. The depression hit Germany especially hard. She had lost almost everything she had in the war and was over her head in debt to the victorious nations.

In such times, when people are cold and hungry and see no hope ahead, it is sometimes easy for a strong and evil man to drive them where he wants them to go. Such men are called dictators. They dictate to the people, or tell them exactly what to do. They promise the people everything if only they—the dictators—are allowed to run the country. Dictators believe that human beings are like animals—strong tigers and weak lambs. They think of themselves as tigers, and believe they were born to rule the lambs.

After World War I, three strong dictators arose. They were Hitler in Germany, Mussolini in Italy, and Tojo in Japan. These men called democracy a “dead corpse.” In a free country, they might have found it hard to make the people follow them, however fine their promises. But the Germans, the Italians, and the Japanese had never known real freedom. They were used to following strong leaders instead of working out their own problems in a democratic government.

Benito Mussolini became dictator of Italy in 1922. He was a journalist who had written a number of revolutionary pamphlets. His followers were called Fascists. When he first came into power, he won the loyalty of the people by making improvements at home. He built new roads, new houses, new factories. One of his proud boasts was that he had made the Italian trains run on time! But he demanded



MUSSOLINI



TOJO

# THE DICTATORS

HITLER



that the people obey him absolutely. Anyone who refused to obey was imprisoned or killed.

Mussolini's real ambition was to rule a great colonial empire. He told the people that Italy was overcrowded and must have more land in which to grow and become a great nation. He wanted the whole Mediterranean Sea to become an Italian lake—*Mare Nostrum*, which means Our Sea. Mussolini glorified war and conquest and sent his armies into Africa to take new land by force.

General Hideki Tojo was the leader of the war party in Japan. He won power in that tiny island by promising the people an empire in Asia. He especially wanted the Netherlands East Indies, now Indonesia, from which America got most of her tin and rubber. Under Tojo's leadership, Japan attacked China in 1931. In 1932, she seized the rich province of Manchuria and renamed it Manchukuo.

Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933. He was an Austrian politician who had worked his way to power through the National Socialist, or Nazi, party. His followers were called Nazis.

Hitler was a ridiculous-looking little man with a screeching voice and a sick mind. But he had the power to arouse people's feelings, particularly the feeling of hate. This feeling is often strong in people suffering from hurt pride, as the Germans were after World War I. Hitler promised the half-starved Germans plenty to eat if they would do what he told them to do. He promised to win back Germany's lost territories and make her a great nation again.

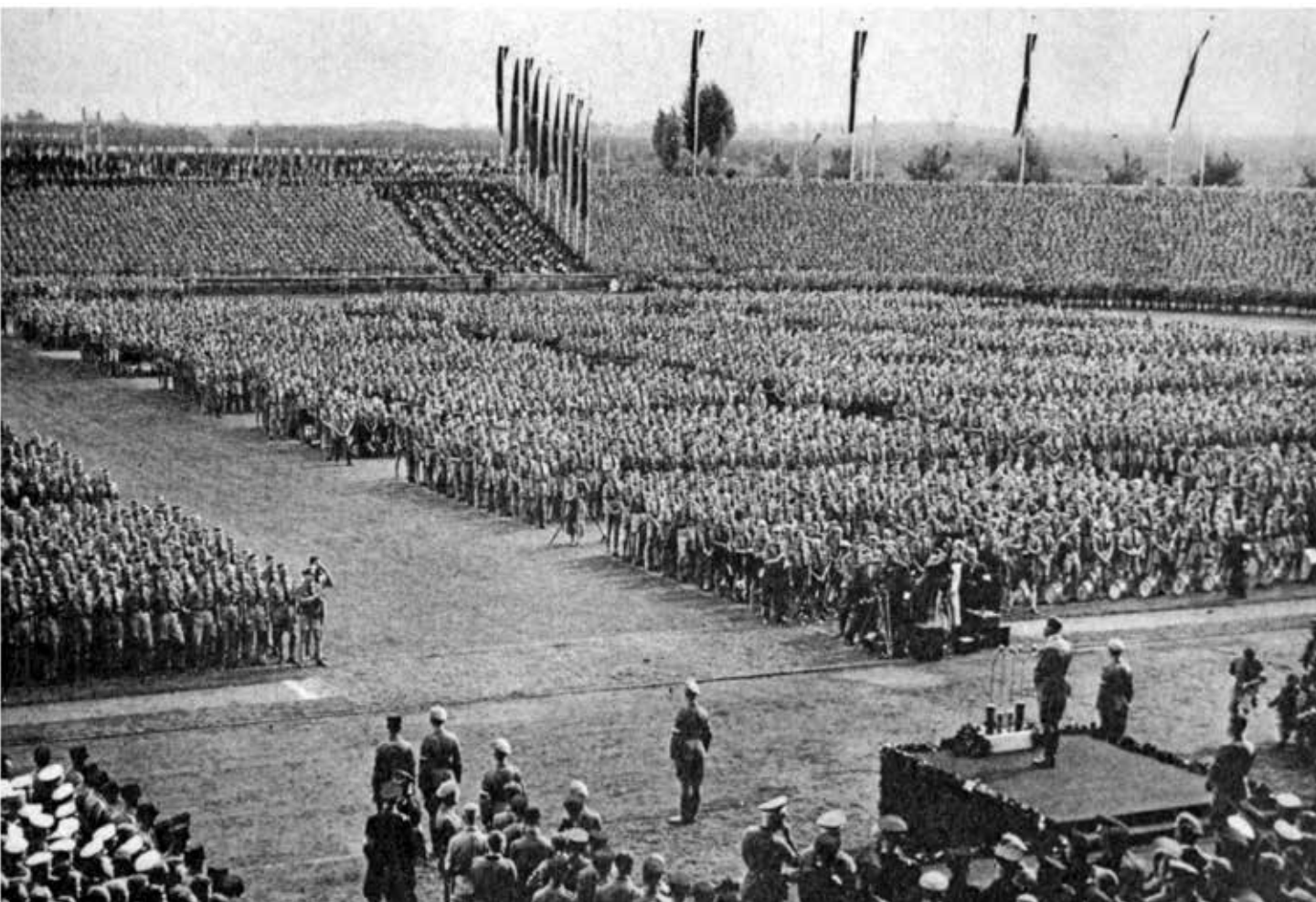
Under Hitler, the Germans began to hope again. He gave them back their pride in themselves as a people. But he took away the freedom they might have found in the democratic government they had set up after World War I. No one dared go against Hitler's wishes or even disagree with him.

Hitler was driven by the idea that the German "race" was stronger and more intelligent than all others. He believed that the Germans were meant to rule mankind. He wanted to conquer Europe, and finally, the whole world.

"Today, Europe," he said. "Tomorrow, the world!"

Like some German leaders before him, he worshipped war.

HITLER ADDRESSES MEMBERS OF THE HITLER YOUTH ORGANIZATION AT A MASS RALLY IN NUERMBERG



“For the good of the German people,” he said, “we must wish for a war every fifteen or twenty years. An army whose sole purpose is to preserve peace leads only to playing at soldiers.”

Once Hitler gained full power, he rounded up and imprisoned or murdered millions of Jews. He told the people that Germany’s downfall was largely the fault of the Jews, and his followers believed him.

Another thing he did was to burn all the books that spoke for the freedom and dignity of the human spirit. He knew that people would be easier to lead once they got it out of their heads that they were capable of thinking for and ruling themselves.

Hitler’s deeds of violence shook the world as it had not been shaken since the days of those other cruel dictators—Caligula of ancient Rome, Ivan the Terrible of Russia, and Philip II of Spain.

In 1936, Hitler and Mussolini joined forces in what was called the Rome-Berlin Axis. It was called “Axis” because all the European states were supposed to revolve around the two great powers of Germany and Italy, as a wheel revolves around its axle.

On September 27, 1940, Japan joined the Axis. Now it was called the Pact of Steel. The three dictator nations, Italy, Germany, and Japan, planned to conquer the world and divide it between them.

The German plan was to take over Europe piece by piece. The Italian plan was to cooperate with Hitler and get what was left over in Europe and as much of Africa as could be conquered. The Japanese plan was to create a huge empire in the Far East.



MUSSOLINI STANDS IN THE SADDLE TO ADDRESS A MEETING OF THE FASCIST YOUTH ORGANIZATION

Hitler, Mussolini, and Tojo felt strong and sure of themselves. It was impossible to reason with them. They wanted war. They started it. The Allies—Britain and France, and later Russia and the United States—tried to stop them.

The blame for *starting* World War II rests solely and squarely on the Axis powers.

# ***HITLER'S CONQUEST OF EUROPE***

Hitler began his conquest of Europe in 1938. On March 15 of that year, he sent his troops into Austria. Nobody lifted a hand to stop him when he occupied that country and proclaimed it part of Germany.

Next, Hitler decided to take over Czechoslovakia. This new democratic republic had been formed out of a part of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire after World War I. It included the region called the Sudetenland. There were a great many Germans living in this area. Hitler claimed falsely that they were mistreated. He threatened to seize the Sudetenland by force.

Both France and Russia had signed treaties to defend Czechoslovakia. If Hitler attacked her, they were bound to come to her help. If war came, Britain would surely be drawn into it. And Britain was not prepared for war.

In an effort to keep the peace, Britain's elderly Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, and the French Premier, Edouard Daladier, went to Germany to talk to Hitler. They met both Hitler and Mussolini at the city of Munich. There, on September 29, 1938, all four signed the document known as the Munich Pact.

By the Munich Pact, war was stopped at the last minute. But it was done at a cruel price, and on Hitler's own terms. The document gave Germany 11,000 miles of Czech territory. This territory contained more than 3,000,000 people. The broken little country was left at the mercy of Hitler.

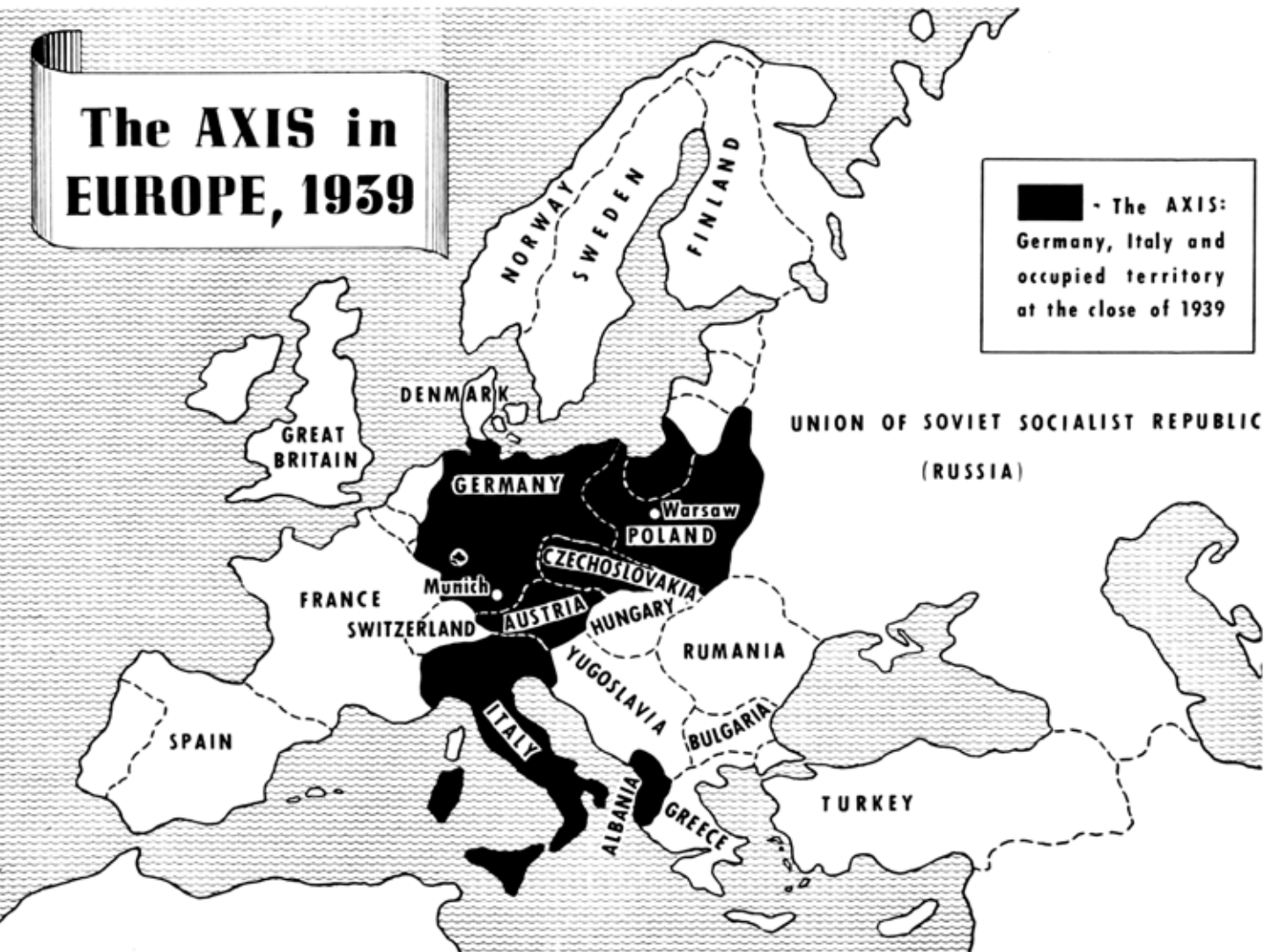
Chamberlain returned to London waving a piece of paper. He assured the English people that he had brought "peace in our time."



PRIME MINISTER NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN IS GREETED BY CROWDS AS HE RETURNS FROM HIS HISTORIC CONFERENCE WITH HITLER ON CZECHOSLOVAKIA. CHAMBERLAIN'S UMBRELLA, WHICH HE CARRIED RAIN OR SHINE, BECAME A SYMBOL OF 'APPEASEMENT,' OR TRYING TO GET ALONG WITH HITLER ON THE DICTATOR'S OWN TERMS.

No one asked the poor Czechs how they felt about it. And the betrayal of Czechoslovakia did not bring peace. Before the year was over, England and France had reason to suspect that Germany planned to invade Poland.

After World War I, France had signed a treaty with Poland promising to protect her if she were invaded. Now, as it became clear that Hitler had his eyes on Poland, England announced that she, too, would fight to protect her. This was the end of appeasement. On September 3, 1939, France and England declared war on Germany.





NAZI INFANTRY ON THE MARCH IN POLAND

## ***THE SINKING OF THE ATHENIA***

World War II was only nine hours old on that beautiful September day. The passengers on board the *Athenia*, a Cunard liner traveling from London to Montreal, were enjoying themselves. Suddenly someone cried,

“Look! There’s a torpedo!”

Almost at once there was a crashing explosion and the unarmed ship began to sink. Women and children were rushed into the lifeboats. But nearly a hundred people lost their lives.

The British had not yet done anything to protect their ships at sea. The sinking of the *Athenia* gave the world warning that once again the Germans would do everything in their power to break British control of the seas, just as they had tried to do in World War I.

## THE “PHONY WAR”


On land, nothing much happened for a while after war was declared. People began to call World War II the “phony war.” The Germans called it the *Sitzkrieg*, which means sit-down war.

The French dug in behind their great Maginot Line—a long series of underground forts running along the border between France and Germany. The Germans stayed behind their Siegfried Line, or West Wall, which they had hastily built above ground. Both sides could see each other. There was little shooting.

Some of the Allied soldiers sang a song—“I’ll Hang Out My Washing on the Siegfried Line!”

One of the reasons for this strange lack of fighting was the fact that the winter of 1939-1940 was one of the worst in living memory. Another reason was that Hitler secretly planned to turn on his partner, Russia, in the east. He thought he could get out of fighting the French and English by defeating the Russians. Once Russia was conquered, he would turn to the Allies and say,

“See, we Germans don’t like the Russian Communists any more than you do. Look how strong we are! Now let us make peace.”

AN AMERICAN SOLDIER PLAYS THE BAGPIPES IN THE  
“DRAGON’S TEETH” OF THE SIEGFRIED LINE. 



ADOLF HITLER, 1940: 'I AM CONVINCED THAT OUR STRUGGLE WILL IN THE FUTURE BE BLESSED BY PROVIDENCE AS IT HAS BEEN BLESSED UP TO NOW. I LOOK TO THE FUTURE WITH FANATICAL CONFIDENCE.'



## ***BLITZKRIEG IN THE WEST***

Before turning on Russia, Hitler wanted to be stronger in western Europe. Suddenly, in early April 1940, he attacked Denmark and Norway. He took them in a single day. His *Blitzkrieg* was like a knife cutting through butter.

A month later, Hitler struck again. He invaded Holland and Belgium. German tanks, followed by infantry, crashed across the borders of these two small countries. Parachutists took airfields, bridges, and railroads. The German Air Force, or *Luftwaffe*, bombed the center of Rotterdam, in Holland, leaving it in flames.

At this time, Winston Churchill became Prime Minister of England. The British people hoped he would find a quick way out of the war. "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat," he said.

## ***MIRACLE AT DUNKIRK***

By 1940, things looked dark for the Allies. Their combined efforts had failed to halt Hitler's advance into Belgium.

At the northeastern corner of France was stationed a British expeditionary force, together with French troops. They intended to keep the Germans from sweeping on to Paris. Then, on May 28, King Leopold of Belgium ordered his army to surrender to the Germans. This was a serious blow to the Allies. The Belgians had been guarding one flank, or side, of the Allied front. Now, the Germans sent a *Panzer*, or tank column, racing westward to the English Channel.

This left the British and French troops to the north separated from the main French armies. They were caught in a trap. They pulled back to Dunkirk on the coast of France, the only seaport that the enemy had not captured. They had to leave the Continent or be wiped out.

Between the retreating Allied armies and the Germans, there was a series of floodgates, used to protect Dunkirk from the waters of the North Sea. The British opened these floodgates so that the waters would flow in and hold up the Germans. Actually, it didn't help much. The Allied Army of half a million men, mostly British, with a few Dutch and the remains of the French army, were strafed or bombed continuously as they poured into the tiny city of Dunkirk. They were forced into an ever-narrowing space toward the beaches, with only the sea ahead.

For a few days, British and French aircraft controlled the air. They were helped by the weather, which was cloudy. The rear guard fought desperately on the outskirts of Dunkirk. But the men crowding onto the beaches knew that time was running out. Many of them were wounded, sick, or dying. It seemed they would all be butchered by the Germans.

Meanwhile, a strange rescue fleet set out from England. Never before did such a fleet go to war. There were motorboats, lifeboats, French fishing boats, navy whalers, tugboats, sailboats, Channel ferries, sloops, mine-sweepers—almost anything that would float.

These boats were manned by every kind of Englishman. There were bankers and dentists, taxicab drivers and clerks, fishermen and policemen. There were old men whose skins looked fiery red against their white hair. There were bright-faced young Sea Scouts, off on the great adventure of their lives. They were all wet, chilled to the bone, hungry. They were unarmed, but they sailed bravely toward Dunkirk into waters covered with the oil of sunken ships.

Some skippers steered by the flames from Dunkirk. Others just followed in line. Some lost their lives in the darkness when destroyers cut their little crafts in two. Others were battered and broken by German fighter planes. Still, the strange fleet sailed on while the British planes dropped bombs to put a wall of flame between the retreating forces and the Germans who were chasing them.

As the boats approached the beaches, men waded out by the thousands to board them. Others dropped from the ruined piers. Packed beyond the limits of safety, the boats sailed back to England, only to return for more men.



TROOPS BEING EVACUATED FROM THE BEACHES OF DUNKIRK

Out of the rescue boats onto the soil of England stepped an army of dirty, sleepy, hungry men. They were so tired they could hardly walk. One reporter said that they brought with them half the dog population of Belgium and France. “Some of the dogs were shell-shocked. They whimpered, but the men didn’t!”

Dunkirk was a turning point in World War II. What seemed to be a great defeat was turned into a great moral victory—a victory in which the defeated soldiers performed so splendidly that they lived to fight another day. Carried out under the eyes and fire of the enemy, the retreat saved a whole British army.

The retreat also inspired the greatest voice in England. After the miracle of Dunkirk, Churchill made this proud challenge:

“We shall fight on the seas and oceans. We shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air. We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches. We shall fight on the landing grounds. We shall fight in the fields and in the streets. We shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender!”



WINSTON CHURCHILL: (AFTER DUNKIRK) “THE LITTLE SHIPS, THE UNFORGOTTEN, UN-HOMERIC CATALOGUE OF MARY JANE AND PEGGY IV, OF FOLKSTONE BELLE, BOY BILLY, AND ETHEL MAUD, OF LADY HAIG AND SKYLARK... THE LITTLE SHIPS OF ENGLAND BROUGHT THE ARMY HOME.”

