

CONFLICT IN EUROPE 1935 – 45 Part Two

Final Script

INTRODUCTION

The Second World War began after Hitler and Mussolini defied the terms of the Versailles Treaty. Italy invaded Abyssinia, Germany marched into the Rhineland, and later annexed Austria and Czechoslovakia. After Hitler invaded Poland, war was declared against Germany. Quickly the Germans overran Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium and finally France. Hitler's plan to invade England was thwarted during the Battle of Britain. He then turned his attention to Russia, launching Operation Barbarossa. At the same time, the Italians and Germans faced British forces in North Africa. The United States entered the war following the attack on Pearl Harbour, and the German advance into Russia ground to a halt just outside Moscow. Events during 1942 would mark the turning point in the conflict.

Main Title CONFLICT IN EUROPE 1935 - 1945

THE BATTLE OF STALINGRAD Chapter Heading

Germany had severely underestimated its enemy, with the Red Army denying the Wehrmacht key victories. The siege of Leningrad would continue until January 1944, and a combination of the harsh Russian winter and a courageous defence, had saved Moscow from the Germans. Soviet industry met the demands of the war, and produced tanks equal in both quantity and quality to the panzers. Stalin used threats, execution and propaganda to maintain discipline in his ranks. The security forces shot any retreating Soviet soldiers, and those captured by the Germans were regarded as traitors to the Soviet Union. Stalin even disowned his own son Yakov when he was captured.

Hitler's displeasure at the failure of Operation Barbarossa to achieve victory in Russia, forced him to take full control of all military operations. General Von Paulus, commander of the German Sixth Army, was advancing towards the Caucasus oilfields when he was ordered by Hitler to capture Stalingrad. Strategically, it would have been unwise to leave such a major city unconquered as he advanced past it. However, some historians believe that Hitler ordered the taking of Stalingrad simply out of hatred for its namesake.

With equal venom, Stalin declared the city must be saved, with the order, “not a step backwards”.

The attack on Stalingrad commenced in September 1942 with massive bombing raids, which reduced 80 percent of the city to rubble. The battle then descended into one of World War Two’s most brutal encounters. Individual streets and houses were contested for in hand-to-hand combat, in what the Germans called “Rattenkrieg”, or “rat war”. After nearly three months, the Wehrmacht had taken most of the city, but failed to fully assert control. In early November, Soviet commander Marshal Zhukov was in a position to launch a counter-offensive. With six armies and one million men at his disposal, he gathered his forces to the north and south of the city. His counter attack began on November 19, sweeping around the city to trap 250,000 German troops inside Stalingrad. Von Paulus could have escaped this, but was forbidden to do so by Hitler. Every day, the Red Army advanced, tightening its stranglehold. The Luftwaffe dropped supplies to the besieged soldiers, but this became increasingly difficult. The Germans were faced with another winter of freezing temperatures with food, ammunition and heat in short supply.

Hitler sent this communication to von Paulus on January 24 1943: *“Surrender is forbidden. 6 Army will hold their positions to the last man and the last round, and by their heroic endurance will make an unforgettable contribution towards the establishment of a defensive front and the salvation of the western world.”* Nine days later, von Paulus surrendered and more than 90,000 German troops were captured. They were treated cruelly, and only 6,000 survived.

The Battle of Stalingrad has been regarded as one of the bloodiest and most brutal military engagements in history. Accurate figures are difficult to ascertain, but it is estimated that the combined German and Soviet losses added up to as many as 1.5 million dead and wounded. This campaign was seen as a great victory for the Soviet Union, and a morale booster for the Red Army. It was also one of the major turning points of the war.

ALLIED VICTORY IN NORTH AFRICA Chapter Heading

In the battleground of North Africa, Tobruk had fallen to the Afrika Korps on June 21st 1942. Rommel, known as “The Desert Fox” for his astute battle tactics, then advanced deep into Egypt.

The Afrika Korps was finally halted in the first battle for El Alamein, which lasted for most of the month of July 1942. By this time, German supply lines were stretched to their limit and the British forces were able to maintain a desperate defence. The battle reached a stalemate, and immediately a new British commander of the 8th Army was appointed, General Bernard Montgomery.

On August 30 1942, Rommel launched another attack on British defensive positions in North Africa. At Alam Halfa, General Montgomery gave orders forbidding retreat. Rommel gambled on making a breakthrough before expected British reinforcements arrived. However, with his own supply line stretching 1500 kilometres back to Libya, he was short on ammunition, fuel and food. The gamble failed and it became his turn to prepare for a counter-attack. Montgomery waited until British forces were at full strength and, on October 23 1942, "Operation Lightfoot" was launched, the initial phase of the second Battle of El Alamein. Outnumbering the Afrika Korps two to one in manpower, tanks and artillery, Montgomery wore down the enemy in what he promised would be a 'dogfight.' After a few weeks, Rommel was forced to withdraw in a major defeat that cost him 60,000 men and 500 tanks.

Montgomery was not the type of general to chase an enemy, and has been criticised for not taking immediate advantage of the situation. Over the following months however, the Afrika Korps was pushed all the way back to Libya. Operation Torch followed in November 1942. Under the leadership of General Dwight Eisenhower, American forces landed on the west coast of Africa, making Rommel's position even more precarious. Caught between the Americans in the west and the advancing British in the east, Rommel was recalled to Germany when it became clear that defeat was inevitable. The Afrika Korps surrendered in Tunis on May 12 1943.

Military historians have conflicting views on the North African campaign. Historian Correlli Barnett believes Britain overcommitted itself and, in doing so, weakened its forces in South-East Asia. It can also be argued that the campaign was merely a sideshow, compared to the battle for Stalingrad. From a positive point of view, Britain did not lose Egypt or control of the Suez Canal. This spoiled any prospect of the Afrika Korps linking up with a German drive through the Caucasus, a potentially devastating threat to the Allied cause. The Allies could now prepare plans for the invasion of Sicily and Italy.

ITALY and the BATTLE OF KURSK Chapter Heading

In July 1943, two months after the surrender of the Afrika Korps, the Allies invaded Sicily from their base in Tunisia. General Montgomery commanded both British and Canadian troops, with General Patton leading the Seventh United States Army. Despite being outnumbered three to one by a combined German-Italian force, the Allies quickly captured the island. A month later, Allied troops landed on the Italian peninsula at Salerno, Calabria and Taranto.

The campaign proved to be long and drawn-out, lasting until April 1945, with most of the Italian army surrendering two years earlier. Maintaining resistance against the Allies was left to the Wehrmacht and Italian troops still loyal to the Axis cause. The Allied bombing of Rome in July 1943 signalled the beginning of the end for Benito Mussolini, the first of the Fascist dictators in Europe. He was deposed as Party leader and sacked as Prime minister by King Victor Emmanuel. Immediately, Mussolini was arrested and driven away to jail in an ambulance, to avoid the public. While incarcerated at Gran Sasso Prison, he was rescued by a SS unit and flown first to Austria and then Germany. In April 1945, he made the mistake of returning to Lake Como in Northern Italy, where communist partisans captured him attempting to board a plane to Spain. Mussolini, his mistress and their entourage were summarily executed. Their bodies were loaded onto a truck and taken to Milan, to be hung upside down from the roof of a gas station.

At the same time as the Sicilian invasion, the largest tank battle in history was taking place on the Russian front. The Battle of Kursk began on July 5 1943, lasting eight days. This was to be the final great offensive launched by Hitler on the Eastern Front. One third of Germany's military might was involved. The Red army was well prepared, after receiving reliable intelligence reports of German troop movements. The Soviets developed a strong offensive strategy and outnumbered the Germans two to one. The Red Army's T-34 tanks, with their skilled and courageous crews, achieved an important victory, proving they could defeat the Germans in a summer offensive. The surrender at Stalingrad, combined with the Soviet victory at Kursk, was critical to the final outcome of the conflict in Europe. Many historians believe this was the most significant phase of the war. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill declared, "A victory at Kursk would shine like a beacon to the world!"

WAR RATIONING Chapter Heading

RATIONING – GERMANY Sub Heading

The Nazis needed to ensure there was no repeat of the years of starvation Germans suffered during World War 1. Ration cards, colour coded for each food item such as red for bread, had been printed and stored prior to the war. Clothing and shoes were rationed on a system that allocated each person 250 points per year. A winter coat, for example, could account for 120.

The Germans expected a short war, so fresh produce was not rationed, and officials decided against converting parks into vegetable plots. As the war dragged on, however, flowerbeds became vegetable gardens and meat was rationed. A black market developed ensuring the wealthy ate well. Allied advances disrupted food supplies from German-occupied territories. German farmers refused to surrender their crops to the authorities, and instead sold to townspeople who could afford higher prices. Despite the difficulties, the situation wasn't critical, and Germans did not starve as their parents had done in 1918.

RATIONING – BRITAIN Sub Heading

Attacks by German U Boats at the outset of war greatly reduced the number of supply ships reaching Britain. With 60 percent of food imported, strict measures were taken to ensure everyone received an adequate diet. Ration books were issued, with coupons exchanged for a weekly food allowance. Queuing was an everyday occurrence for housewives, especially when non-rationed items such as fish and sausages appeared in shops. For those who could afford it, there was a flourishing "black market" for restricted items. Staple foods such as potatoes and carrots were cultivated with the "Dig For Victory" campaign. Public parks, school playing fields and any unused spaces became market gardens, lessening the dependence on imports. Clothing was also rationed and when supplies dwindled, the Ministry of Information instituted a "make and mend" campaign. Blankets were turned into coats and curtains into skirts.

WOMEN IN THE WAR EFFORT Chapter Heading

GERMANY Sub Heading

With so much of Germany's manpower serving in the armed forces, there was a pressing need for women to contribute to the war effort. However, Nazi philosophy, and Hitler's views in particular, saw middle-class women as homemakers and mothers, not industrial workers. So, the burden fell on working-class women. They resented the peacetime lifestyle the middle to upper classes appeared to enjoy. Various attempts were made to encourage voluntary war work, but upper-class women labelled this as 'Bolshevist'. Despite this, by 1942, 52 percent of the work force was female. Many were employed in factories producing munitions and weapons, or were left to manage farms. They were aided by young women aged 17 to 25 from the Reich Labour Service, who were required to spend several months working in the country. During the war, six million women worked in German agriculture, while another one million were factory workers.

Before the war, the Wehrmacht employed women as secretaries, cooks and cleaners. They undertook new roles such as air raid wardens once the conflict began. Later on, females were deployed as auxiliaries to maintain anti-aircraft batteries and operate searchlights. By war's end, 80,000 women were involved this way.

BRITAIN Sub Heading

By the end of 1942, 10 million British women had registered for war work. They built aircraft, ships and vehicles, worked on the railways, and in the metal and chemical industries. Nurseries and flexible working hours allowed women with small children to contribute. Their pay was roughly half that of men. The Women's Land Army (WLA) was formed in 1939 to replace farm workers who had joined up. Initially, this idea was met with resistance from farmers, but this disappeared when it became clear productivity did not decrease. Young women were encouraged to join, with posters promoting "for a healthy, happy job". But in some cases, conditions were primitive, with no electricity or heating in the bedrooms, and no running water in the house. Sanitation could mean a basic hole in the ground, and meals often fell short of ration requirements.

The Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) played a vital role in running field kitchens, supervising evacuations and providing support services to air raid shelters. In 1941, when it became apparent a voluntary system could not provide enough female labour, the government introduced conscription for single women and childless widows aged 20 to 30.

By 1943, approximately 85 percent of women were employed in essential work for the war effort. The Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) employed 200,000 in eighty trades. The ATS was also used to meet the shortage in Anti-Aircraft Command, with mixed-sex crews operating from August 1941. There were 100,000 members of the Women's Royal Navy Service, known as "Wrens", mainly working ashore as clerks, drivers, meteorologists and radar operators. The Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) plotted aircraft movements and radar signals. They debriefed aircrews after raids, acted as drivers and flew planes from factory to airfield.

D-DAY The Allied Invasion of Western Europe Chapter Heading

In the spring of 1944, the Red Army began its westward advance. Stalin continued to pressure his allies into creating a second front, thereby diverting the full might of the German Army away from Russia. Allied landings in Italy did draw on some of Germany's resources, but the question remained - when to commence a full-scale invasion in the west? Planning for D-Day began in 1943, codenamed 'Operation Overlord'. General Dwight D. Eisenhower was appointed supreme commander of the Allied invasion. Recalled from Italy, Montgomery commanded all land forces. Calais in France was the closest point from Dover in South-east England, and the Germans believed this was where the invasion would be staged. Rommel, who had been promoted to Field Marshal, commanded the Atlantic defences. The Germans had built a heavily fortified line of defence, the 'Atlantic Wall', along the French coastline. Normandy remained less heavily fortified, so the allies chose it as the invasion site.

Deceptions were carried out to encourage Hitler to think the invasion would happen elsewhere. Agents and double agents planted false intelligence, while a 'ghost army' in Scotland gave the impression that Norway could be a target. As D-Day approached, the Allies had difficulty concealing the massive build up of men and equipment. To create the impression Calais was the objective, the surrounding area was heavily bombed. As well, dummy landing craft were assembled in the Thames, and fake planes and inflatable rubber tanks were assembled on airfields in England's southeast. Although the Germans were never completely deceived, they could not be certain if Normandy was the real invasion point, or merely a diversion for the main assault at Calais. D-Day was fixed for June 5th, but bad weather forced a postponement.

Meteorologists reported a 24-hour interlude between two weather depressions, providing a fair weather window of opportunity for the landings. Eisenhower seized on this and ordered 'Operation Overlord' to commence the next day. A coded message to carry out vital acts of sabotage was sent to the French resistance. At 12.16 am on June 6th, 32,000 troops were dropped in an airborne assault behind enemy lines.

The landing beaches were code-named, Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword. Beginning at 6.30am on Utah, landing craft ferried troops ashore. Warships provided supporting fire, bombing shore batteries and enemy positions inland. There was heavy loss of life at Omaha beach, where steep cliffs and stiff resistance from German defenders resulted in 2000 American casualties. Though the British failed to reach the town of Caen on the first day as planned, by nightfall 156,000 British, Canadian and American troops had landed, with casualties numbering 10,000. German resistance was fierce, but they faced many disadvantages. Field Marshall Rommel, in charge of the entire area, was in Berlin for his wife's birthday, and did not return until late in the day. The Allies commanded the skies, so no German bombers attacked the landing sites. The feared panzers were in limited numbers in Normandy, with most divisions in the Calais area.

The next objective was to break out of Normandy and link up with other Allied forces. The major obstacle was a patchwork of small fields and hedgerows, with sunken roads between. This was perfect country to defend, favouring the Germans. In a major pincer movement, the Allies attempted to push the Germans back to Paris and beyond. Caen had been reduced to rubble by the bombing and from here, a combined British and Canadian force pushed south. Americans moved southeast from the Cherbourg peninsula into the so-called 'Falaise pocket'. The largest tank battle on the Western Front took place here. Although 40,000 Germans managed to escape, their presence in Normandy was virtually eliminated. By late August, 2 million Allied troops were in France. General Charles de Gaulle organised the final assault on Paris with American support. Its citizens supported this by rising up in revolt against their occupiers. Paris was liberated on August 25th 1944.

The human cost in the campaign was high, with over 425,000 Allied and German casualties, roughly equally distributed. French civilians also suffered with 20,000 casualties, mostly as a result of Allied bombing.

RUSSIAN COUNTER OFFENSIVES 1944 Chapter Heading

Relentlessly, Soviet forces moved westward. The retreating Germans destroyed all property and livestock and many Russians were either killed or deported for slave labour. On June 24th 1944, Stalin launched Operation Bagration to finally drive the Germans out of his country. Minsk was recaptured on July 3rd and by August, Russian forces reached the River Vistula, a short distance from the Polish capital of Warsaw. Its citizens rose up in revolt once they were assured of Soviet assistance. But this promise was not kept, and by early October, over 250,000 Poles had been killed, they're uprising crushed by their German captors. But, why didn't the Soviets intervene? Critics allege that Stalin gave false assurances hoping that leaders of the democratic Poles labelled the 'London group' would be annihilated. This would pave the way for his preferred 'Lublin group' of communist Poles to dominate post-war Poland. Stalin also refused to let British and American aircraft use Soviet controlled-airfields to bring assistance to the uprising.

What distinguished the Russian Front from the war in the west was the scale of the brutality seen there. Hitler saw the invasion of Russia as 'Rassenkampf' or race war. The Nazis believed Russians to be an inferior race. Of the 5 and a half million Soviet soldiers captured, three million of them died of starvation, disease and ill treatment. Tens of thousands of Russian Jews and gypsies became the first victims of the 'Final Solution'. Death squads, such as the infamous SS 'Einsatzgruppen', murdered thousands of civilians in acts of 'ethnic cleansing'.

It was during the Soviet advance into Poland that troops came across the abandoned Majdanek concentration camp. Its prisoners had been hastily herded off on a death march away from the approaching Russians. Only the dead were left behind. This discovery confirmed rumours about the existence of such camps.

NAZI RACIAL POLICIES - THE HOLOCAUST Chapter Heading

Hitler wrote of his hatred of the Jews in *Mein Kampf* "...the personification of the devil as the symbol of evil assumes the living shape of the Jew." On April 1st 1933, a national boycott of Jewish businesses began. The Nazis then implemented radical policies to turn Jews into 'non-persons' and forced many to flee their homes and their country.

The passing of the Nuremberg Laws in September 1935 deprived Jews of citizenship. People defined as Jews could be barred from employment as lawyers, doctors or journalists. Jews were prohibited from using state hospitals and could not receive state education past the age of 14. Public parks, libraries and beaches were closed to them. War memorials had Jewish names expunged. The Nuremberg laws were also enacted for the preservation of pure German blood, and to prevent marriages between Jews and Aryans.

The assassination of German diplomat Ernst von Rath by Herschel Grynszpan, a German-born Polish Jew, served as a pretext for anti-Semitic attacks. In Germany and Austria on November 9th and 10th 1938, a co-ordinated attack was directed at Jewish people and property. During 'Kristallnacht' or 'Night of broken glass', 99 Jews were murdered, and about 30,000 were sent to concentration camps. 267 synagogues were destroyed and thousands of homes and businesses ruined.

While Hitler's campaign against the Jewish population is his most well documented racial policy, other minority groups including homosexuals and gypsies, were persecuted to create a pure Aryan state. A Nazi study labelling Gypsies as 'non-Aryan', prompted Heinrich Himmler to issue a decree 'combating the gypsy plague'. German gypsies were transported to Auschwitz in Poland. There, in a special camp, some were used for medical experiments while others were gassed. It is estimated that more than 220,000 European gypsies were victims of such camps.

In Germany, disabled people were subject to the 1933 sterilisation law. The Nazi definition of a handicap was very loose and included prostitutes, alcoholics and people with Parkinson's disease. At the beginning of the war, a euthanasia programme code-named T4 was designed to give a 'mercy death' to anyone considered unproductive, to relieve the burden from the family and state. Relatives received a form letter that spoke of an 'unexpected death', and which contained a warning not to make further enquiries. Between October 1939 and August 1941, 72,000 people from mental hospitals, asylums and children's homes were gassed in rooms disguised as showers. It was only due to mounting public hostility that the T4 programme was terminated.

Steps were taken at the beginning of the war to implement what was to become the "Final Solution" to the Jewish problem.

With Germany occupying Poland, all Jews there were required to wear a star for identification. This regulation was later extended to include German Jews and those in other occupied countries. Eventually, the Nazi's would have most of the Jewish population of Europe under their control. In 1940, Jews were herded into fenced-off ghettos under inhuman conditions. The Warsaw ghetto was the largest, with nearly 400,000 interned there. This was 30% of Warsaw's population housed in 2 % of the city. In 1943, inmates rose up in a revolt that lasted a month but was violently suppressed, with 56,000 of their number killed.

As the Wehrmacht pushed into Russia, about 3000 members of the 'Einsatzgruppen' followed. Their orders were to kill all Jews left behind in captured territory: men, women and children. At the Wannsee Conference held near Berlin in January 1942, Herman Goering issued orders to Reinhardt Heydreich for the "Final Solution" to the Jewish problem. Jews were removed from homelands and ghettos, and taken away to the east in overcrowded freight wagons. After a selection process, those unfit, too old or too young to work, were sent directly to extermination camps. Those remaining were sent to concentration camps to be worked to death.

In occupied Poland, six extermination camps were established at Chelmno, Auschwitz, Majdanek, Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka. Prisoners were stripped naked and their possessions confiscated. They were told to shower to remove lice, but were in fact gassed to death in specially constructed shower blocks. Afterwards, their bodies were cremated or buried in large pits. It is estimated that 6 million Jews lost their lives in Nazi camps.

THE FINAL DEFEAT OF GERMANY Chapter Heading

Achieving a final victory in Western Europe was not easy for the Anglo- American Allies. Historian Max Hastings argues that Montgomery's fumbled and drawn-out capture of the Dutch port of Antwerp was a principle cause in the Allies' failure to advance into Germany in 1944. For his part, General Eisenhower has been criticised for being too cautious. A better field commander might have advanced to the Rhine earlier, while the Wehrmacht was still on the defensive. In addition, Allied commanders admitted: "Hitler's armies performed far more professionally and fought with much greater determination than Eisenhower's men." ***

In the Ardennes Forest in December 1944, Germany launched a desperate counter offensive, halting the Allied advance. In the first five days of the 'Battle of the Bulge', the Germans destroyed 300 tanks and captured 25,000 men. American reinforcements were rushed in, making a stand at Bastogne, which was under siege for eight days. Although the Germans had the benefit of surprise, their offensive was doomed to failure. Their panzers had inadequate fuel, and manoeuvring them was difficult on the narrow, snow-covered roads. When the weather cleared, they were exposed to allied air attacks. Retaking the 'Bulge' took the Allies until February 1945. The battle was important for the Soviets, as significant German panzer formations had been removed from the Eastern Front.

The Red Army began its final offensive on January 12th 1945, with instructions to extract vengeance for the devastation inflicted by Operation Barbarossa. The German army was completely outnumbered and a savage war was waged, with both sides routinely killing prisoners. Eight and a half million German refugees formed the largest exodus in history, fleeing from the advancing Russian army. Those left behind were victims of mass rapes and killings. German ships evacuated more than 2 million people from East Prussia. The 'Willem Gustloff' left port with 9000 refugees and crew, but was sunk by a Soviet submarine. Only 949 of those on board survived.

In the west, the Anglo-American advance was cautious, even though they held total control of the skies. After dramatically capturing the bridge at Remagen, the Allies staged their breakout past the Rhine in March 1945. In town after town they met resistance and, although German soldiers were surrendering, there were always enough men and guns to form some kind of defence. Conscripted men of the "Volkssturm", or People's Army, supported the Wehrmacht. The Volkssturm included men and boys from the age of 16 to 60 who were ordered by Hitler to fight to the death. In the east, the battle outside of Berlin was a brutal confrontation, costing the lives of 12,000 German and 30,000 Russian soldiers. Soviet troops entered Berlin from the east on April 21st. They met stiff resistance as they advanced through the shattered city street by street. Eisenhower sent a personal message to Stalin stating that his armies had no intention of moving into Berlin. Instead, on the afternoon of April 25th, a reconnaissance group of Americans met their Soviet allies at Torgau on the River Elbe, 80 kilometres west of the city. The Soviet Union now controlled all of Eastern Europe from Finland to Greece.

A defiant Adolf Hitler, not wanting to suffer the same humiliation as Mussolini, committed suicide in his Berlin bunker on April 30th.

Allied victory in the Italian campaign on May 2nd signalled the beginning of the end of the Conflict in Europe. Five days later, Germany accepted unconditional surrender at a ceremony in Rheims, France, followed by another in Berlin the next day - May 8th, VE day.

AFTERMATH - THE NUREMBERG TRIALS Chapter Heading

It had already been decided before the war ended, that Nazi leaders were to be tried for their crimes. Hitler, Goebbels and Himmler had committed suicide, leaving the remaining 21 to face trial at Nuremberg. The defendants were charged with conspiracy to wage aggressive war, crimes against peace, crimes against humanity and war crimes. There was widespread unease about the absence of precedent in international law for formally imposing the victor's justice on the vanquished. The decision to indict the Germans for crimes against humanity was regarded by some observers as a mockery, so long as Soviet judges sat on the bench, given Stalin's record against his own people. Twelve defendants were sentenced to death, including Herman Goering, who later committed suicide in his cell. The others received life imprisonment, or shorter sentences. Three were acquitted.

Hitler had promised that the Third Reich would last a thousand years. In fact, it came to an end after only twelve. The cost of this conflict was appalling. 15 million military and 35 million civilians perished, 20 million of which were Russians. As well, six million Jews were exterminated. Europe was in ruins and the ideological differences between the victorious powers had already begun to darken the post war years.