On September 1, 1939 Germany invaded Poland and World War II began. At the same time the Soviet Union attacked Poland from the east. It was divided up among the countries before the Allies were able to help.

Germany’s attack was carried out with fast tanks and troops that were supported by warplanes. Because the German army moved very quickly this phase of the war was called “Blitzkrieg”.

In the following spring Germany invaded Norway and Denmark. Both countries were occupied by the German army by June. On May 10, 1940 Hitler’s troops invaded the Low Countries—Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg and days later they surrendered.

In the middle of May German soldiers crossed into France and by June 14 the Germans had entered Paris. On June 22 France signed a peace agreement with Germany. German forces then occupied northern France and the Atlantic coast. A new government that was friendly to the Germans was formed in Vichy. On the other side General Charles de Gaulle escaped to Great Britain and started his free French movement. In a radio broadcasts he urged the French people to fight against the Germans.

**THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN**

Hitler next wanted to invade the island of Great Britain. He attacked the British Air Force in order to control the skies over the island. It was history’s first major air battle.

In June 1940, the German Luftwaffe began bombing airfields and other targets in southern England. German warplanes attacked from airports in France. At the end of the battle the British had shot down about 1700 German planes. Hitler saw that he could not defeat England’s air force so he gave up his idea of invading Britain. Instead he sent the Luftwaffe to bomb British cities and towns. In London alone, more than 12,000 civilians were killed.

**WORDS**

- **airfield** = a smaller airport where military planes take off and land
- **Allies** = the countries that fought against Germany in the Second World War
- **attack** = to start using bombs and guns against an enemy in a war
- **battle** = a fight between armies in a war
- **broadcast** = here: to send a message over the radio
- **civilian** = a person who is not a soldier in a war
- **defeat** = to win against
- **divide up** = to give a part of something to two or more countries
- **escape** = to get away
- **forces** = soldiers
- **government** = the group of people who rule a country
- **instead** = in something’s place
- **invade** = to take control of a country by sending an army into it
- **major** = big, important
- **movement** = group of people who believe the same things and have the same ideas
- **occupy** = to enter a country with soldiers and stay there and control it for a longer time
- **peace** = opposite of “war”
- **peace agreement** = when two people, groups or countries promise not to attack each other
- **sign** = to write your name on a document
- **soldiers** = people who fight for a country in a war
- **support** = help
- **surrender** = give up
- **tank** = a heavy military car that moves on a metal belt. It has a large gun on its top
- **target** = object you want to attack
- **troops** = soldiers
- **urge** = persuade, to ask someone to do something