



WW2 IN EUROPE

GREAT  
BATTLES  
FOR BOYS

JOE GIORELLO  
WITH  
SIBELLA GIORELLO

---

# WW2 in Europe

---

Great Battles for Boys  
EXCERPT

Joe Giorello

with  
Sibella Giorello

# COPYRIGHT

Great Battles for Boys: WWII Europe

Copyright © 2014 by Rolling Wheel Publishing and Joe Giorello

**Excerpt Edition**

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner without written permission from the author and publisher except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

*Dedicated to my sons Daniel and Nico.  
And every soldier missing in action.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Note from the Author](#)

[Prelude to War](#)

[The Invasion of Poland](#)

[More Books in the Great Battles for Boys Series](#)

## NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

The battle for freedom requires great sacrifices, because freedom isn't free.

As you'll see from the battles in this book, sometimes people pay for freedom with their lives.

This book focuses on some of World War II's most important battles. I hope you'll also discover what warriors can teach us about courage and determination, especially when the odds are stacked against us.

Follow the links at the end of each chapter and discover even more good books about World War II, some Internet sites, and movies you can watch with your whole family—although you should remember most movies are not the literal truth. After reading this book, you'll probably see the difference between fact and fiction.

I enjoy hearing from my readers. If you have questions or want to suggest another battle for a future book, contact me on my website, [www.greatbattlesforboys.com](http://www.greatbattlesforboys.com), or at the Great Battles page on Facebook at [facebook.com/greatbattles](https://facebook.com/greatbattles). And be sure to check out the other books in the Great Battles for Boys series.

Now let's begin our journey to the battlefields of World War II in Europe.

—Joe Giorello

## PRELUDE TO WAR



Adolf Hitler, 1937.

“WARS AND RUMORS of wars.” That phrase dates all the way back to biblical times. Maybe you’ve heard the phrase yourself. But why has it lasted so long? Because wars don’t just fall from the sky. Conflicts erupt from a sequence of events. Long before war begins, people are talking about troubling happenings—“rumors of war.”

The sequence of events leading up to World War II actually began with World War I. That war was called “The Great War,” not because it was good, but because so many people lost their lives. The total number of military and civilian casualties was about forty million men, women, and children. More than 300,000 of them were Americans soldiers.

You can read more about that war in *Great Battles for Boys: World War I*.

What you need to know is that World War I ended in 1918, but many of the problems created by that war didn't get solved. The war had almost wrecked Europe, not just killing tens of millions but destroying whole economies. The countries that won World War I—especially France—wanted to punish the country that lost the war and created so many of the problems—Germany.

A peace agreement was signed ending World War I. It was called the Treaty of Versailles. France added some harsh rules to it. For instance, the treaty ordered Germany to pay a huge amount of money to the winning countries. That's not unusual. Winners sometimes demand a losing country pay back the debts created by a war—a process called "reparations." But Germany was completely broke after World War I. The German people were literally starving and couldn't find jobs.

England and America asked France to lighten up. For one thing, how was Germany going to pay money to other countries when it couldn't take care of itself? England and the United States were also worried that the treaty's terms might actually make things worse because the German people would resent the treaty and the winning countries, which could lead to the kind of bitterness that starts wars.

France wouldn't listen.

The Treaty of Versailles was ratified, or made official. Germany was forced to obey all the treaty's demands.

Tragically, just as England and America predicted, the situation grew worse. The struggling German people felt even angrier at France and the other countries that won World War I.

As that fury and resentment spread across Germany, one powerful madman arose and used their anger to take charge of the country. This man would change not just Germany but the world—and change it for the worse.



His name was Adolf Hitler.



Massive German crowds gather to cheer Hitler, standing in the window, after being inaugurated as Germany's chancellor on January 30, 1933.

During World War I, Hitler served in the German Army and was awarded several medals for bravery. After the Great War, he rose through the German government, gathering political steam with former soldiers like himself who really hated the Treaty of Versailles. But not everyone liked Hitler. Some German politicians threw him in jail. But while he was in prison, Hitler grew even more popular by writing his autobiography, *Mein Kampf* (pronounced "mine komph"), which means "my struggle."

In this book, Hitler told the German people they were superior, that they belonged to something called the Aryan race. Hitler said these Aryans—people with blue eyes, light skin, and blond hair—were greater than any other people on earth. And because they were better, Germany had a "historic destiny" to rule the world. The problem, Hitler said, was that some other people, especially

Jews, were holding Germany back from true greatness. If Germany got rid of all the non-Aryan people, Germany could become powerful again. No more hunger. No more looking for jobs. No more trouble.

Hitler's message filled a lot of German people with hope. They believed his ideas would change their lives for the better.



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-2007-0329-501  
Foto: o. Ang. (Januar 1934)

Children were taught at a young age to worship Hitler. Here, schoolchildren give the Nazi salute, 1934.

When Hitler got out of jail, he was even more popular. He was also learning to speak with passion and persuasion by watching the political speeches of Benito Mussolini, the dictator of Italy. As head of Italy's Fascist party, Mussolini drew huge crowds wherever he went. Hitler and Mussolini agreed about many things—such as the government should be extremely powerful and rule over people's lives. Soon these two men formed a political alliance, or partnership.

Meanwhile, Hitler and his party of Nazis—or National Socialists—were winning more political offices. Hitler was creating military-type organizations within the government by backing people who agreed with his idea that Germany should rule the world and that the country needed to “cleanse” itself of all non-Aryan races—especially Jewish people. Eventually, Hitler won control of the entire German government, giving the Nazis full power over the country.

Hitler continued to give speeches about this new Germany, an empire that would “last for a thousand years.” He called that empire the Third Reich.

To build that empire, Hitler wanted to take back the land that the Treaty of Versailles forced Germany to give up—land given to other countries, such as Poland. And Poland turned out to be one of Hitler’s first military targets.

His sneaky attack on that country would kill thousands—and launch what would become World War II.

# THE INVASION OF POLAND

September 1, 1939



German soldiers march into Poland, 1939.

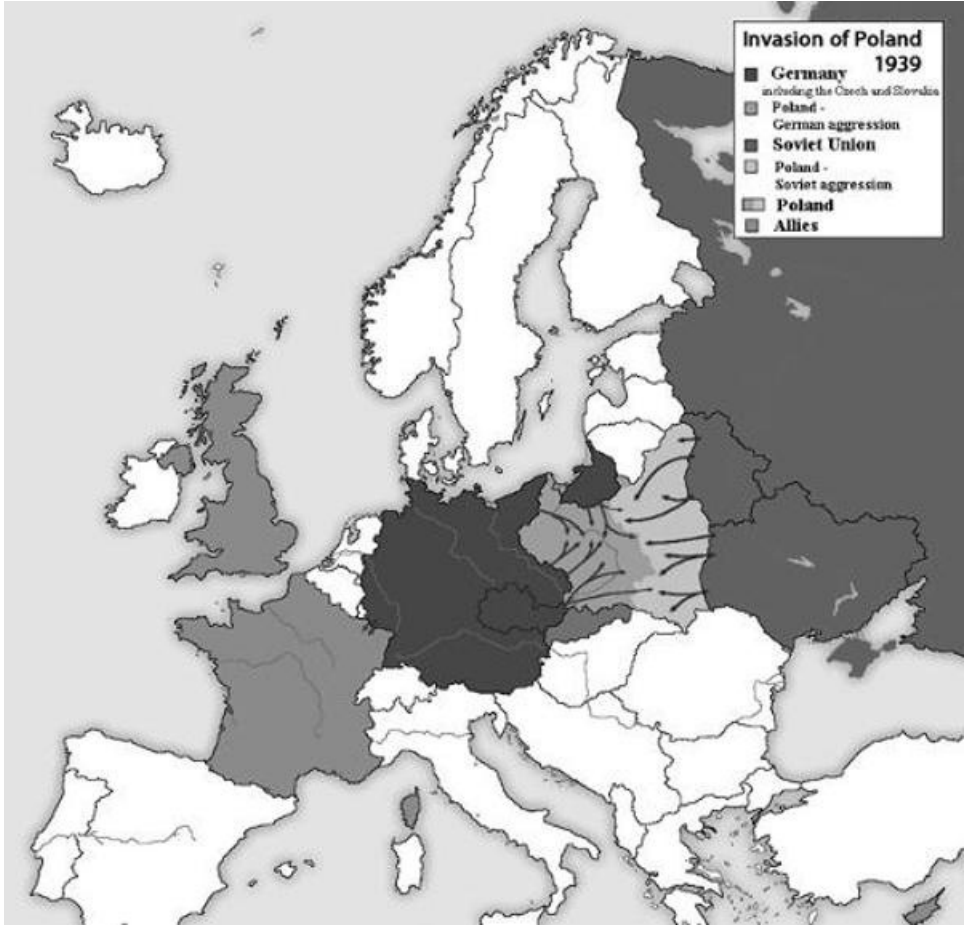
HAVE YOU EVER watched a little kid play with their favorite toy? If you suddenly take away the toy, the kid will naturally get upset. But what if you give the toy to another kid—somebody the kid doesn't even like? The kid will be even more upset!

You've created a major problem.

The German people typically didn't like the Polish people. So when the Treaty of Versailles forced Germany to give land to Poland, it was like a kid seeing a cherished toy handed over to their

enemy. With every passing year, Germans grew more upset about that land switch.

Look at the map. It shows Germany in 1939, marked in black. To the immediate right is the land given to Poland, marked in dark gray, with Poland itself to the right of that in lighter gray.



With the German people upset about their lousy economy and this land switch, Hitler cleverly played on their emotions. He kept saying that the land belonged to Germany, not Poland.

At the same time, Hitler was fooling the rest of the world. Right after saying these things to his own people, he turned around and

signed a “nonaggression” pact with Poland. This pact meant Hitler was promising not to attack Poland.

This confused the German people. How could Germany regain that land if Hitler wasn’t going to invade Poland?

Here’s how—Hitler was patient and cunning. After signing that pact, Hitler and some other German politicians got together and made up some lies about Poland. They accused the Poles of all kinds of terrible things, and German newspapers reported these accusations as if they were facts. This is called propaganda—when the truth gets twisted to support a political agenda.

Hitler also started accusing the Polish government of killing innocent Germans who lived on the land that was taken away by the Versailles Treaty. Naturally, the German people were outraged by this “news.”

But Hitler’s propaganda didn’t end there. In late August 1939, some German spies seized a Polish radio station. The spies dressed up like native Poles and started broadcasting an ugly report about Germans—all spoken in Polish, of course. To make their lies seem even more believable, the spies dragged some dead bodies to the radio station to “prove” the Poles had killed some Germans. The same night, these spies created even more “crimes” against Germans who were living in Poland, including setting a house on fire.

Of course, the German people demanded justice. All these lies were part of Hitler’s plan to invade Poland, a plan that was named “Operation Himmler.” Yes, Hitler had signed the nonaggression pact with Poland, but he was devising ways to break the agreement. Hitler didn’t care if everything was based on lies.

“The victor will not be asked whether he told the truth,” Hitler said.

Right after those radio station “murders,” Germany’s air force—called the Luftwaffe—started bombing Polish cities, bridges, roads, airfields, and communication centers.

Thousands of innocent people were killed.

After the Luftwaffe struck, hordes of German tanks roared into the country, smashing through villages, towns, and markets.

Then the German infantry marched in, shooting to kill.

The date was September 1, 1939. It would mark the beginning of World War II.

Two days later, on September 3, Great Britain, France, Australia, and New Zealand declared war on Germany.

But for the Polish people, help was too late.



Invading German vehicles shove aside a horse-drawn Polish cart.

Poland never really trusted Hitler, even after he had signed the nonaggression pact. Most Polish leaders suspected Hitler would try something sneaky.

However, nobody expected a sudden ruthless attack on civilians.

Germany was demonstrating its new style of warfare called Blitzkrieg or “lightning war.” This tactic worked like a sucker punch—coming out of nowhere so fast that the victim didn’t have time to recover and respond.

The Luftwaffe smothered the Polish sky with bombers and fighter planes, while massive concentrations of armored and motorized infantry stormed across the land, shattering any enemy defenses. Blitzkrieg not only surprised the enemy, but it also created so much chaos that opposing military leaders struggled to organize their defenses.

In the case of this invasion, the situation was even worse for the Polish military because its soldiers were still using outdated weapons and tactics from World War I. Cavalry soldiers spurred horses and swung swords while armored German tanks blasted machine gun fire. Poland’s wooden and canvas biplanes were shot out of the sky by modern German fighter planes, such as the Messerschmitt 109.





Polish cavalry soldier, 1938.

Yet, despite being the total underdog, Polish soldiers fought bravely.

Three squadrons of Polish cavalry soldiers attacked the German 8th Army and forced them to retreat. Under heavy machine gun fire, the horseback-riding soldiers pursued the Germans and managed to capture one of the Germans' division headquarters, taking captive one general and about a hundred soldiers.

Unfortunately, the Blitzkrieg tactic confused the Polish Army's high command. It sent troops to the wrong defensive positions, allowing German ground forces to break right through the lines.



Bundesarchiv, Bild 1011-300-0094-16  
Foto: Heydrich | September 1939

Lone horse, stranded in a Polish battlefield, September 1939.

As if this wasn't enough trouble, on September 17, troops from the Soviet Union invaded Poland's eastern border. (Look at that map, above. To the right, you'll see where Stalin's forces invaded.) It turned out Hitler had another secret—he and Soviet leader Josef Stalin had agreed to take over Poland and divide the country between themselves.

This second invasion prompted Poland's commander-in-chief and several other officials to flee into Romania.

However, the attack still wasn't over.

The Luftwaffe unleashed the first large-scale aerial bombardment on a major city, hitting Bzura, Poland. For ten days, the outmanned Polish forces tried to fight the advancing German 8th Army. But every counterattack failed. The Luftwaffe destroyed all the bridges across the Bzura River, trapping the Polish forces in an open area where German Stuka bombers pounded them even further.

When the anti-aircraft ammunition ran out, Polish forces retreated into nearby forests, but the Germans kept pursuing them. German planes dropped incendiaries—burning weapons—that flushed the men from the trees.

During this one campaign, the Germans dropped hundreds—perhaps thousands—of bombs.



Young survivor of the Luftwaffe bombing of Warsaw, Poland, 1939.

Polish cities burned to the ground.

The Luftwaffe targeted civilians, even refugees who were fleeing the cities. Mass killing was all part of Blitzkrieg's tactics to completely destroy an enemy and create panic. Far away from the battles, German secret police were murdering thousands of Polish people.

During this September campaign, the German military killed between 150,000 and 200,000 civilians.

Finally, on September 27, 1939, Poland surrendered to Germany.

More than 300,000 Polish soldiers were captured as prisoners of war. Hitler and Stalin divided the country, just as they had planned, and then both dictators turned their sights on the rest of Europe.

Hitler and Stalin both wanted more land. And they would kill to get it.

This was war.

### **WHO FOUGHT?**



THE SECRET PLAN to launch World War II was code-named Operation Himmler. Who was Himmler?

Heinrich Himmler was one of Hitler's leading henchmen. He joined the Nazi party in 1923 and helped Hitler rise to power.

Himmler coordinated Nazi propaganda. When Hitler needed an excuse to invade Poland, Himmler came up with those false stories for the newspapers. He also coordinated the fake murders at the Polish radio station. Himmler hated Jews and became one of the

chief strategists for the mass murder of millions of innocent people whom Hitler considered “inferior” races. That mass murder was later called the Holocaust. You’ll read about it in later chapters.

When Himmler was growing up, his family was part of the Catholic church. But Himmler left the church as he grew closer to Hitler. He became obsessed with the occult—the dark magic of superstition. Himmler designed many of the symbols that the Nazis used to identify themselves.

For instance, Hitler had handpicked some fanatic followers to form an elite group called the SS. It stood for *Schutzstaffel* or “Protection Squadron.” These SS soldiers were ruthless beyond imagination. Himmler devised the squadron’s public symbol—two lightning bolts, side by side. The symbol was based on ancient German mythology. The SS wore this symbol on their uniforms. Before long, it was recognized as a sign of merciless pain and oppression.



## **BOOKS**

*Blitzkrieg: The German Invasion of Poland and France 1939 to 1940* by Phil Yates

*Hitler Youth: Growing Up in Hitler’s Shadow* by Susan Campbell Bartoletti

*World War II: An Interactive History Adventure* by Elizabeth Raum

*DK Eyewitness Books: World War II* by Simon Adams

## **INTERNET**

Read the diary of a Polish doctor who witnessed the Nazi takeover of his country: [www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/poland.htm](http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/poland.htm)

This short documentary on YouTube shows historical footage of the invasion: [youtube.com/watch?v=uNOqSSP1o94](https://youtube.com/watch?v=uNOqSSP1o94)

Watch the Blitzkrieg in action: [youtube.com/watch?v=vgCWMZaKKUw](https://youtube.com/watch?v=vgCWMZaKKUw)

## **MOVIES**

*Hitler: The Rise of Evil*

Get the rest of the book at [GreatBattlesForBoys.Com](http://GreatBattlesForBoys.Com) and [Amazon!](http://Amazon!)

## MORE BOOKS IN THE GREAT BATTLES FOR BOYS SERIES

*Bunker Hill to WWI*

*The Civil War*

*World War I*

*World War II in Europe*

*World War II in the Pacific*

*The Korean War*

Find them at [GreatBattlesForBoys.Com](http://GreatBattlesForBoys.Com) and [Amazon!](http://Amazon!)