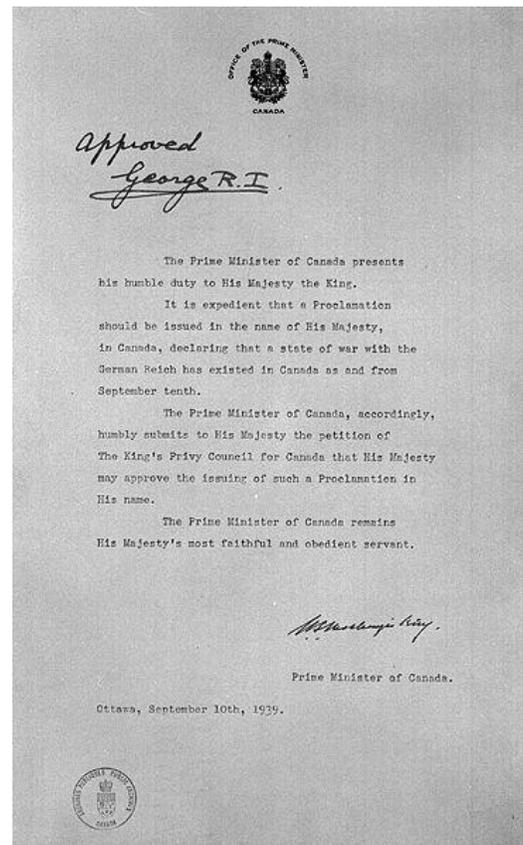


6.3 The War in Europe

September 1, 1939 - thinking that the Allies wouldn't or couldn't really react to their aggression, Hitler broke the Munich agreement and invaded Poland. This was part of the Germany / Russia pact that they would not fight each other in the splitting up of territories between the two countries. On September 1 German forces invaded Poland with armies, armoured divisions (tanks) and air forces. This was an example of the Blitzkrieg attack to overwhelm all defenders while limiting German losses.

- Britain and France had an treaty which promised support for Poland against attacks. So on September 3rd Britain declared war on Germany.
- Canada was an independent power in 1939 but most Canadians still felt close ties to Britain. The event that cinched the decision was the sinking of the Athenia by a German U-boat. The Athenia had been carrying about 500 Canadians who died in the attack. This angered the Canadian people so much that the country demanded to go to war.
- The Canadian army at the time of the declaration was about 4000 men strong. This meant that they needed to recruit and train a huge number of soldiers before fighting. Luckily the winter of 1939-40 was very cold and meant no one put large armies in the field, so everyone had time to ready their forces.



April 1940 - After a very cold winter that made starting attacks almost impossible, the fighting starts between the Axis and Allies in Europe. German forces made a Blitzkrieg attack through Norway and Denmark in April, and the Netherlands and Belgium in May. They pushed into France, overwhelming Allied forces and forced them to retreat to a town called Dunkirk, on the French coast. The army of 350,000 were almost wiped out by the Germans, only being saved because a fleet of all possible boats crossed the English Channel to carry the soldiers to safety. A few weeks later Germany finished defeating the French and captured Paris.

June 22, 1941 - Germany breaks the non-aggression pact with Russia and invades with an army of 1,000,000 men, tanks and planes.

- Russia and Germany had signed the non-aggression pact during the time when the Allied countries were practicing the policy of appeasement with Germany. It stated that they would not attack each other and outlined how they would divide the lands that laid between them.
- When Germany attacked, Russia then joined with the Allied forces to fight in the war. Russia had never had a very advanced army up to then, but they did have large numbers of people to draft into their forces.
- It was impossible to push in with Germany's Blitzkrieg type attack through the Russian winter, which had always been the country's best defense. Hitler's army got bogged down and trapped in a long battle which was called the Eastern Front.
- By the end of the war over 3,000,000 Axis troops had been involved in the Eastern Front, ending in the deaths of many Germans and even the surrender of some parts of the army.
- The Battle was also costly for the Russian army. The fighting on the Eastern Front cost them at least 7,000,000 wounded or killed soldiers and 14,000,000 dead civilians.
- Most importantly for the Allied forces, Hitler's campaign into Russia drew his forces away from destroying Britain.

August 19, 1942 - The Dieppe Raid

- In the morning of Aug 19 a force of 6000 Allied forces made a raid on the German defenses at Dieppe, on the French coast.
- This was an attack including the Canadian Second Division, British and American troops
- The attack was a huge failure
 - o they were supposed to land before sunrise but were delayed, meaning the Germans were up and could see them coming
 - o Bombers and artillery were supposed to 'soften' up the beach defenses but didn't get it done right. German guns were in place to fend off the attackers
 - o Of the 5000 Canadians involved in the attack 1400 died and 2000 were taken prisoner. More Canadians died during this raid than any other day in the war.
- The raid on Dieppe only served to teach the Allies what they would have to do better for a successful invasion of Europe against the German forces.

September 1941 - The Italian Campaign

- After defeating the Axis forces in North Africa the Allied troops pushed across the Mediterranean and attacked Italy
- The first landings were on Sicily, the island at the far south of Italy. These forces were led by American General Dwight Eisenhower and included the Canadian First Division.
- Canadians took an important role in the liberation of Italy from the Axis powers. They were the ones to break through the German lines and free Rome as well as pushing through the German 'Gothic Line' in Northern Italy, the last line of defense in 1944.
- Many have accused the Canadian forces in Italy of taking a vacation and fighting the 'easy war' in the Italian sun. However, Canadians are still fondly remembered in thankfulness by the Italian people each year on April 21st weekend when they celebrate freedom day – the liberation from Fascist rule of World War 2.

June 6, 1944 - Operation Overlord

- For 4 years Hitler had almost total control of the European continent. This meant he was able to consolidate his holdings and build defenses to keep the Allies out.
- After years of planning and testing for the best spots, the Allies mounted a massive attack on the beaches of Normandy, France. The plan was to break through Nazi defenses and to set up a base of operations in Europe so they could begin the land battle against the Axis forces.
- 24,000 troops (15 000 Canadians and 9 000 British) were to attack Juno Beach as part of the multi attack invasion. We lost 359 Canadian troops that day, with 1074 total casualties in the CEF.
- The Canadian Third Division was an important force in the weeks following D-day. They went against the Nazi veteran forces and drove them out of ports such as Dieppe and Calais, giving the Allies a permanent landing site in Europe. It was Canadian forces that then forced the Germans out of Belgium and the Netherlands. The Canadian Third Division accepted the surrender of Nazi forces in the Netherlands in May of 1945.