

September 1, 1939 – Blitzkrieg – The War Begins – Mr. Parker

Battle Situation in Poland

- Advantage = Germany (*geography)
 1. German land surrounds Poland on three sides
 2. 3500 mile long common border between Germany & Poland
 3. Poland well suited to mobile armor – flat & very dry in 1939

Geographic locations: Polish Corridor, Danzig (established as free trade city at end WWI), East Prussia, Czechoslovakia, Warsaw

Polish Preparation for War

The Polish Army was basically a 1920s era army with only small pockets of modernized units. Poland was not capable of standing against the Germans.

- Majority Polish army positioned along western border
- Most Polish industry close to western border
- Poles did not try to defend the interior of the country

** After Hitler invaded and conquered the rest of Czechoslovakia in March of 1939, Britain and France warned that they would declare war if Germany invaded Poland.

****Polish Military Strategy = defend the border until Britain and France attacked Germany on her western border.** Poles were prepared to fall back to prepared fortifications if need be.

** **KEY POLISH MISTAKE** = At the beginning of the invasion, Poland was nowhere near full military strength. Poland had about 1 million troops mobilized. She had not fully mobilized because Britain and France convinced her that full mobilization might provoke the Nazis to attack. As a result, tens of thousands of Polish reserves were waiting in RR stations or riding freight cars toward their units when the attack came.

When the war started, the French initially sent troops into Germany and penetrated 50 miles without encountering any resistance!! However, their commanders decided to retreat to France and preserve the military to defend the homeland. French were afraid of a repeat performance of past wars with the Germans and they were concerned that the British could not send an equal number of troops to that of the French. This phase of the war became known as “**The Phoney War**” or “**Sitzkrieg.**” The British & French did little more than drop leaflets on Germany, encouraging the Germans to retreat from Poland.

Other Polish Problems = Poland was a very multicultural nation with many problems. There were 2 million Germans living in Poland!! 30% of the population was not ethnically Polish. Poland had been reconstituted by the Versailles Treaty, after WW I. **Poland had not existed as an independent nation since 1795** (1st subdivided in 1772, again in 1793, & disappeared in 1793).

Development of Air Theory

Airplanes did not become effective until the last year of World War I (1918). The British were the first major power to create an air force as a separate branch of the military, the **RAF**. **Italian General Giulio Douhet** is considered the father of modern military air theory. In the 1920s he said the best defense was a

good offense. He promoted the development of large bombers and **strategic bombing**. This would save both lives and money, by taking the war to the enemy and causing all damage to occur on his territory.

The military did not accept Douhet's theories right away since the technology to create such a bomber did not exist in the 1920s. Between 1932-1935 technology allowed production of such bombers (mostly development of wing flaps and variable pitch propellers).

1936 Spanish Civil War was the first proving ground for aircraft. All types tried. Found out that high altitude bombing was ineffective. Discovered that small airplanes combined with tanks worked well. Small, quick bombers worked the best. Germans found dive bombing to be most effective and they couldn't bomb well from a horizontal position. Almost all countries studied the usage of aircraft in the Spanish Civil War.

Hitler's Propaganda Excuse for Attack – **Operation Canned Goods

After the March 1939 Nazi conquest of Czechoslovakia, Britain & France warned Germany that they would declare war if Hitler attacked Poland. Hitler needed an excuse to attack Poland. He did not want to be held responsible for starting another World War. He created the appearance of a Polish invasion as the pretext for Blitzkrieg = Operation Canned Goods.

1. August 31, 1939 -- Hitler ordered **13 convicted criminals moved from an Eastern German concentration camp** to a schoolhouse close to the border with Poland (town called Oranienburg).
2. 12 of the 13 German criminals were ordered to **put on Polish military uniforms & then each was injected** with a fatal drug.
3. The 12 were then taken to a forested area 10 miles inside the German border (close to town of Hochlinde) where they were **shot and their bodies arranged** in such a way to look like they died in an attack.
4. **Foreign newspapermen & radio broadcasters** were then brought to the scene.
5. Later that day (Aug. 31, 1939), several members of the SS, dressed in civilian clothes, escorted the last prisoner to a nearby town (German) called Gleiwitz, where they **took over the radio station**.
6. One of the Polish-speaking SS men, broadcast a **fiery speech** saying that Poland was attacking Germany and calling for all Poles to join.
7. Next a **scuffle was faked** and lots of guns were fired and the civilian-clothed prisoner was then shot and left on the studio floor.

Hitler's Speech Before the Reichstag (Sept. 1, 1939)

The next day (Sept. 1, 1939), Hitler gave a speech before the Reichstag in which he referred to this Polish attack. Then he said he had launched a full scale invasion of Poland! In this speech, Hitler's brilliant oratory skills were shown when he drew a powerful symbolic image by stating the he had, "**put on the gray uniform of a German soldier, the same one he had worn in World War I, and would not take it off until victory or death!**" This enabled all German people to see the invasion of Poland as the final revenge for unfair treatment at the end of WWI.

* The key to **Blitzkrieg** was the **Aug. 23, 1939 Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact**. It guaranteed that Germany would not have to fight a 2 front war – against Br. & Fr. in the West and against the Soviet Union in the East.

SEPTEMBER 1, 1939 - - THE ATTACK BEGINS!!

Several days prior to Sept. 1, the old German training battleship (1906), * **Schleswig-Holstein**, anchored in ***Danzig** harbor on a scheduled “courtesy visit.” On Sept. 1, at 3 AM, the Schleswig-Holstein opened up with her 11” guns. Her target was the ***Westerplatte**, an old fortress that sat high above the harbor and was supposed to protect it. The Westerplatte did not have large enough guns and was destroyed!!

The Military Tactic of Blitzkrieg

Blitzkrieg = “Lightning War”

- Intense attack from both the air and ground.
 - Goal = defeat enemy as quickly as possible to preserve military fighting capacity and save money. If you defeat them quickly, your casualties are lower, less equipment is lost, and you are ready to fight again. Quick victories with few casualties are politically valuable too!!
1. {**Simultaneously**} **Hit the Rear** -- **High level bombers & dive bombers** {Bombers = Heinkel HE-111 & Dornier DO-17 and main dive bomber was the Junkers JU 87} sent in to destroy enemy’s support in the rear. Destroyed most of Polish Air Force while still on the ground. **Hit:** RR stations, trains, bridges, radio stations, headquarters bldgs, barracks, munitions factories. Explosives & incendiary bombs set huge fires in cities & panicked the Poles.

JU 87 Stuka (short for Sturzkampfflugzeug):

- a. 2000 lb. Maximum payload
- b. 1 - 550 lb. Bomb under fuselage (middle under cockpit)
- c. 2 – 110 lb. Bombs under each wing
- d. No match for the faster British fighters

Luftwaffe = air weapon (in German) – German Air Force

Hermann Goering = Commander of Luftwaffe

Lebensraum = “living space”

1. {**Simultaneously**} **1st on Front Lines** -- Hit first with the new, ***Junkers JU 87 dive bomber**, also known as a **Stuka**. These JU 87s were psychologically effective too. Were fitted with sirens on the undercarriage of the plane, hence the name, **“Screaming Eagle” or “Shrieking Vulture!”** Sound of the diving plane made soldiers feel like the bomb was coming straight at them. Initially, the sound of the siren created panic!! Bombs also fitted with cardboard flutes that whistled as they descended.
2. **2nd on Front Lines** – **Tanks, Armored Cars, & Motorcycles** penetrate behind the front lines to disrupt communication, cut off reinforcements, and disrupt central command.

3. **3rd on Front Lines – Panzer Divisions {included infantry & artillery} [show tank overheads here]** attack and then move significant distances into the enemy's rear. A Panzer Division consisted of: 2 tank regiments, 1 infantry regiment, & 1 artillery regiment. There were 308-316 tanks (26 command tanks) in one panzer division. Each Panzer Division had its own infantry, reconnaissance, artillery, transport, communications, medical, and technical support. Once in the enemy's rear area, ground forces were supported by aircraft. The Germans liked to attack with **** Panzer Corps** which consisted of 2 Panzer Divisions or about 635 tanks. **Reconnaissance planes** spotted targets and sent aircraft to destroy them. Radio communications between ground and air was a critical new development of the Nazis.

Wehrmacht = infantry or land army

Heinz Guderian = early commander of the Panzer Divisions

Each German Infantryman Carried:

1. Mauser rifle
2. 2 grenades (**potato mashers**)
3. 60 rounds of ammunition
4. gas mask
5. canteen
6. trench spade
7. mess kit
8. rucksack

Front ranks in the attack on Poland often made forced marches of as much as 40 miles per day!!

**** An infantry regiment consisted of 2000-6000 men. A division consisted of 10,000-20,000 men.**