

Blitzkrieg – “lightening war”

- ❖ On the 23rd of August, 1939, Hitler and Stalin set aside their differences and agreed to the *Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact*.

What was this pact?

Why did Hitler suggest such an agreement with the USSR (Russia)?

- ❖ At 4:45am on September 1st, 1939, the German warship Schleswig-Holstein opened fire on a Polish garrison in Danzig. At the same moment 62 divisions (One division has between 10-15,000 troops) and 1,300 aircraft poured into Poland.

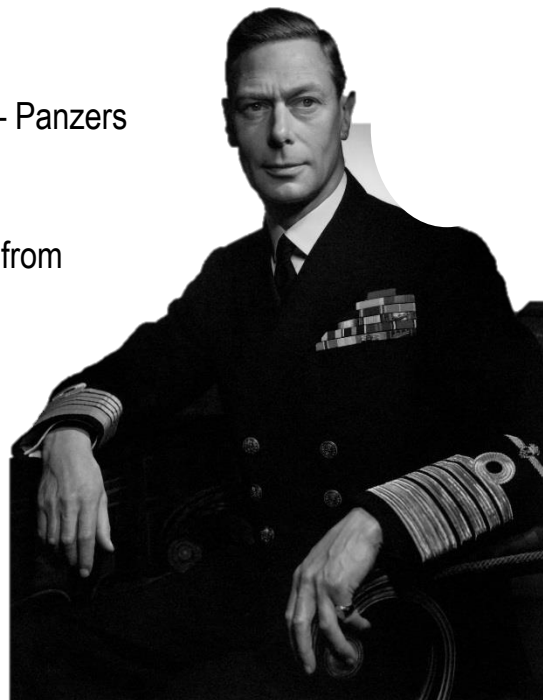


German Soldiers removing the Polish Border gate on September 1st, 1939.

- ❖ Hitler's generals were surprised by this action and urged caution – the German army was not yet at full strength.
- ❖ Poland asked for assistance from Britain and France. At noon on September 3rd, 1939, Britain declared war on Hitler's Germany.

What did Canada do? (Remember the Statute of Westminster)

- ❖ Poland's military could not fend off Hitler's armored divisions – Panzers (tanks).
- ❖ On September 18th the Red Army of Soviet Russia poured in from Poland's eastern boarder.
- ❖ Warsaw – the capital of Poland – held out until September 27th. They surrendered at 2:00pm that afternoon.
- ❖ In the six weeks following 10 May 10th, 1940, German forces defeated Allied forces and conquered **France, Belgium, Luxembourg** and the **Netherlands** (Holland). Italy entered the war on June 10th, 1940 and invaded France over the Alps.



King George VI (King of Great Britain and Canada in 1939)

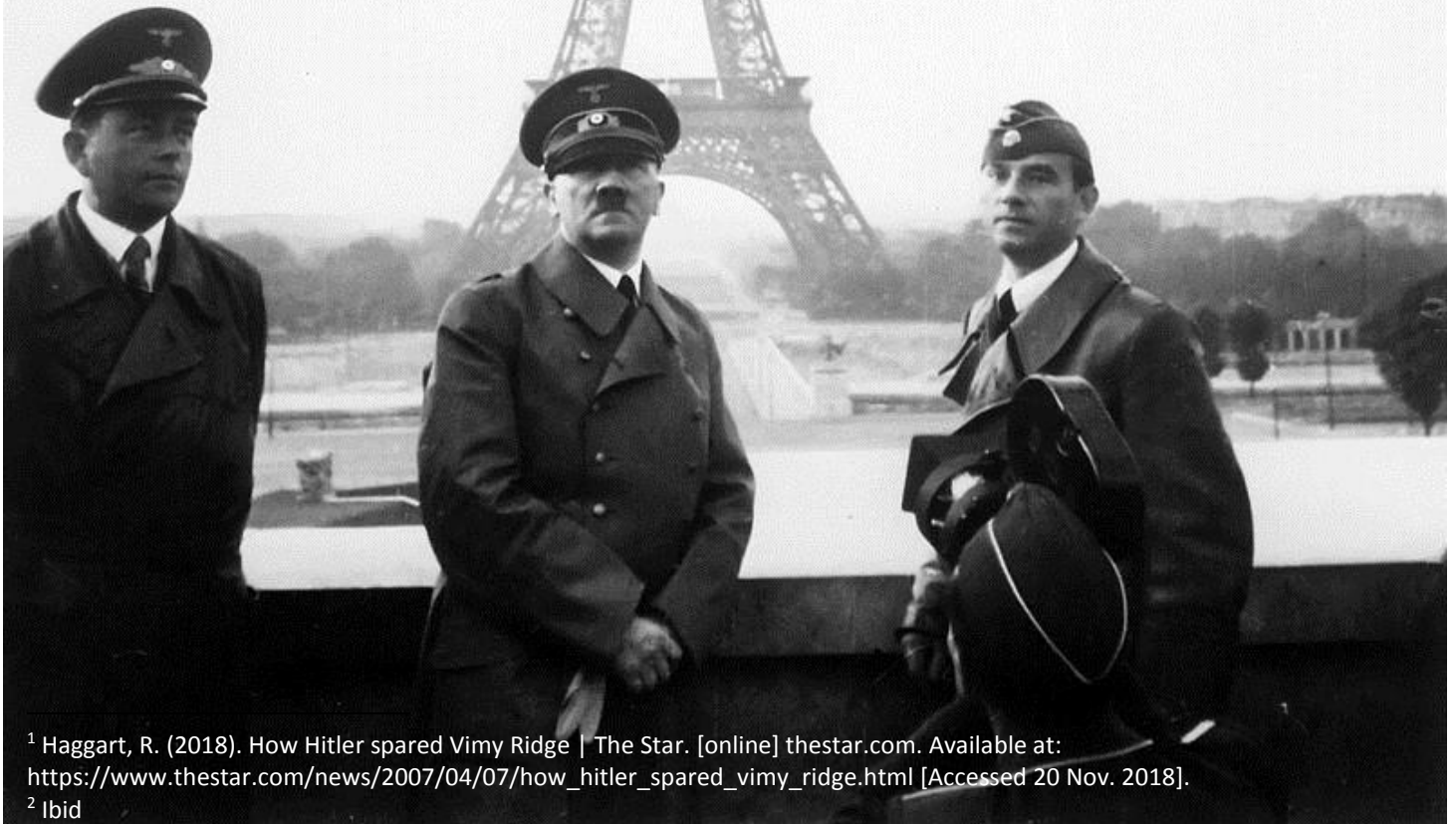


- ❖ Hitler so admired the Canadian Vimy Ridge memorial (dedicated by King Edward VIII in 1936) that he visited the site on June 2nd, 1940. The German leader called in the world's press as best he could and insisted they take his picture on the unscathed steps. He then assigned special troops from the Waffen-SS to guard Vimy Ridge.¹ As explained by Ron Haggart (Toronto Star):

The SS had a vicious reputation – they were Hitler's personal army, they guarded him. And it was also their job to protect Vimy Ridge, not only from Allied armies but also from regular Wehrmacht soldiers who, rather understandably, might want to deface it. No one would defy the SS.

Hitler's plan was a great success. All the Australian war graves in France from World War I were destroyed in World War II. But the cemetery beside Vimy Ridge and the memorial itself remained untouched because the Waffen-SS did its job.²

- ❖ Explain in your own words how Hitler was so successful in conquering much of Western Europe in 1940:

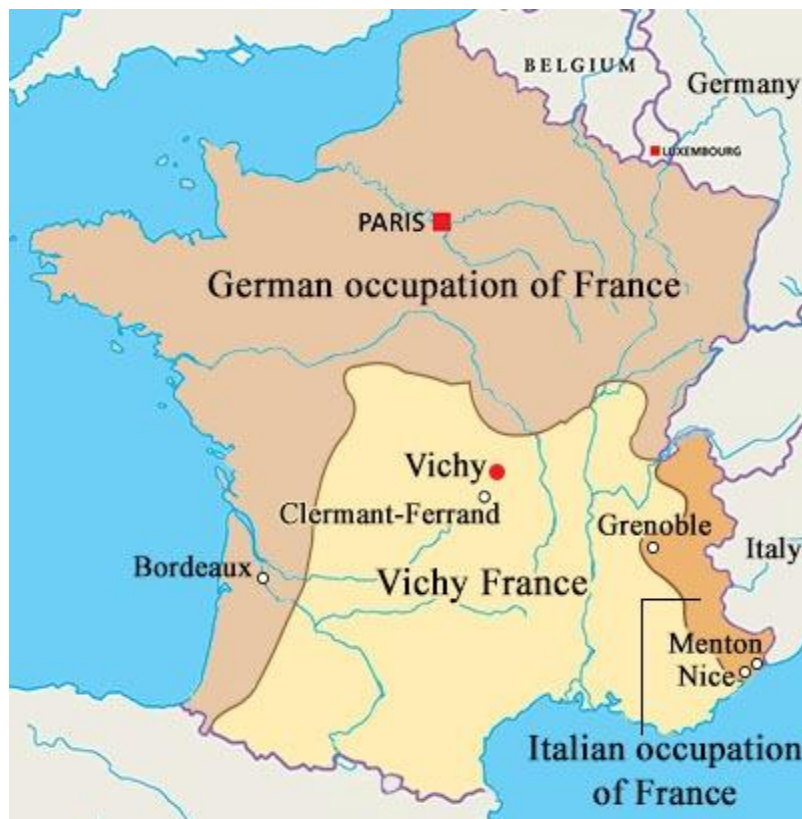


¹ Haggart, R. (2018). How Hitler spared Vimy Ridge | The Star. [online] thestar.com. Available at: https://www.thestar.com/news/2007/04/07/how_hitler_spared_vimy_ridge.html [Accessed 20 Nov. 2018].

² Ibid

❖ On July 20th, 1940, a new government of France was declared by the Nazi-occupying forces. Based in Vichy, France, this new government was headed by Marshal Philippe Pétain and occupied the unoccupied “free zone” of the country. Called “Vichy France,” this new state was considered a “client state” of Germany (A client state is a state that is economically, politically, or militarily subordinate to another more powerful state).

- All French territories were supposed to be under the jurisdiction of “Vichy France,” including the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon (off the coast of Newfoundland).



❖ To counter the Vichy government, General Charles de Gaulle created the Free French Forces (FFL). Based in Great Britain, the Free French Forces acted as a government-in-exile and was supported (and recognized) by the Allies.