

# CHC2P Unit 3: 1939-1959: War and Peace

## Activity 1: The Start of WWII

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### Overview

In this activity, you will examine a variety of issues related to World War II, ranging from the Blitzkrieg to Canada's role in the war and the beginning of the war in the east of Europe.

### Lesson

#### *Hitler's Takeover of Europe*



After Hitler invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, Britain and France declared war on Germany.

Although Canada was no longer automatically at war when Britain was at war, there was a very strong feeling that the Mother Country should be supported. One week after Britain's declaration of war, the Canadian Parliament declared war on Germany.

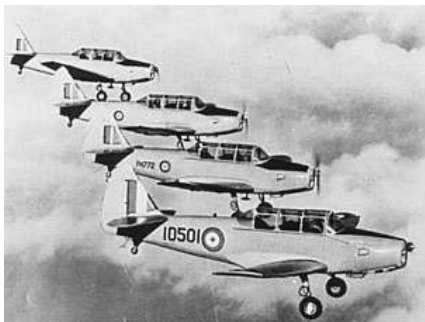
#### *Blitzkrieg*

The Nazi war machine invaded Poland, using a rapid method of attack called Blitzkrieg or "lightning war." Prior to the attack on Poland, the Soviet Union (Russia), under the leadership of the communist dictator Joseph Stalin, had signed a friendship agreement with Hitler's Germany.

The Soviet Union attacked Poland from the east. Hitler and Stalin defeated Poland and occupied the country. In the spring of 1940, the Nazis used Blitzkrieg to take over Denmark, Norway, Holland (the new home of Anne Frank), Belgium, and France. Soon Hitler controlled most of the continent of Europe.

Aside from his agreement with Joseph Stalin, Hitler also had a friendship treaty with the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini.

#### *Canada and the War in the Air*



The Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) had been formed in 1924, and during the Second World War, expanded to become the fourth largest flying force on the Allied side. Canada and its partners in the war were known as the Allies.

In the first year of the war, flying schools were set up in Canada by the RCAF, under a program called the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. The British Commonwealth consists of countries at one time ruled by Britain.

Men and women from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, as well as Canada, trained as pilots, radio operators, navigators, and flight engineers. The Training Plan was one of Canada's most important war contributions.

In combat, the RCAF suffered 17,000 casualties, many while flying bombing raids over German territory.

### ***Women in the Canadian Armed Forces***



In July 1941, a Women's Auxiliary Air Force (later renamed Women's Division) was formed to release men for combat duties. Over 17,000 women were enlisted and trained in trades such as clerks and mechanics. Many served overseas at Royal Canadian Air Force stations.

Women were not allowed to fly in actual combat. However, at least one Canadian woman managed to fly military aircraft. Marion Orr paid for her own flying lessons, and then went to England, where she served as a pilot moving fighter planes between airfields.

Altogether, 50,000 women served in the Canadian armed forces during World War II. They played important roles in such positions as nurses, office workers, ambulance drivers, and firefighters. They were not allowed to take part in combat, but in carrying out their duties, many were wounded or killed.

### ***Hitler Double Crosses Stalin***

In the summer of 1941, Hitler broke off his friendship with the Soviet Union by launching a surprise attack on his ally. The German Blitzkrieg took over parts of the Soviet Union. The Russians fought valiantly against the superior German forces, and prevented them from winning a complete victory on what was called the Eastern Front.

In 1942, most Canadian soldiers were in Britain training for an attack on Hitler's Europe. Joseph Stalin insisted that he receive help against the ferocious German attack on his country. He asked England to invade Western Europe, so that Hitler would be distracted from his invasion of Russia.

Watch the [Visual History of World War II](#) to get an idea of how quickly Hitler's German army overran Europe between September 1939 and June 1940.

## **Assignment**

1. List 3 reasons why Canada entered World War II.
2. Explain what Blitzkrieg means and list 5 countries the Germans used it to take over.
3. Create a chart to demonstrate 3 Pros and 3 Cons for Canada entering World War II.
4. In your opinion, should women be equal partners with men in the Canadian military? Explain.
5. Overall, how many women served in the Canadian Armed Forces during WWII?
6. List 4 important roles that women played in the war.