

An Analytical Diary of 1939-1940

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*The Twelve Months that
Changed the World*

By

Andrew Sangster

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**This work is dedicated to my wife Carol.
Also to the memory of our brother Lynn Sangster**

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FOREWORD

I am currently an undergraduate studying Contemporary Military and International History at the University of Salford. The study of History at university level is a science; judgements require a persuasive argument and every point made has to be backed up with reliable references. This book helps to guide the reader to the wide range of historical material available in researching events between September 1939 and August 1940 from a multinational perspective. The month by month account follows the progression of issues from different viewpoints. Rather than purely narrating the events, it describes both the circumstances leading to them, and provides a valuable insight into the political reasons behind the war's course. It also explores the social consequences, and the everyday lives of ordinary people and their reactions. While many books detail the exploits of war in one country, or from a particular perspective, it is important to remember that people from many nations were affected by the conflict. The wide variety of information gathered and referenced in this book, from historians of different nationalities, helps to broaden the insight of the reader, and documents a history of a world war rather than just a record of a British, American or Russian one.

Andrew Bulpitt, Undergraduate at Salford University

PREFACE

Patrick Finney correctly observed that “one of the most fruitful issues to probe is the interconnection between historiography and national identity.”ⁱ

Each and every single historian belongs to a nation, and his or her nationalist identification is often easy to perceive in their studies. History books are often imbued with the historian’s particular point of view. The sense of national identity is especially powerful within the public’s collective recollection of war or other highly critical times. There will be iconic symbols, films of people and narratives which form the cultural backlog of any nation. If the name of the historian is withheld it would take minimum time to identify the writer’s nationality. The general member of the public would be easier to detect because of the inherent backlog of inculcated memory, and the induced amnesia of some of the circumstances.

The public hold firm opinions. The British who often claim they actually won the war forget that Britain declared war on Germany. The Germans, who blame the iniquities of World War II on the Versailles Treaty and claim Hitler was an aberration within their history, often forget that Hitler was initially voted to power by a populist vote. The French, like the British, forget they declared war on Germany and will blame their politicians, and neglect the fact they had the largest army in the world led by elderly out of date military commanders. The Russians, who played the greatest part in winning the war, try to explain the German-Russian alliance of August 1939 as a form of defence, and never mention the secret protocol.ⁱⁱ We are all guilty of standing on our own stage and banging our own drum; it will not go away.

This very public and indeed innate human characteristic continued into the postwar years. The French relied on the de Gaulle mythology of a “fighting France” and pretended Vichy never existed. The British claimed they stood alone when in reality they had the backing of the Dominions, nearly one fifth of the world’s population, and the latent support of the USA. The Germans claimed that because of the Allied bombing, the

ⁱ Finney Patrick, *Remembering the Road to World War Two, International History, National Identity, Collective Memory* (London: Routledge, 2011) p.10

ⁱⁱ For more on the Protocol see chapter *September* under *Russia Invades*.

Soviet pillaging and raping, this transformed them into the real victims. The Russians claimed it was communism that saved the day rather than the sacrifice of millions of Russian soldiers, a view expressed by Stalin in his speech of 1946, slightly altered by Khrushchev and later modified by Gorbachev. Two to three generations on the public tend to view World War II as some form of historical monument from which nothing can be learned today. Myths grow, some are debunked, while others fade, and some memories are buried; the public memory is like a kaleidoscope with few bright colours.

The tragedy of this is the survival of rampant nationalism, and a failure to learn from the realities of history. The year 1939-40 was a year in which the most powerful nations, having already fought the war to end wars, entered an even more dreadful worldwide military conflict. To this day the superpowers and their subsidiaries persist in sabre rattling. The year 1939-40 took the world from a state of anticipated or "hoped for" peace to a world heading towards a total war.

This book looks at this significant year of change as objectively as possible. It cannot be entirely objective because the writer is British, but an attempt at objectivity has been made. Amongst the cited references and history books British, American, German, French, Italian, many more other national sources have been plundered. Each month is viewed from what actually happened (with a detailed monthly chronology) with additional notes on themes, events, and about ordinary people's lives. The military, political and social history is viewed, and significant events and developments are noted, and each month the war at sea is specifically covered as this critical aspect is often neglected, or is only to be found in dedicated naval histories.

The book is intended for the student and the general reader of history. It is hoped that whatever the reason for reading this text there will be enjoyment, a better understanding, and a lesson from the past for today. As a human race we seem inept at learning from the past; we have to repeat the mistakes for ourselves. The year 1939-1940 should be a warning to those who claim "my country is great," "my country first," "I shall make my country great again" and "my country does not need to live and work with other countries." It only took the twelve months from September 1939 to August 1940 to watch the world turn itself upside down and inside out.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

For each month there are a series of sections dealing with the critical issues relating to the year under study. Campaigns and battles are examined but not in a blow by blow fashion which is best found in specialised military history books, or in the given chronology at the end of each chapter. The sequence of events in the invasion of Poland, Finland and France for example can be traced through the chronological table, but the essential ingredients of the causes, motivations and complexities of the day, which are the indispensable features of the study of history, are found within the main body of the text. The chronology is also important because it underlines the constant warfare at sea, the changes of attitude in America, and touches upon other aspects of the war long forgotten, such as why women were asked not to wear high heels!

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Second World War was the most devastating event in modern history, and has left permanent scars on the global map to this day with far-reaching consequences. There are some historians who, with some justification, argue that the war started in August 1914 and did not finish until after the reunification of Germany on the 3rd October 1990, following the collapse of the Berlin Wall.ⁱ Many historians argue against this concept, in particular Gerhard Weinberg writing that the “intentions of the belligerents were fundamentally different.”¹ He rightly argued that the Great War was about boundaries, colonies, and military power, while the 1939-40 war was about control of the globe and ideologies. Nevertheless, the one gave birth to the other and the ramifications continued in the proxy wars of Korea, Vietnam and many other areas of extreme violence. The twentieth century was a time of international conflict in which nations changed sides, intentions and motives shifted, but they were all related like a dysfunctional family consumed in a war of the species. Such intentions as imperial greed ignited the twentieth century conflagration, but it was later stoked by ideologies such as fascism and communism with which capitalism and liberal democracies would eventually confront or oppose. Nevertheless, the wars were distinctly related, and the traditional geopolitics may have changed colours but they remained intact.

The 1939-45 war was the greatest ever historical global conflict, and the precise numbers of those killed can never be accurately estimated, though between fifty to sixty million people are among the most generally accepted figures. The inability to provide a precise number even to the closest thousand underlines the wantonness of this period of history. The number of injured, misplaced and the orphaned can never realistically be estimated, and the global economics and worldwide suffering reverberated to the end of the century. Even at the political level it was not until 2006 that the Chancellor Ed Balls the Economic Secretary to the Treasury made the final payment of the British war debt to the Americans. The Cold War and the many proxy wars which followed 1945 have given rise to conflict into the twenty-first century.

ⁱ It was erected in 1961 by the GDR (East Germany) and known as the Anti-Fascist Wall.

This study concentrates on the critical year of 1939-1940 offering an analytical month by month study of the main features of this dramatic world event. However, as an overview it is important from the very start to try and understand the driving forces behind the twentieth century global conflict, as well as the dominant features of the war itself.

The Driving Forces of War

International Tensions at start of Century

From the very beginning “war between the Great Powers was much talked about in the first decade of the twentieth century, by politicians, writers, novelists and philosophers.”² In Britain, during the era of the Victorians and Edwardians, nationalism and colonial growth were the dominant features of international relationships. In foreign policy terms it was a matter of geopolitics which placed the emphasis on geography, demography and resources amongst the many driving forces of national interest. The German colonies were not as vast as those of Britain and France with their sea-going ability, and consisted of Namibia, Cameroon, Tanganyika, Togo, parts of New Guinea and a few islands such as Nauru and the Bismarck Archipelago. These colonies, as with the colonies of other European powers, became places of resources and of national prestige.

Although it is almost distasteful and rarely mentioned there was a distinctive flavour of personal greed and almost jealousy between the leading powers, often reflecting old animosities which were centuries in the making. The 1870 Franco-Prussian war became a hall-mark of French relationships with Germany, and Bismarck’s recently united Germany wanted more growth in terms of its colonies and perceived influence. In France the German annexation of Alsace and much of Lorraine aggravated the French for decades. Because of British naval influence and power most European countries were covetous of that country’s overseas *possessions* as they would have been regarded. The dysfunctional Kaiser Wilhelm II appeared all but envious of the status held by his family relations, especially Edward VII and George V, and he was covetous of the Royal Navy which he had every intention of imitating; it was ironic that he was technically an Admiral of the British fleet. When Germany started investigating access for a port on the Atlantic coast of Morocco it caused concern that it might trigger a war in the same way that it later caused apprehension in 1914, when the British heard of the widening of the Kiel Canal. There appeared to be a growing tension between the national

powers. There was equal consternation when it was announced the Germans were building a railway line deep into the Middle East to reach the Persian oilfields. The recently established unified Germany wanted to expand and increase its influence. The geopolitics and their ramifications of this period have changed little to this day. Some historians have argued that it was not just a matter of communism, fascism and imperial greed, but liberalism itself with its moralistic language and the rights of small nations. In his recent book Peter Clarke looks back to the legacy of William Gladstone as part of the formulary for the disaster of the First World War.³ The roots of the twentieth century problem run deep.

Explosion of World War I

The Austro-Hungarian central power was ruled through the dual monarchical role by the archaic Franz Josef who had held the throne since 1848. He and his advisers were uneasy with their Hungarian component, but they were especially mistrustful of the Serbs with their demands for independence and their own state. The Russians supported the Serbs, and when in 1912 the Serbs defeated the Turks, it not only caused concern for Austria's influence in that area, but also for the Germans, who saw Austria and Germany as the new evolving Central Power. When one country "supports another" it is usually out of self-interest or greed for influence in an area; this remains a political feature to this day with areas of interest in the Middle-East and elsewhere.

There had always been a belief that the Austrians and Germans would constantly treat the Slavs as the enemy and *vice versa*. In the Balkans there was considerable pressure for autonomy from many of the various components of that complex area; an issue still not truly resolved as the recent civil war in the 1990s demonstrated. The Italians having defeated the Turks in 1912 had taken control of the old Turkish North African territories of Libya. The world with the expansionist European nations was in a state of considerable mutual suspicion and therefore politically fragile.

As always with the European tradition a series of alliances were established. France had a long-standing treaty with Russia giving the understandable impression to Germany that she was surrounded by potential enemies. In 1904 France and Britain had signed the *Entente Cordiale* which gave the impression to Germany that she was fenced around not only on the land but vulnerable at sea. Germany therefore aligned herself with Austro-Hungary and also looked towards Italy; it was simply power politics.

Nevertheless, “the conflicting fears and desires of many States and peoples did not create a European war, but they served as a set of multiple fuses waiting to be ignited, should war begin between two States.”⁴ In terms of economics the European nations worked together, and for many people war appeared inconceivable from the point of view of economic common sense and self-interest. Nevertheless, whilst many people considered war unnecessary and far too dangerous, it arose because of national and personal animosities that can be found in any social club. There existed heightened sensitivities regarding the colonies, especially where there were important resources of oil and other raw materials, and consequently this included the possessive control of ports, canals, the sea lanes, and even railway lines in faraway deserts. Interestingly three of the major nations namely Britain, Germany and Russia were all related through their monarchies. The British Royal family was Germanic, and both the Kaiser and Tsar had familial relationships with the British Royal family, and with these connections always wrote and visited one another formally and socially.

When the successor to the Hapsburg Empire was assassinated by the student Gavrilo Princip a Bosnian Serb, it initiated a butchery which lasted long after 1914-1918. It was not simply that the Austrians were tactless in visiting Sarajevo on a major Serbian national day, (this visit took place on a national festival day when the Serbs commemorated the loss of the Kosovo battle against the Turks in 1349) but the whole Balkan region had been badly mishandled by a major power who had assumed ownership of other lands. Russia quickly mobilised its forces in support of Serbia, motivating Germany to declare war on Russia, and therefore on France by terms of the Franco-Russian Treaty. The Kaiser was a person, who most now accept was dysfunctional, and who reflected and thought in way more reminiscent of the medieval period. He refused to accept Belgium’s neutrality which propelled Britain into the war. The sensitivities of individuals and peoples, nation States susceptible to their prestige and status and greedy for colonies and supremacy all came together and engendered a major industrial war. The appalling carnage is well known and documented in history, poetry, novels, films, and is still painful to comprehend.

Overview of Origins of World War II

The serious issue on an eventual global basis emerged when the war finished in 1918 because it was only a pause when it had been anticipated that 1914-18 was the “war to end wars.” In 1919 a prophetic Daily Herald

cartoonist had depicted a scene from a Versailles Treaty committee of leaders with one of the participants hearing a child cry, and looked towards a mother and child with the caption of *1940 Class* attached to the baby's toe.⁵ This prescient view from 1919 tallied with the French General Foch who regarded the 1918-19 peace agreement as a mere truce.

The Great War concluded with the well-known but manifestly unbalanced Versailles Treaty which sought retribution and recompense, and which reflected the geopolitics of the nation States which had initiated so much devastation. The timing of the Treaty was felt appropriate given that the French and British were also totally exhausted, and the American General Pershing's suggestion for a fresh campaign was viewed with uncertainty, mainly because of the inevitable increase of American influence within the European structure, (an anticipated fear later to be held by de Gaulle post World War II).

However, "among Germans there was near universal agreement that such treatment was unjust and intolerable making the Versailles Treaty perhaps the only political issue around which there was widespread agreement in Weimar Germany."⁶ Most Germans regarded the reparations with anger since they were based on the manifestly false premise, namely "the assertion written into the Versailles Treaty (Article 231) that Germany alone had been responsible for the war."⁷ The treatment of Germany after the war fuelled nationalism once again, but "apart from the ostracism and humiliation of Germany, which in spite of the servitudes imposed by the treaty settlements, remained the most powerful nation in Europe."⁸ Germany remained as a potential powerhouse in the centre of Europe.

Many ordinary Germans and especially German soldiers did not consider that they had been beaten because German troops were still in France fighting when it was agreed to stop. In fact most Germans found it almost inconceivable that they had lost the 1914-18 war; not least because in the spring of 1918 it appeared that the Germans had been winning. Even at sea the U-boat campaign in 1917 was sinking an average of half a million tons of Allied shipping on a monthly basis.⁹ Although the Americans had joined the Allies it had taken time to produce their resources and mobilise, and when the German attack (Operation *Michael*) started on the 21st of March the losses sustained by both sides were greater than any other battle since the war started. The Austro-Hungarian victory against the Italians at Caporetto in late 1917 had raised serious questions about the enemy's continued incipient strength, and it was not helped that great numbers in the French army revolted against their own command. It was at the very last moment that the war seemingly turned against the Germans, the Allies

winning the Intelligence war and the battle in the skies. Ludendorff had been concerned about the high production of Allied tanks and also the mass production of gas. In addition to these concerns, the Germans had produced weapons for the war and ignored food production which had led to riots by the housewives. Furthermore, it has been conservatively estimated that up to half a million Germans died from malnutrition and its related diseases. Perhaps there was some substance in the often discounted claim that the Royal Navy blockade had worked. (It was probably this problem which caused Hitler to view the Ukraine as a potential bread basket.)¹⁰ As the Allies started to increase their number of soldiers the rumours of peace talks caused many soldiers in the German army to return home, which caused a degree of disintegration. This was compounded by the German naval mutiny, and finally all these factors caused the Kaiser's resignation. This is a mere summary of the end days and the victory, but significantly for most Germans, especially the German soldier, they never felt they had been beaten.

The legacy of the so-called Peace Conference achieved few of its aims; Germany was humiliated and there appeared little hope of any internal or external reconciliation. However, the central unity of the German nation survived, but the treaty imposed major restrictions, and huge chunks of their territory were re-distributed, not just out of recompense or retribution, but because of an innate fear of the potential might of a powerful and militant Germany re-emerging. Germany's population was in European terms second only to Russia, and her rivers and sheer geographical resources gave her industry considerable if not overwhelming potential. It was not until 1945 that the breakup of Germany as a nation was considered, and probably because of the fact that despite the Versailles Treaty Germany had remained potentially powerful.

Cynically, the country of Poland was undoubtedly regarded as a buffer state between the West and Russia; the Treaty created a system of small states in what was almost a No Man's land. This established a highly dubious future and easy pickings for Hitler on his arrival in power. As early as 1917 Balfour had announced to the Imperial War cabinet that by creating an independent Poland "Russia will be cut off from the West;" a theory welcomed by many. The Treaty "tied the Germans in the immediate present; it tied the Allies for the future."¹¹ The Versailles Treaty never resolved the perceived German problem in so far that she remained the strongest country in Europe in many aspects, especially with Russia no longer in the balance of the politically influential scales.

In 1919, as noted, the Germans were confused because the soldiers at the frontline appeared to be winning or at least holding their own from

which developed the theory of the *dolchstoss*, the stab in the back. This was the theory that the ordinary German had been betrayed, and it was later fine-tuned to concentrate its implications upon the Jewish population. It was generally believed that although in 1918 the German soldier was in retreat, he “had not been routed or destroyed.”¹² The new Weimar Republic was in a delicate position, and run by a coalition dominated by Social Democrats, whose “representatives only signed the Treaty of Versailles under the express threat of coercion.”¹³ The Germans had to watch their old stamping ground of Alsace-Lorraine be returned to France; Poznan and parts of East Prussia and Upper Silesia were given to Poland, territory was taken by Belgium, Lithuania and Czechoslovakia. In addition to this war reparations were placed around the £6,600 million mark, which was to prove crippling for a country trying to re-emerge from a major war.¹ There was a ban on any union between Germany and Austria. There were strict military demands with a limitation of Germany's army to 100,000 men with no conscription, no tanks, no heavy artillery, no aircraft and no airships, as well as limiting the German navy to deploying vessels of under 100,000 tons, and no submarines were allowed. This was the treaty to guarantee that Germany never provoked another war. Many believed at the time that the treaty was far too drastic and too punishing, but it has recently been suggested that those critical of the treaty should try and imagine “what sort of peace Europe would have had if a victorious *Kaiserreich* and its allies had been making it.”¹⁴ Nevertheless, with the benefit of hindsight it is possible to understand that although the treaty sought a peaceful stability in Europe by restricting Germany's potential, it created an environment for further conflict. It has been argued that “a harsh dictated peace must inevitably arouse a determination in the defeated side to reverse it.”¹⁵ Even in 1939 John Colville, a civil servant at 10 Downing Street, anticipating an early British victory noted in his diary there should be no *guilt clause* in the next final peace treaty.¹⁶

The financial reparations for Germany were just about possible but not manageable politically, and this is true of nearly every aspect of the Treaty: Germany was politically unstable and the Versailles Treaty made it more so.¹⁷ John M Keynes as early as May 26th 1919 in a letter to Austen Chamberlain wrote that “we have presented a Draft Treaty to the Germans which contains in it much that is unjust...if this policy is pursued, the consequences will be disastrous in the extreme.”¹⁸ If the treaty divided the

ⁱ It has sometimes been suggested that the seeming collapse of the capitalistic system, especially the collapse of the financial markets in the USA and the West, was a major contributory factor in creating World War II; there may be some validity in this argument on a very general basis.

Allies at the time of its signing and afterwards, it certainly united the Germans. The treaty provoked a deep resentment amongst some of the German senior military men. They felt that however long it took the treaty's misdeeds had to be rectified for Germany's honour: all they needed was a government or leader who agreed.

The financial consequences of the Great War were far reaching: Germany suffered to a far greater extent than most other nations. Nevertheless, soldiers of all nations when they returned home found their countries impoverished; there was a lack of employment and a serious shortage of food. Germany though found itself in the midst of a civil-war and Russia was in the midst of a major revolution; the rest of the world was heading towards a financial disaster. Europe remained in turmoil and now regarded itself as in state of "suspended war" with communistic Russia.¹⁹

In 1909 Norman Angell had published his book *The Great Illusion* (originally published under the title of *Europe's Optical Illusion*) which had predicted that in the event of a major war the economic and financial loss would be disaster.¹ This work was intended as a warning against a war which it failed to prevent, but it proved to be all too accurate after the 1914-1918 conflict.²⁰ The world was suffering from economic turbulence, communism had taken hold in Russia, and capitalism had all but imploded in Western Europe and America. Above all the 1929 financial collapse and the great depression almost seemed to be the death knell of the financial systems, and rocked the stability of many countries. It was catastrophic in the wide extent of the various ramifications, and the seismic shocks were so shuddering that western politicians were at a loss as to how they could cope.

The liberal western democracies could hardly manage and teetered under pressure as alternative methods of government appeared on their own door steps, and soon surfaced within their own political communities. The democracies found themselves challenged by the sudden rise of popular mass movement alternatives. The most feared was the sudden rise of communism which caused a nervous shockwave to the democracies that exists to this day. In Italy Mussolini was the first to take on the role of a fascist leadership, but Italy retained its Royal family and the influence of the Vatican remained intact. The West did not fear Mussolini who was often regarded as someone the democracies could work alongside. There appeared to be a population outcry (a phenomenon which today we tend to

¹ Norman Angell 1972-1967: he was an English lecturer, journalist, author and an MP for the Labour Party. He was also an executive member on the World Council against War and Fascism. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1933.

call the *populist vote*) for an alternative to capitalism and democracy. It was the potentially powerful Germany that raised the question marks more than Mussolini in Italy or Franco in Spain. Germany after the Great War had entered a period of street fighting and had come close to a civil war, but “Germany stormed the ramparts of respectable politics and imposed single-man, single-party dictatorship with a little over a third of the population vote.”²¹ Hitler rose to power through the legitimate democratic process, and destroyed it once he was in power. His apparent success drew admirers in France, Britain and America, and only the more astute foresaw the immediate dangers.

The geopolitics at the end of the nineteenth century, and which had reached boiling point in the first decade of the next century lit the many fuses for the 1914-18 conflict, and the politicians failed dismally in the aftermath of the war to resolve the problems. The problem of rising nationalism under fascist rule soon descended to more sinister depths, and become even more rampant between 1920 and 1940. The twentieth century’s armed conflict paused for a moment but started again in 1931 when Japan invaded Manchuria, and escalated in 1937 when Japan and China began a full scale war. This war was more like the imperial expansion of territorial gain as was Italy’s occupation of Ethiopia in trying to find possessions and status in Africa. As Weinberg pointed out these wars “had begun quite independently...and would have remained both separate and different had not Germany launched a new type of war which came to absorb them.”²² When Hitler brazenly invaded Poland in 1939 the imperial wars around the globe merged into a global conflict, which if the 1914-18 was described as the *Great War* then the 1939-1945 conflict could be called the *Greater War* given that to date there has been no serious nuclear clash.ⁱ

In all these catastrophic events it was clear that Hitler and his immediate entourage played the leading roles and introduced the new elements of racial purity, *lebensraum* and possible world domination. In 1918-1919 there was a failure to resolve the geopolitics of the day, and in 1945 the total defeat of the enemy changed the circumstances, but never resolved the main issues of nationalism with all its geopolitics of power, self-esteem, influence, ownership and inbuilt prejudice. It ought to be noted that although the Versailles Treaty is often and rightly blamed for many of the consequences, it ought not to be forgotten that it was Hitler

ⁱ See Weinberg, Gerhard, *A World at Arms* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994) who uses the expression “the Greatest War,” p.3

who stoked the fires of resentment and added his own daemonic agenda as mentioned above.

Critical Features of World War II

Opening International Scene

During the interbellum years there were distinctive changes in the old alliances. France's traditional partnership with Russia failed because Tsarist Russia was now a form of communism under Stalin a political system which brought fear to most French politicians. On the surface it appeared that Russia just sought personal security, but the existence of the Comintern (the International Organisation of Communist Parties) sent nervous reactions throughout the western nations. It was felt, understandably, that there was a powerful evangelical missionary zeal about communism.

America had long begun a period of political isolation not wanting to be immured in another European war, and forever distrustful of the imperial designs of France and Britain. It should be noted that America was economically strengthened by the European war, but her determination for remaining isolated and in peace was manifestly indicated by the self-imposed reduction of her army almost to the limits of that forced upon Germany. Some have argued that this American policy may have encouraged Hitler as he pursued his ideal of European if not world domination. Although America had withdrawn from the various committees regarding the Versailles Treaty she remained active in European affairs, the plans to assist the Germans in their reparations were the well-known Dawes plan and then the Young plan; both American. Britain and the USA, as with most other nations, could not believe another war would take place, and for a long period of time the armed forces were ignored by the financial governmental departments; "distaste for the past constricted any realistic concept for the future."²³

Japan, which like America had benefitted financially from the Great War, was imperialistically inclined with wars against China and Russia. Japan's self-interest was evident, as was Italy's intentions as Mussolini moved inexorably closer towards the increasingly belligerent Germany; a country which was demanding redress from the humiliating Versailles Treaty, and seeking the infamous "living space," *lebensraum*. Although it should be noted that Germany and Japan never linked military forces, there was a "real overlap when the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour provoked Hitler, very mistakenly, to declare war on the United States."²⁴

These belligerent nations were imitated by Stalin's Russia out of territorial greed or self-defence (a strategy of defence against potential German aggression as some have proposed) in seeking land in Poland and access to the Baltic. Although the Russian archives are more accessible these days, more time and research will be needed to understand fully Stalin's motives. It has been often argued that Stalin always believed Hitler to be the main enemy, and his access to the Baltic and swathes of Poland was an act of preparation against an ascending Germany. The historian Alan Bullock wrote that the "Russians, alarmed by the extent of the German victories in the west, had hurriedly taken advantage of Hitler's preoccupation to occupy the whole of their sphere of influence."²⁵ Stalin's behaviour before, during, and after World War II tends to beg the question as to whether in reality he was simply indulging in old fashioned imperial greed. Stalin might also have feasibly considered Hitler's point of view that Russia's treaty with Germany might possibly dissuade the British and French declaring war over Poland. Poland would then be regarded as another isolated war as in Manchuria over which no one wanted to provoke a global conflict, and face the inherent dangers of Hitler's Nazi world view. It has been argued that Stalin was doing no more than the Western politicians had done at Munich, averting a war by allowing the division of a minor country. Technically Russia remained neutral. It has been argued that Stalin never tried to assert as Chamberlain had done a false atmosphere of friendship with Germany. Stalin asserted that "the Soviet Government could not suddenly present to the public German-Soviet assurances of friendship after they had been covered with buckets of filth by the Nazi Government for six years."²⁶ Nevertheless, Stalin took rich pickings in Poland, and later consumed parts of Finland, took over the Baltic States and then turned his predatory eye towards the Balkans. Whatever explanation some historians offer for Stalin's behaviour, it appears to other historians that he was behaving in the same way as the old imperialist power seekers with a mind-set not so different from the Nazi aggressor.

The General Trends

The intense heat in the furnace of the 1939-45 conflict and from sheer necessity changed some of these international alliances. When Germany attacked Russia the democracies embraced Stalin as Uncle Joe out of pure national self-interest. Each side needed the other until the dangers of German fascism were destroyed, and then the old enmity returned postwar in what has been dubbed the Cold War. Germany as the Central Power and

main enemy was deemed as finished by late 1944, and even before the war concluded Soviet Russia was being viewed as taking her place as the prime enemy of the future for the West. The wartime alliance between Russia and the West was all a matter of national survival for the necessary time span.

For the early years of the war the impetus and initiative was clearly with the Germans, and no one in 1939-42 would have dared predict the likely outcome of the hostilities. The Americans were driven into the war following Pearl Harbour, but it took time for their industrial resources to be weighed in the balance, which eventually tilted the tide of battle against the Axis forces in the Western zone. The beleaguered Russians found American supplies delivered by the Royal Navy and merchant men invaluable, but the Russians also astutely moved their industrial might away from the incoming German forces to the safety of Siberia, and produced huge numbers of the critical and formidable T-34 tanks, and more up to date aircraft.

For their part the Germans, although having an outstanding war machine and good military leadership, probably the best in the world at that time, failed to develop their air technology. They also failed to utilize the full extent of their industrial output until it was too late, by which time strategic bombing with a vengeance had been started by the Allies. The economic aspect of a modern war was woefully underestimated by the German hierarchy, especially in the face of the dormant might of the awakening American industrial power.

France was swiftly invaded leading to probably the most catastrophic defeat of history. Britain only survived because of the English Channel, the German inability to prepare invasion plans, and some young RAF fighter pilots in slightly superior machines. Britain survived, but contrary to popular British opinion did not win the war, but acted as a launching pad for American, British and Colonial troops to re-invade Europe in 1944. It is often underplayed, but the vast majority of forces in 1942 North Africa did not come from the British Isles, but from the Dominions, now generally referred to as the Commonwealth. Once the Western democracies awoke to the serious dangers posed by Nazi Germany and Japan in the Far-East, nearly two thirds of their economies were devoted to the war and a third of their manpower.²⁷

The sheer logistics accruing on the Allied side allowed the invasion of Europe to take place. This re-conquest of Western Europe was critical not only for the dignity of the Western Democracies, especially defeated France, but it also ensured that Stalin's Red Army (then in full force and over-powering) had no excuse to sweep through to the English Channel.

Technology and scientific advancement was with the Allies, as the Japanese discovered after the annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

This analytical diary will pay full heed to the war at sea because the battles to keep supplies coming into Britain were vital, and the sea war had to be won. Britain and France had originally anticipated winning the war by an economic blockade and a war of attrition following the pattern of 1914-18, but it was the blockade against Britain that became one of the serious issues for Western survival. It was not just for Britain's survival, but the need to have a launch pad for the anticipated invasion of Europe. It was by the sea routes that Russia was fed the essential supplies from America, and it was America controlling the Eastern Oceans that brought the downfall of their Japanese adversaries. In a global conflict the seas remained the main communication and transport routes, and they were vital to all the belligerents.

Another major feature of the war was the part played by Russia which like the naval aspect is occasionally underplayed in the Western memory. Britain lost nearly 500,000 people during this war, but the Russians lost an estimated twenty-six million; more than fifty Russians died for every British person. In 1942 the Germans deployed on the Eastern front one hundred and seventy-eight Divisions plus another thirty-nine from its co-belligerents; in North Africa Rommel fought the Allies with a mere four divisions. The war on the Eastern front was barbaric, and an unpleasant hallmark of this war was the massive slaughter that took place, most especially the attempted annihilation of the Jewish race in the Holocaust. This barbaric savagery had to be given the new legal terms of *Genocide* and *Crimes against Humanity*, and they have left an indelible mark on the twentieth century.ⁱ

Also considered barbaric by some was the Allied strategic bombing of German cities. Initially attempts were made at the tactical bombing of military and industrial sites, but bomb aiming by both sides was imprecise and totally inadequate. It was the bombing of populations that brought both Japan and Italy to their knees, and hindered Germany's potential of utilising its massive industrial might to support their war machine. The bombing of German cities remains a contentious issue to this day, as do many other aspects of a war that marked the entire globe in one way or another.

ⁱ The word *Genocide* was devised by the Polish Rafael Lemkin, and *Crimes against Humanity* by the Cambridge Don and Polish born Lauterpacht; see Sands Philippe, *East West Street* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 2026) pp.137ff. and pp.59ff.

There are many myths about the war which have been generated by political forces during and after the war. Some have projected the image of Britain as “a welfare state, a craven satellite of the US, a decrepit industrial basket case, a national community whose identity centred to an unhealthy degree on nostalgia.”²⁸ Yet in 1939-40 the year under study some British leaders remained confident of victory because of the country’s material strength, its place in the global community, and its technical and scientific capacity. At the very best the year 1939-40 should be described as that moment when Britain was caught *on the hop*.

Many people and events from 1939-45 have become myths, while other incidents have been dumped in the amnesia bin as best forgotten. The moral side of the Allied cause has been projected as the only answer to the barbaric methods used, and as the new threat of the Cold War emerged wounds were quickly dressed, and Western Europe unified as a doorstop to Bolshevism.

This project is not just another history of the war, but a month by month account of how it unfolded, the social ramifications, along with analytical passages on the critical events when they occurred. It is not based on a newspaper analysis, but with the benefit of hindsight which allows the historian to view events in the context of the day, and within the wider picture of the twentieth century.

Brief Overview of the First Year

The year 1939-1940 was a period of despair and disaster if not sheer catastrophe; it was a seismic turning point in history. The invasion of Poland, and Finland came as a shock. The invasion of the Low Countries, and especially France was almost breath-taking in the speed of the German victory. The European scene seemed to be changing dramatically, and gave the impression that the democratic and liberal western world was collapsing like a house of cards. The so-called Phoney War was in many ways more significant than it appeared at the time, and was a German victory by default for a variety of reasons. It was not surprising that neutral countries were desperate to steer clear of the conflict. The notes in the chronology sections indicate that the industrial powerhouse of the USA was determined not to be involved, but the change of attitude can be seen both in Roosevelt and the reference to the Gallup polls which indicated the change of mind amongst the American people. The motivations and intentions of Stalin’s Russia remain an enigma, but are reviewed in the light of known scholarship and opinion. The sinister and emerging signals