

September 1 is a weird date in history because it marks both the beginning and the end of WORLD WAR II.

The beginning was on SEPTEMBER 1 1939, when GERMANY - under the leadership of the Nazi dictator ADOLF HITLER - invaded POLAND. Hitler and the leader of the Communist SOVIET UNION, JOSEPH STALIN, had made a deal where they promised not to attack each other, and a secret part of that deal was an agreement that Germany and the Soviet Union would both invade Poland

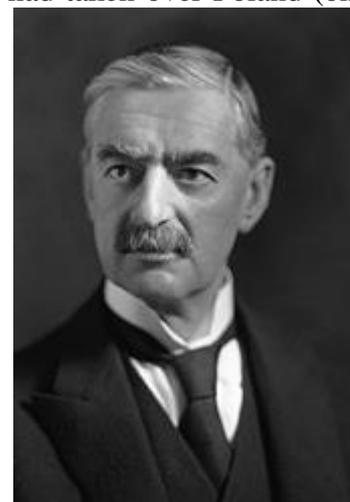
and divide the country up between them. The Germans went first on September 1 1939, and the Soviets followed on 17 September. The German invasion of Poland resulted in BRITAIN and FRANCE declaring war on Germany on September 3 1939 because they had promised Poland that if another country invaded Poland, they would help Poland out. It was an empty promise - there was literally nothing the British or the French could do to



protect Poland from being invaded, but Britain and France didn't feel they had any alternative but to declare war on Germany - otherwise Hitler would feel he could invade any country he liked (as he had already in 1938 with AUSTRIA and CZECHOSLOVAKIA (pronounced 'Check - oh - slow - vak - ee - ah')).

Noticeably, Britain and France didn't declare war on the Soviet Union when the Soviets invaded Poland later on that same month - they probably thought they had enough on their plate declaring war on Germany. But for a while, after Germany had taken over Poland (on

October 6), it seemed like Britain and France weren't really at war. Hitler didn't make any more moves with his army - and the British Prime Minister NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN started boasting that Hitler had 'missed the boat' and lost his chance to act against France and Britain. But then came the spring of 1940, and Germany leapt into action, invading DENMARK and NORWAY (something that resulted in Neville Chamberlain's resignation, and WINSTON CHURCHILL's becoming Prime Minister, which I told you about May 1) and then in MAY 1940, Germany invaded France, defeating the French army within a few days, and forcing the British soldiers to retreat to DUNKIRK, on the northern French coast, and then take any boat they could find back home, over the English Channel. By JUNE 1940, Hitler was the undisputed master of Western Europe - everywhere except Britain was under his control. And Britain stood alone against one of the most barbaric and disgusting regimes that the world has ever known.



The end of World War II was on SEPTEMBER 1 1945, when JAPAN officially surrendered to the UNITED STATES on board the American ship USS MISSOURI (pronounced 'Miz - oor - ee'), which was parked in TOKYO BAY, right next to the Japanese capital. So how did

Japan and the United States get involved in World War II? Well, tensions between the two countries had been growing for years, particularly over the issue of who would control the PACIFIC OCEAN, which lies between Japan and the United States. And Japan struck first against the United States, bombing the American ships at PEARL HARBOUR, in Hawaii (pronounced 'Ha - why - ee'), which is an American island (actually, it's one of the 50 states



that make up the United States of America) in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. That happened on DECEMBER 7 1941. Up until then, Churchill had been urging the American President FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT (pronounced 'Delay - no Rooze - uh - vel') to enter the war against Germany on Britain's side - but Roosevelt was unwilling to get involved. Once Pearl Harbour was attacked, it was obvious that America and Japan were now at war, but Hitler reacted to the news of the Japanese attack on the United States by declaring war on the United States himself. So that dragged the United States into Britain's fight against Germany - the United States had no option but to declare war not just on Japan, but Germany as well. Hitler's declaring war on the United States was a really insane thing to do, because by then Germany was already involved in a terrible war with the Soviet Union, having broken its promise not to attack the Soviet Union on 22 JUNE 1941, on year after Hitler had conquered Western Europe. So Hitler was basically declaring war on the world - he wanted Germany to take on, at the same time, Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union. He had literally no chance of winning that fight - so as soon as Hitler declared war on the United States, it was a question of when, not if, Hitler would lose the war.



He managed to last another three and a half years, with Germany surrendering in MAY 1945. But that left Japan, which had had some early successes in its war in the Pacific Ocean, driving back the United States army in the Pacific, under its commander GENERAL MACARTHUR, all the way back to Australia. But the Americans fought back and got closer

and closer to Japan until they were ready to invade Japan itself. But the Americans knew that invading Japan would result in huge numbers of American soldiers being killed in battle - so instead they wheeled out the terrible weapon that they had invented and that I told you about on July 16: the atomic bomb. They dropped the bomb on Hiroshima on August 6 1945, and on Nagasaki on August 9 1945 - and that was enough for the Japanese. Their Emperor HIROHITO (pronounced 'Here - oh - heet - toe') announced that the Japanese would surrender, and the official surrender took place on September 1 1945 aboard the USS Missouri, with General MacArthur signing the Japanese surrender document on behalf of the victorious United States of America. MacArthur would then go on to effectively run Japan for the next four years, ensuring that it became the kind of friendly and welcoming country that we know today.



And what happened to little Poland, the country whose invasion started off World War II? Unfortunately, the end of World War II didn't bring it any good news. The Soviet Union - which had beaten the Germany army which invaded it in 1941 and then chased it all the way back to Germany, entering Berlin in April 1945 - insisted to the British and the Americans that the whole of Eastern Europe was to come under its control after the end of the war. And the British and Americans didn't see that they had any choice but to agree. The Americans could have built some more atomic weapons, and threatened to bomb the Soviet Union - but everyone was sick of war (apart from the brilliant American general GEORGE PATTON, who I will tell you about some other day, and who definitely wanted to carry on and invade the Soviet Union) and it would have been very hard to turn on the Soviet Union after three years of telling everyone in Britain and America who great 'Uncle Joe' Stalin was. So Poland was betrayed, and left to its fate - escaping from the control of Nazi Germany, only to fall into the clutches of the Soviet Union. Poland would only truly be free in 1989, when the Soviet Union collapsed - 44 years after the end of World War II. But Poland had a lot to do with bringing about the collapse of the Soviet Union - so they might have got the ultimate revenge on Joseph Stalin and his evil plans to bring the whole of Eastern Europe under his control. But I'll tell you more about that some other time.