



CAMPAIGNS OF WORLD WAR II DAY BY DAY

EDITED BY CHRIS BISHOP
AND CHRIS McNAB



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amber
BOOKS

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Contents

6	Introduction
8	THE WAR IN EUROPE AND NORTH AFRICA
10	The Blitzkrieg begins: Poland is overrun
14	Incredible victory: Battle of the River Plate
18	Battle for Finland: The winter war
22	Breakthrough at Sedan
26	Escape from Dunkirk
30	Skies of glory: The Battle of Britain
34	Operation Judgement: The raid on Taranto
38	O'Connor's victory: Operation Compass
42	Hitler strikes south: The invasion of the Balkans
46	Death from above: The airborne invasion of Crete
50	The hunt for the Bismarck: On the run in the Atlantic
54	Panzergruppe Guderian: The drive on Smolensk 1941
58	Stalin's winter offensive: An expensive lesson
62	Death on the Neva: The siege of Leningrad
66	The Battle of Sevastopol: Conquest of the Crimea
70	Gazala and Tobruk: Desert Fox in action
74	Forgotten sacrifice: The Arctic convoys
78	Disaster at Dieppe: No second front
82	Operation Torch: North Africa landings
86	Drive for the Volga: Looking for oil
90	Montgomery's victory: El Alamein
94	Stalingrad: Death of an army
98	Kasserine: Desert Fox strikes back
102	Kharkov: Manstein's masterpiece
106	Kursk: Eastern turning point
110	Target for tonight: The night battles over Germany
114	The Schweinfurt raids: Battle over Germany
118	Operation Husky: The invasion of Sicily
122	The Battle of the Atlantic: Defeating the U-boat offensive

- 126 The Big Week: Striking at the heart of the Reich
- 130 Breakthrough at Cassino: Battle for the Monastery
- 134 The Anzio landings: A 'stranded whale'
- 138 D-Day: The Normandy landings
- 142 Unstoppable Red Army: The destruction of Army Group Centre
- 146 Normandy breakout
- 150 Death of a city: The Warsaw rising
- 154 Operation Market Garden: The battle for Arnhem
- 158 The last Blitzkrieg: The Ardennes offensive
- 162 Storming into Germany: The Battle of the Rhine
- 166 Battle for Budapest: A city under siege
- 170 Air war over Europe, 1945: Allies supreme
- 174 Battle for Berlin: The fall of the Reich

178 THE WAR IN THE PACIFIC

- 180 Pearl Harbor: Day of infamy
- 184 Expansion in the Pacific: The Indian Ocean raid
- 188 Coral Sea: Carriers in action
- 192 The Battle of Midway: Decision in the Pacific
- 196 The Battle of Guadalcanal: All for an airfield
- 200 Solomons: The sea battles
- 204 Kokoda Trail: New Guinea 1942–1943
- 208 Bloody Tarawa: Battle for the Gilberts
- 212 Imphal and Kohima: Victory of the forgotten army
- 216 The Great Marianas Turkey Shoot
- 220 Leyte Gulf: Final victory
- 224 Return to the Philippines
- 228 Strangling Japan: The submarine war in the Pacific
- 232 The sands of Iwo Jima
- 236 The road to Mandalay: Triumph in Burma
- 240 Okinawa: End of an empire

- 244 Appendices
- 253 Index

Introduction

From western Europe to the steppes of Russia and the jungles of Southeast Asia, on land, at sea and in the air, World War II was six years of unprecedented conflict.

In *Campaigns of World War II Day by Day*, Chris Bishop and Chris McNab document the bravery and sacrifice, cruelty and terror that millions of servicemen and women, as well as ordinary people, experienced and endured on a daily basis.

This comprehensive reference volume is divided into two parts, the war in Europe and North Africa and the war in the Pacific. Within each section every campaign is described in detail, and is expertly analysed. Black-and-white and colour action images, detailed maps and illustrations provide an evocative, and often harrowing, insight to the war.

Exhaustive chronologies show how the war progressed from one day to another; beginning as a purely European affair and ending with the cataclysmic use of atomic weapons in Japan.

World War II remains the largest military conflict in history. This book tells the day-by-day story of the campaigns of that tumultuous era.



THE WAR IN EUROPE AND NORTH AFRICA



The Blitzkrieg begins

Poland is overrun

September 1939: Hitler takes a gamble that he can launch an attack on Poland without triggering another European conflict.

On 31 August 1939 Hitler ordered the invasion of Poland. The following day the UK and France demanded the instant withdrawal of all German forces and, in the face of the contemptuous silence with which this was greeted in Berlin, consulted on how best to implement their promises to Poland. That they must be implemented was unanimously agreed, but how, when and where this would happen were matters for lengthy discussion, and indeed remain the subject of controversy. As a result of the agreement an ultimatum was sent – and ignored. At 1100 on 3 September 1939, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain broadcast the news that Britain was now at war with Germany.

Luftwaffe in action

At 0445 on 1 September, bombers and fighters of the Luftwaffe crossed the Polish frontier and began their systematic destruction of the Polish military infrastructure. The first Blitzkrieg had begun.

Poland was an ideal theatre for warfare. In addition to being fairly flat, her frontiers were much too long for them to be well defended. She was, moreover, flanked by her enemy on both sides – East Prussia to the north and the newly occupied Czechoslovakia to the south – and the most valuable areas of the country lay between those flanks. Poland, in fact, protruded like a tongue into hostile territory – and in September 1939 her armies were deployed in that tongue, instead of behind the river lines of the Vistula and San where their defences would have been stronger. But the fatal weakness in Poland's defences lay in her lack of armour, for the bulk of the army consisted of 30 divisions of infantry supported by 11 brigades of

horsed cavalry and two motorised brigades. Against them were to be launched six German armoured divisions and eight motorised divisions, together with 27 infantry divisions whose main role would be to engage the attentions of the Polish infantry while the German mobile forces raced around the flanks to strike at the centres of control and supply.

One hour after the Luftwaffe had struck, Army



The Germans organised an SS unit in the free city of Danzig during August 1939 and at the outbreak of hostilities it joined the Danzig police in an assault on the Polish-held post office and the Westerplatte fortress.

ENCIRCLEMENT: THE FIFTH PARTITION OF POLAND



The German plan was to defeat the Polish army in a classic battle of encirclement. The Poles fought stubbornly, but the professionalism and numerical superiority of the German army made the result a foregone conclusion.



Poland fielded about 100 PZL P23 Karas light bombers in 1939 but they had little impact. 327 Polish aircraft were destroyed, many on the ground, and 98 flew to neutral Romania as the defeat of Poland became inevitable.



The Polish army was poorly equipped and its troops poorly led. Despite weak strategic direction and a reckless enthusiasm for offensive tactics, the Polish soldiers resisted for 36 days. Sixty-six thousand Polish troops were killed in action and 130,000 wounded.

Group South under General Gerd von Rundstedt smashed its way forward: the 8th Army on the left wing driving for Lodz, the 14th Army on the right aimed for Krakow and the line of the River Vistula, and the bulk of the armour of the 10th Army under General Walther von Reichenau in the centre piercing the gap between the Polish Lodz and Krakow Armies, linking with 8th Army mobile units and racing on for Warsaw.

By 4 September, 10th Army spearheads were 80km (50 miles) into Poland, curving up towards the capital and isolating the Lodz Army from its supplies, while to the south 14th Army tanks had reached the River San on each side of Przemyśl.

Meanwhile, Army Group North under General Fedor von Bock was driving down

from Pomerania and East Prussia: the 4th Army along the line of the Vistula towards Warsaw, and the 3rd Army along the line of the Bug towards Brest-Litovsk, Lwow and eventual junction with the 14th Army coming up from the Carpathians.

Frantic efforts

Thus two massive encirclements would take place, the outer intended to block any escapees from the inner, and at the end of the first week only the immediate confusion of battle masked the extraordinary success of the German attack. The inner pincers had certainly met successfully, but the chaos inside the trap was such that no-one could be sure what was happening. Polish columns marched and counter-marched in frantic efforts to make contact either

with the enemy or with their own support, and in doing so raised such clouds of dust that aerial observation could report nothing but general movement by unidentified forces of unknown strength, engaged in unrecognisable activity in pursuit of incomprehensible aims.

Fighting at Bzura

As a result there was some doubt at German headquarters whether or not the bulk of the Polish forces had been trapped, therefore 10th Army armour was wheeled north to form another block along the Bzura, west of Warsaw. Here was fought the most bitter battle of the campaign, but it could only end in defeat for the Poles. Despite their desperate gallantry, they were fighting in reverse against a strong, well-entrenched enemy who had only to hold on to win, and after the first day they were harried from behind by

troops of the 8th Army from the southern group and of the 4th Army from the north. It is hardly surprising that only a very small number managed to break through the German armoured screen to join the garrison at Warsaw, where they soon found themselves again cut off from escape to the east by the outer encirclement.

From this double encirclement only a small fraction of the Polish army could hope to escape, and on 17 September even this hope was dashed. The contents of the secret clauses of the Russo-German Pact signed the previous month were cruelly revealed when the Red Army moved in from the east to collect its share of the spoils; Poland as a nation ceased to exist and a new international frontier ran from East Prussia past Bialystok, Brest-Litovsk and Lwow as far as the Carpathians.



Panzer I armoured command vehicle, Radzymin, 27 September. A young German tank crew commander leads a column of German armour along the road to Warsaw. The white cross was used as a recognition sign on German vehicles during the Polish campaign.

The Blitzkrieg begins

Chronology

The invasion of Poland was the trigger for World War II. It also illustrated Germany's new talent in mechanised warfare. In under four weeks the entire Polish defence collapsed under the tactics of Blitzkrieg.

1939

August 31st

Adolf Hitler gives the final orders for the invasion of Poland.

September 1st

In the early hours of the morning, German air units begin preparatory bombardment of Polish defences. At around 6.00am over 50 divisions of German armour and infantry cut across the border in two main army groups: Army Group North attacking across northern Poland from

northern Germany and East Prussia, and Army Group South driving towards Warsaw and through the Carpathians from Silesia.

September 3rd

The British prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, announces that Britain is at war with Germany.

September 8th

German units begin to enter the outskirts of Warsaw, having advanced nearly 321km (200 miles) in a week.

Below: Polish civilians dig trenches in September 1939. The Poles concentrated much of their defence on the frontiers, so were easily bypassed and encircled by German armour.

Right: An anti-Nazi leaflet from the early days of the war. On 9 September 1939 alone British bombers dropped over 12 million propaganda leaflets on Hamburg, Bremen and the Ruhr.





German soldiers remove Polish street signs. The German occupation aimed at eradicating Polish culture, especially in the anonymously named 'General Government' territory, formerly central Poland and heavily administered by the SS.

September 9th

The retreating Polish Poznan army launches a counter-attack against German forces around Kutno on the Bzura.

September 17th

From the east, Soviet forces invade Poland, striking towards Vilnius and Bialystok. The isolated pocket of Polish resistance around the river Bzura finally falls to German forces north of Lodz. Over 170,000 Polish soldiers are taken prisoner.

September 18th

Vilnius falls to the Soviets. The Polish government flees across the border into Romania and is interned.

September 19th

Soviet and German forces meet at Brest-Litovsk.

September 22nd

Bialystok and Lwow fall to Soviet forces.

September 27th

The defence of Warsaw finally collapses. The carve up of Poland between the Soviets and the Germans begins.

September 28th

Polish troops holding out at the Modline fortress some 36km (20 miles) from Warsaw finally surrender after an 18-day siege.

September 29th

Molotov and von Ribbentrop sign the 'German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty', dividing Poland into eastern and western zones under the control of the Soviets and Germans respectively.

October 2nd

The final element of the Polish defence, a unit of 4500 men under Admiral Unruh in the Półwysep Hela peninsula north of Danzig, surrenders to German forces.

International Events 1939

September 3rd

In the UK, 1.5 million citizens – mainly children, pregnant women or women with young children – are evacuated from the major cities in expectation of German air raids. Britain's armed forces are mobilised.

September 4th

The British RAF loses seven aircraft during ill-conceived raids on German naval bases at Wilhelmshaven and Brunsbüttel.

September 10th

Canada declares war on Germany.

September 11th

Over 150,000 British troops are shipped over to France to bolster the European defences against Germany.

September 15th

Russia and Japan sign a peace treaty which ends their conflict over the border of Mongolia and Manchuria.

September 17th

A German U-boat, *U-29*, sinks the British aircraft carrier *Courageous* off the Hebrides.

September 22nd

The Romanian prime minister Armand Calinescu is shot dead by Nazi terrorists.

Incredible victory

Battle of the River Plate

Hitler's 'pocket battleships' were expressly designed to be fast enough to outrun any vessel their guns could not sink.

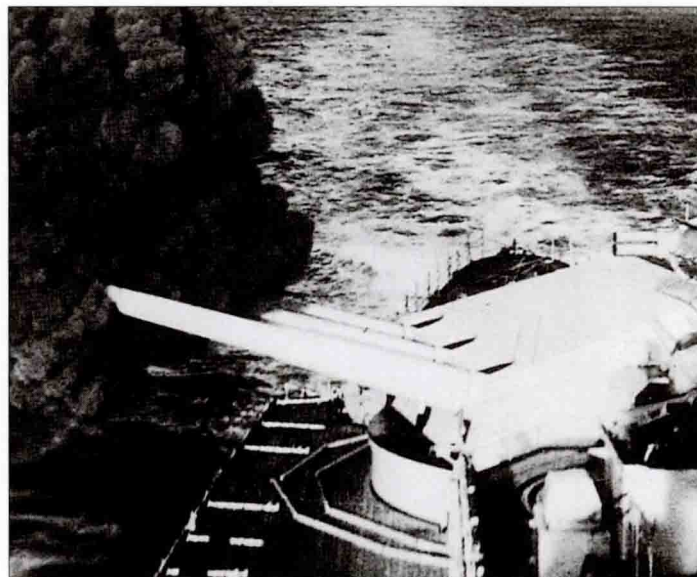
Although history affords no example of war against commerce in itself defeating a major maritime power, the Kaiser's fleet had come close enough to success against the UK to encourage Hitler to try again. Among ships built expressly for the purpose were the three 'Deutschland' class 'pocket battleships' (more correctly 'armoured ships'). They were designed with long range and economical diesel machinery to give a speed greater than that of any more powerful ship, while armament and protection were on a scale that was to be more powerful than any faster ship.

Toward the end of August 1939, before the actual outbreak of hostilities, two of these ships, KMS *Deutschland* and KMS *Admiral Graf Spee*, together

with their dedicated supply ships, left for their war stations in the North and South Atlantic respectively. Beginning with the 5050 grt Booth liner *Clement* near Pernambuco on 30 September, the *Graf Spee* destroyed several independently routed merchantmen during wide-ranging depredations over the next few months. No fewer than eight separate Anglo-French hunting groups were formed to catch her.

Raider warning

On 2/3 December 1939 two British ships, *Doric Star* and *Tairoa*, were sunk in mid-ocean. Each transmitted a raider warning and position that, when plotted, indicated that the German ship's course was toward the rich traffic in the Rio de Janeiro – River Plate area. This region



Deutschland's guns in action during her successful commerce-raiding cruise in the North Atlantic. The elusive German raider sank the British armed merchantman *Jervis Bay* before returning to Germany.

was in the ambit of Commodore Henry Harwood, whose South American Cruiser Division was known as Force 'G'. Having picked up the merchantmen's distress signals, Harwood was convinced that Captain Hans Langsdorff, in the *Graf Spee*, was making for the Plate estuary and at a speed that indicated arrival on or about 13 December. He accordingly concentrated his three available cruisers, the 203mm (8in) HMS *Exeter* (flag) and the 152mm (6in) sisters HMS *Ajax* and HMS *Achilles* (the latter New Zealand-crewed) some 240km

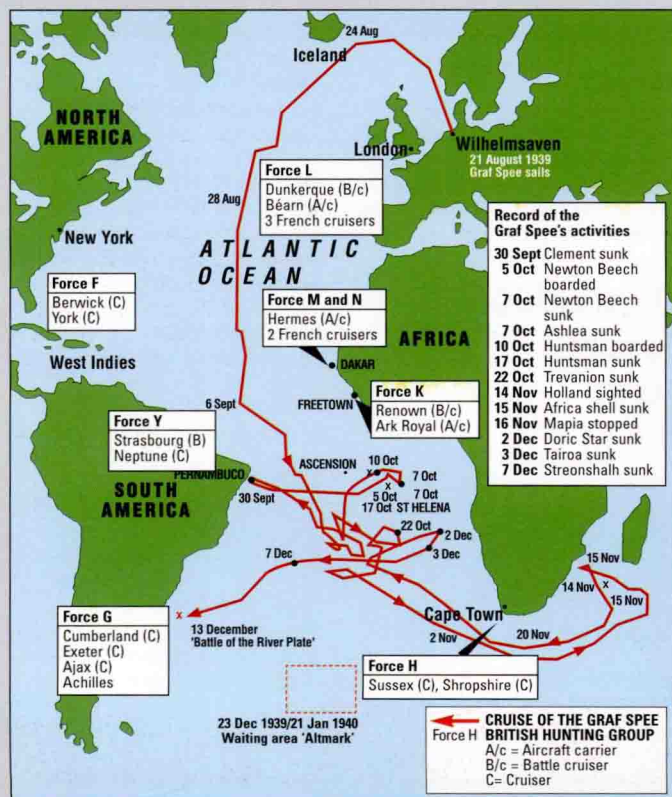
(150 miles) off the Uruguayan coast on 12 December and thoroughly briefed his captains regarding his intentions.

Sure enough, at 0608 on 13 December *Ajax* sighted the enemy, unexpectedly to the north-westward. Langsdorff was, in fact, loitering in expectation of intercepting a small convoy whose presence he suspected through papers taken from a further British ship, the *Streonshalh*, sunk on 7 December without any transmission. Backlit by the early dawn, Harwood's ships had been sighted by *Graf Spee* at 0530 and, taken to be the convoy, were already being approached.

Harwood was presented with a formidable adversary. Against him Langsdorff could deploy six 280mm (11in) guns in two triple turrets and eight 150mm (5.9in) weapons.

Within 150-200mm (8-6in) gun range, the German ship's 80mm (3.15in) vertical armour would prevent vital damage. Only in speed did the British have the advantage and this was used to good effect, the three cruisers working in two divisions. *Exeter* approached from the south while the two faster light cruisers worked around to the east; each division could thus spot the fall of

LANGSDORFF: TO CATCH AN OCEAN RAIDER



Captain Hans Langsdorff handled his ship with considerable skill, ranging across the South Atlantic and into the Indian Ocean and leaving the Allied navies completely confused. He sank only nine merchant vessels, but he did so without the loss of a single life and, in the process, tied down four enemy battleships, four battlecruisers, six aircraft carriers and more than twenty cruisers. He was handicapped by his ship having only one seaplane, the famously unreliable Arado Ar 96. This broke down for the final time on 11 December, so he could no longer see over the horizon just as a British cruiser squadron approached.