



# 1933

## January 30 – February 1

### Adolf Hitler becomes chancellor of Germany

President Paul von Hindenburg appoints Hitler chancellor of Germany by recommendation of his political advisers, who believe they can manipulate Hitler for their purposes. At first, only three of the eleven ministers in Hitler's government are Nazis. Over the course of the next year and half, Hitler takes over all mechanisms of governance and functions of state.

## February 27 – March 5

### Reichstag arson leads to state of emergency

On the evening of February 27, 1933, the Reichstag building goes up in flames. The Nazis exploit the torching of the Reichstag as the sign of an attempted Communist putsch (move to overthrow the government). This legitimizes their all-out war against the Communists. Hitler presents an emergency order that voids important basic civil rights. The number of crimes carrying the death penalty is increased. Police are given more power to detain and imprison suspects. The order— to be in effect until the end of the war— replaces constitutional rule with a perpetual state of emergency.

## March 5

### Reichstag elections: the Nazis gain 44 percent of the vote

The main reason for these special elections is Hitler's aim to attain total Nazis Party control of Germany—the Nazis hope they will get an absolute majority. Despite aggressive propaganda and the climate of terrorism they foster, the Nazi Party receives only 44 percent of the vote. Although this is an 11 percentage point increase from the November 1932 elections, Hitler still has to form a coalition government.

## March 22

### First concentration camp is established in Dachau, Germany

The Nazi regime establishes Dachau, the first concentration camp, near Munich. The first group of prisoners, opponents of the Nazi regime, consists mostly of Communists and Social Democrats. Ultimately Jews, members of the Sinti-Roma people, and homosexuals will be prisoners of the camp, which operates until the end of the war. Theodore Eicke is appointed commandant of the camp. He develops a violent institution that creates fear among the population and becomes an efficient tool to silence opponents of the regime.

## March 24

### The Nazis sponsor the Enabling Act

With only 44 percent of the vote in the March 5 election, Hitler seeks another way to establish a dictatorship. The Nazis sponsor the Enabling Act, a bill that allows Hitler's government to bypass the Reichstag for four years. To make sure it passes, the Nazis imprison Communists and push the Act through the Reichstag. Once passed, the democratic freedoms of the Weimar Republic are revoked, and political parties are dissolved. Hitler is on the road to establishing a complete totalitarian dictatorship.

## April 1

### The Nazis declare a boycott of all Jewish businesses in Germany

A one-day government sanctioned boycott of Jewish-owned businesses takes place throughout Germany, from major cities to small villages. Uniformed Nazis, some armed with rifles, station themselves in front of every Jewish-owned shop, business, or professional office and keep customers from entering. The boycott, the first nationwide action against German Jewry after the Nazi takeover, legitimizes anti-Jewish activity and gives it an official sanction. It is the beginning of a policy of removing Jews from all economic and business affairs and undermining their economic existence.

## April 7

### Civil Service Reform - Jews are barred from working in the civil service and are stripped of their equal rights

The Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service is designed to remove Jews from key positions in the community and the German administration. Jews may no longer work in civil service. Jewish WWI veterans and Jews whose fathers or sons were killed in WWI are exceptions.

## April 25

### School quota system limits the number of Jewish high school and university students in Germany

A new law sets a Jewish quota of 1.5 percent of high school and university enrollment, and stipulates a limit of 5 percent Jewish enrollment in any single school. Jews will be totally barred from German schools by 1938, and Jewish schools will be ordered closed in autumn 1941.

## May 6

### Persecution of Jewish homosexual advocate and researcher, Magnus Hirschfeld

Nazis raid the institute of Magnus Hirschfeld, a pioneering physician who is both Jewish and gay, as well as a fierce advocate for decriminalizing homosexuality. In 1933, Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin is looted and his research on LGBTQ people, medical research, and histories of the gay community are destroyed. Established in 1919, the institute researched sexual health, legislation, and lobbied to decriminalize homosexuality. Several days after the raid, the collection will be thrown into a bonfire of "un-German" books.

## May 10

### The Nazis burn thousands of anti-Nazi, Jewish-authored, and other books

Public book-burnings suppress free speech and ideas. They become a tactic supervised by Joseph Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda, which controls all aspects of cultural and intellectual life. Acts of book-burning, commonly carried out by university students, continue across Germany throughout the year.

## July 14

### Forced sterilization of German citizens with congenital disabilities begins

In July 1933, the Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring is put into effect. This law requires the forced sterilization of German citizens with hereditary illnesses such as "feeble-mindedness," schizophrenia, manic depression, epilepsy, hereditary blindness or deafness, serious physical deformities, and more. Between 200,000 and 350,000 individuals will be sterilized between 1933 and 1945.

## July 14

### Germany is proclaimed a one-party state

Once the Enabling Act is passed, the government no longer needs legislators' votes to pass laws. In fact, other parties have already been banned. On July 14, 1933, a one-party state is proclaimed in a statement that forbids the formation of any other party.

## October 14

### Germany quits League of Nations and disarmament talks

The Nazi regime's first foreign policy measure is to pull out of the League of Nations. This step is intended to release Germany from international controls over its rearmament.

## November 12

### The Nazi Party gets 92 percent of the vote in one-party elections

Because no other political parties are represented (since all had been dissolved and banned under the terms of the Enabling Act passed in March), the Nazi Party receives 92 percent of the vote. The remainders are "invalid" ballots. On this date, a separate vote passes on Hitler's decision to pull Germany out of the League of Nations.

# 1934

## January 26

### German-Polish non-aggression pact

Germany and Poland sign a 10-year non-aggression pact stating that neither will use force in order to settle disputes.

## June 30

### "The Night of the Long Knives"

The SA (*Sturmabteilung*, Storm Troopers), also known as "Brown Shirts," is the Nazi Party militia that helped Adolf Hitler rise to power in Germany, engaging in street fights with political enemies and terrorizing German citizens. Ernst Roehm, the commander of the SA, wants it to be incorporated into the German army. Hitler is afraid that Roehm will try to seize power and, accusing him and his associates of homosexuality, orders the liquidation of the SA and the murder of Roehm as well as other SA leaders. This purge is later known as "The Night of the Long Knives."

## August 2

### German President Hindenburg dies

German President Paul von Hindenburg dies on August 2, 1934, at the age of 86. After Hindenburg's death, Hitler merges the offices of chancellor and president to become the sole and unrivaled leader of Germany, to be known as the Fuehrer.

## September 6

### Gestapo compiles lists of homosexual men

A Gestapo division on homosexuals is set up, compiling "pink lists" from across Germany. These lists are names and addresses of suspected homosexuals given to authorities under great duress, through interrogation, pressure, and blackmail. "Pink lists" allowed authorities to locate, prosecute and incarcerate individuals suspected of homosexuality. The German police had been compiling lists of suspected homosexual men since 1900.

# 1935

## January 13

### Germany reclaims the Saar region

The Saar region was an area of Germany controlled by France following World War I. In an attempt to expand the Reich's borders, the German government holds an election where the local population votes in favor of living under German rule. This is the first territorial expansion of Nazi Germany after the Treaty of Versailles.

## March 16

### Military conscription in Germany begins

In violation of the Treaty of Versailles, Hitler enacts a new law which entitles Germany to have significantly more soldiers than was previously allowed.

## April 1

### Jehovah's Witnesses refuse military draft

Jehovah's Witness organizations are banned by the German government. Refusing to be drafted or perform military-related work when Germany reintroduces compulsory military service, they are arrested, tried, and incarcerated in prisons and concentration camps.

What are the Jehovah's Witnesses and why did the Nazis target them?

Jehovah's Witnesses organizations were founded in the United States in the 1870's, and sent to Germany to seek Christian converts in the 1890's. Perceived as largely unwilling to accept the authority of the state, and based on their strong opposition to war, Jehovah's Witnesses were seen as a "rival ideology" by the Nazi party, refusing to raise arms, "Heil Hitler", or vote in elections.

By 1939, an estimated 6,000 Jehovah's Witnesses will be detained in camps and prisons, with many refusing to sign declarations renouncing their faith. Historians later estimate the number of Jehovah's Witnesses who died in concentration camps and prisons as 1,000 German citizens and 400 from other countries.

## May 31

### Jewish people are no longer allowed to serve in the German armed forces

Contrary to the March 16 directive that service in the German army is compulsory, Jews are no longer allowed to serve in its ranks.

## September 1

### Paragraph 175 of the Criminal Code is amended to criminalize homosexuality

Paragraph 175 of the Criminal Code prohibiting homosexuality, originally from 1871, is amended to criminalize a broader range of relationships between men and include harsher sentencing. In 1936, Nazi leader Heinrich Himmler will create an office for Combating Homosexuality and Abortion. As Germany moves across Europe, laws criminalizing homosexuality in annexed territories will be imposed.

## September 15

### Nuremberg Laws enacted

Two anti-Jewish laws are enacted by the Reichstag. The laws, the Reich Citizenship Law and the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor, are adopted during a special meeting convened at the annual Nuremberg Rally of the Nazi Party, and are therefore referred to as the "Nuremberg Laws." Most notably, this antisemitic legislation strips Jews of German citizenship and bans marriages between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans.

## November 14 – 26

### Nuremberg Laws are expanded to include Roma and other groups

Nuremberg Laws are expanded to include Roma and other groups. The first supplemental decree of the Nuremberg Laws (November 14, 1935) prohibits marriage between people who might produce “racially suspect” offspring. A week later (November 26, 1935), the Minister of the Interior amends the Nuremberg Laws to include Roma, black people, or their offspring.

The Nazis consider the Roma a socio-racial “problem,” however their treatment of the Roma is inconsistent. In some cases, the Nazis subject those Roma who are nomadic to persecution and their fate is similar to that of the Jews, while Roma who had settled down and did not live a nomadic lifestyle are left alone and spared. However, in other cases the opposite happens, and in still other cases no distinctions are made. Of the 44,000 Roma who live in the Reich, thousands will be sent to concentration camps after the war begins. Others are concentrated in transit camps before being sent to ghettos. It is later estimated between 90,000-150,000 Roma are murdered throughout Europe during the war.

# 1936

## March 7

### The Germans enter the Rhineland

In violation of the Treaty of Versailles, the German army enters the Rhineland, the area along the River Rhine in western Germany, and takes over this region. Despite this act of aggression, European powers refrain from taking meaningful action against Germany.

## July 17

### The Spanish Civil War begins

Right-wing forces, known as the Nationalists –led by General Francisco Franco and other military generals– launch an uprising with the intent to overthrow the democratically elected Spanish Republic. Over the next three years of violent conflict, Italy and Germany will provide military aid to the Spanish Nationalists, using the conflict as testing grounds for new warfare methods and hoping to secure a potential ally in the right-wing leader and future dictator, General Franco.

## August 1

### The Summer Olympic Games begin in Berlin

In 1931, the International Olympic Committee designated Germany as host of the 1936 Games. However, when Adolf Hitler rose to power in 1933, it was unclear whether he would go ahead with the plan. Ultimately swayed by the opportunity to show off the “new” Germany to the world and use the Olympics for their propaganda value, Hitler agrees to host the games. Germany goes all out in preparation for the big event: a new stadium is built, Berlin is cleared of its antisemitic billboards, and overt anti-Jewish persecution is restrained. In addition, Roma are rounded up and held in a special camp away from the Games.

## September 9

### The Four Year Plan is unveiled

This plan is the Nazis’ economic program to prepare them for war, for which Hitler personally writes the memorandum. He sets forth two goals for war and stipulates a timetable for intensified rearmament. The goals are to give the *Wehrmacht* (the unified armed forces) operational capabilities within four years, and to enable the German economy to cope with wartime conditions. Hermann Goering, who is in charge of the plan, will direct the deportation of millions of people from the occupied territories to forced-labor camps in future compliance with the plan.

## October 25

### The Rome- Berlin Axis Agreement is signed between Italy and Germany based on political interests

In the first three years of Nazi rule, Italy and Germany avoided an alliance despite their ideological closeness, because Italy feared German territorial expansion and because of other political interests. However, Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935 derails its relations with the democracies and prompts reconciliation with Nazi Germany. This relationship becomes stronger when Italy and Germany both side with the Fascists in the Spanish Civil War. Although Mussolini does not initially identify with Germany's anti-Jewish racism, in view of Germany's growing strength, the Italian dictator eventually issues anti-Jewish decrees too.

## November 25

### Germany and Japan sign a military pact

By concluding the "Anti-Comintern Pact," directed against the Communist International and by implication the Soviet Union, Hitler also places further pressure on British leaders who are concerned about the escalating Japanese threat to British interests in the Far East. Hitler hopes that Britain will also reach terms with Japan, but the British government refuses. Italy will join the pact in November 1937.

# 1937

## March 21

### Pope Pius XI responds to German racist policies

In a written document, Pope Pius criticizes the Nazi government's hostility towards Catholic religious and cultural activities. Although Pope Pius disapproves of Nazi racial ideology, no reference to the plight of German Jews is made in this document.

## July 19

### Buchenwald concentration camp is established in Germany

One of the largest concentration camps in Germany is established. The initial inmates are mostly non-Jewish political prisoners and criminals. Following the *Kristallnacht Pogrom*, more and more Jews are imprisoned in the camp.

# 1938

## March 11 – 13

### The *Anschluss* – The Annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany

Germany annexes Austria to incorporate it as part of the "Third German Reich." Violence against Jews and desecration of Jewish property begins immediately. The following month in a referendum closely controlled by the Nazis, some 99 percent of the Austrian public will support unification with Germany.

## April 4

### Homosexual men sent to concentration camps

On this day, a directive is issued from Gestapo declaring that men convicted under Paragraph 175 are sent to concentration camps, intending to stop the homosexual "contagion." Between 1933 and 1945, an estimated 100,000 men will be arrested as homosexuals, of whom some 50,000 are officially sentenced. Police compile lists of suspected homosexuals after torturing and compelling gay men to identify others as homosexuals. Most of these men serve time in regular prisons, and an estimated 5,000 to 15,000 are sent to Nazi concentration camps. These numbers provide a rough estimate, as many gay men –after the war–

still fear imprisonment under existing anti-gay laws, and thus will be reticent to speak about their experiences.

Records report that homosexuals were among the most abused groups in the camps; they are treated harshly and are marked with pink triangles to signify homosexuality. As homosexuality was believed to be a “disease” that could be “cured” with hard work and humiliation, homosexual men are subject to beatings, and segregation from other prisoners in order to “prevent” homosexuality from spreading to other prisoners.

## June 14

### Jewish businesses have to register as Jewish

If an owner or partner in a business is defined as a Jew under the Nuremberg Laws, the company is considered “Jewish” and must be registered accordingly. This status makes it easier for Jews to be identified and banned from economic life and will spur the process of “Aryanization,” the confiscation of Jewish businesses and property.

## July 6

### Anti-Jewish economic policies restrict Jews’ access to many fields of activity

This new set of anti-Jewish regulations restricts Jews from working in many different fields, such as: bookkeeping, realty, money lending, marriage brokerage, tour-guiding, peddling, and any job outside of their residence.

## July 6 – 15

### The Evian Conference

Delegates from 32 countries meet in Evian, France, at a conference called by US President Franklin D. Roosevelt after Germany’s annexation of Austria. They meet in order to discuss the general refugee problem, which is really about Jewish refugees.

## August 17

### Compulsory middle names for Jews in Germany are required in order to identify them as Jews

A law is enacted that requires all Jews, except for those who have “typical” Jewish names, to take on new middle names: “Israel” for men and “Sarah” for women. The new legislation also prohibits Jews from giving their children any name from a list of “German” names.

## September 29

### The Munich Agreement: Great Britain and France accept German annexation of parts of Czechoslovakia

The leaders of four countries—Germany, France, Great Britain, and Italy—meet to discuss the future of the Sudetenland, a province of Czechoslovakia. After lengthy talks, primarily between Neville Chamberlain (Prime Minister of the UK) and Hitler, it is agreed that Germany may annex the Sudetenland. Czechoslovakia is not included in these negotiations.

## October 5

### Passports of German Jews are marked with the letter “J”

The passports of German and Austrian Jews are invalidated, and those who need a passport for emigration purposes are given one marked with the letter “J” (*Jude* – Jew).

In an effort to stop the flow of refugees coming into Switzerland, the Swiss police ask the German authorities to introduce a symbol so that they can identify Jews at border checkpoints. As a result, Jews are required to obtain new passports stamped with the letter “J”. The marking of Jews’ passports will make it even harder for them to find safe havens.

## October 28

### 17,000 Polish-born Jews are expelled from Germany to Poland; most are interned in Zbaszyn

The German authorities begin to carry out the brutal eviction of Jews with Polish citizenship— the first mass deportation of Jews. SS men drive them across the Polish border; most of them are concentrated in abandoned stables near the border town of Zbaszyn, Poland. The Jewish deportees spend months in the border area in limbo, without provisions or possessions.

## November 9 – 10

### *Kristallnacht Pogrom*

During the night of November 9, 1938, and continuing into the following day, there is a nationwide riot against Jews across the Third Reich (Germany, Austria, and the Sudetenland). More than 1,400 synagogues are torched; and approximately 30,000 Jewish men are arrested and sent to concentration camps. Official German reports state that 91 Jews are murdered, but the number is certainly much higher. Jewish-owned shops and businesses are plundered and destroyed. Nazi propaganda claims that *Kristallnacht* is a spontaneous outburst from the German public as a reaction to the assassination of Third Secretary, Ernst vom Rath, in the German Embassy in Paris by Herschel Grynszpan, a 17-year-old Polish Jewish refugee. However, in reality, the violence is planned and implemented by the highest echelons of the Nazi leadership. On November 9, the signal for the violence is given by Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels and is carried out by members of the Nazi regime. The Jewish community will later be forced to pay “compensation” for the extensive damage.

## November 10

### Italy adopts antisemitic racial laws

Italian racial laws forbid sexual relations and marriage between Jews and “Aryans,” and place other hardships on Jews that lead many to lose their livelihoods. Foreign Jews are deported and Jewish students and teachers are expelled from the Italian public school system.

## November 12

### Nazi leaders enact new laws to economically remove Jews from society

After the *Kristallnacht Pogrom*, German leaders take measures to economically remove Jews from the Third Reich by any possible means. This includes new laws handing Jewish businesses over to Germans, restricting Jewish doctors to only treat Jews, and forbidding Jews from practicing law or attending universities. In addition to these measures, the German government imposes a fine of 1 billion Reichsmarks on the Jewish community (for the murder of vom Rath) and establishes a Central Office for Jewish Emigration.

## November 15

### Jewish children are banned from public schools

Even before this official ban, most Jewish students had switched from public schools to Jewish schools due to the anti-Jewish climate and harassment inflicted by many non-Jewish teachers and students.

## December 2

### First Kindertransport arrives in Great Britain

With an easing of immigration restrictions for certain categories of Jewish refugees after the *Kristallnacht Pogrom*, Great Britain receives its first transport of some 200 Jewish children from Berlin. The last transport is on May 14, 1940, when the Dutch army surrenders to German forces. In total, the rescue operation brings approximately 10,000 children (7,500 who are Jewish) from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland to Great Britain.

# 1939

## March 15

### The Germans occupy Bohemia and Moravia

Germany moves in and occupies the Czech zone, known as Bohemia and Moravia. This area becomes part of the Reich and anti-Jewish actions soon follow—synagogues are torched and Jews are assaulted in the streets.

With Germany's encouragement, the Prime Minister of Slovakia announces his country's independence from the Republic of Czechoslovakia.

## March 28

### The civil war in Spain ends

General Franco and his Nationalist forces win the three-year civil war and establish a fascist government in Spain. Tens of thousands of political opponents are imprisoned or executed in the ensuing years. Though sympathetic to the Axis cause, General Franco opts to stay largely neutral during WWII.

## June 6

### The MS *St. Louis*, a ship with 936 Jewish refugees, is turned away by Cuba, the United States, and other countries

Toward the end of the 1930s, forcing Jews to leave Germany became an explicit objective of Nazi policy. As a result, German Jews become refugees expelled from their birthland and, for those who are able, seek to find ways out of the country. A German passenger ship, the MS *St. Louis*, carrying mostly Jewish refugees, is refused entry by the Cuban government, even though the Jewish passengers had paid for permits to enter Cuba. After many failed negotiations with the US and other countries, the ship is returned to Europe. Many of these passengers are later murdered during the Holocaust.

## August 18

### Beginning of the Euthanasia Program (T4 Program)

The Euthanasia Program (also known as the T4 Program) establishes gassing installations for adults and the development of questionnaires for medical professionals to report children under three who showed signs of a severe mental or physical disability. This questionnaire is circulated by the Reich Ministry of the Interior to physicians, nurses, and midwives.

Health authorities encourage parents of children with disabilities to admit their children to designated clinics in Germany and Austria. There, medical staff murders young charges by gassing, lethal overdoses of medication or starvation.

## August 23

### Germany and the Soviet Union sign a non-aggression pact

A secret agreement is made between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union (USSR) prior to World War II. It is signed by German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and Soviet Foreign Minister Viacheslav Molotov, giving the agreement the name by which it is known: the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The Pact allows Germany to invade Poland and includes a secret plan to partition Poland. After Germany's invasion of Poland a week later, the two countries divide Poland into the two previously-agreed upon zones.

## September 1

### Germany invades Poland, beginning World War II

On September 1, 1939, Germany invades Poland. The German *Wehrmacht* (the unified armed force) outnumbers the Polish forces three to one and has superior equipment. The invasion reveals the German fighting method for the first time— the *blitzkrieg*: cooperation among naval, air, and ground forces to attack and surround the enemy rapidly. In response to the invasion, France and Great Britain declare war on Germany on September 3; however, neither country takes immediate military measures on Poland's behalf.

## September 3

### Great Britain, France, India, Australia, Canada, South Africa, and New Zealand declare war on Germany

France and Britain demand that Germany immediately withdraw from Poland. When Hitler accuses Britain of encouraging the Polish provocation, Britain, France, India, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa declare war on Germany.

## September 17

### The Soviets invade Poland

The Soviet army enters the eastern part of Poland as established in the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement, signed on August 23.

## September 21

### Establishment of Jewish councils and the concentration of Jews into the larger cities of Poland

Reinhard Heydrich, chief of the Nazi Security Police, sends a directive to the heads of the operational groups of Security Police (*Einsatzgruppen*) in occupied Poland. This directive, known as the *Schnellbrief*, explains the procedures and directives to be invoked against the Jews in the Polish occupation zones. According to the *Schnellbrief*, Jews will be deported from the areas of northwestern Poland earmarked for annexation to the Reich, and the remainder will be concentrated in large towns situated near railroad junctions. Jewish councils will be established in these Polish towns to carry out the German authorities' orders, including providing German authorities with information about the Jewish population and their property.

## September 28

### Poland is divided between Germany and the Soviet Union

Within a few weeks, the German army defeats the Polish army and divide the country into three regions. The western and northern provinces, including the country's second largest city, Lodz, are annexed to Germany; eastern districts are annexed to the Soviet Union; and an enclave in central Poland is converted into the *Generalgouvernement* — a German-occupied zone that is not annexed to the Reich, whose political future remains undefined during the initial phase of the occupation. Approximately 1.8 million Jews are trapped in this German-occupied zone of Poland, and more than a million Polish Jews in the eastern areas of Poland come under Soviet rule.

## October 4

### The Warsaw (Poland) Jewish Council is established

A Jewish Council headed by Adam Czerniakow and comprising twenty-four additional Jewish members is established in Warsaw. Although Czerniakow was a member of the prewar executive council of the Jewish community, he is not well known among the Jews of Warsaw. The Jewish ghetto in Warsaw, the largest of all the ghettos in Europe, will be closed just over one year later.

## October 7

### Jewish “resettlement” in the Lublin district of Poland begins; plans are made to establish a Jewish “reservation”

The plan for resettling the Jews in the Lublin district and establishing a Jewish “reservation” is part of a more comprehensive Nazi program to reorganize Eastern Europe along “racial” lines and to physically separate and isolate Jews from the rest of the population. The program becomes operative in early October 1939. The plan represents a “territorial solution” to the Jewish question, which is later abandoned in favor of a “Final Solution”, which entails extermination of the Jews instead of physical separation.

## October 8

### The first ghetto is established in Piotrkow Trybunalski, Poland

The Piotrkow ghetto is the first known ghetto to be formed in occupied Poland. The town is taken over by the Nazis with brutal force and destruction.

## October 26

### Civil administration (*Generalgouvernement*) is established in Poland

The *Generalgouvernement* is divided into four districts: Warsaw, Krakow, Radom, and Lublin. The *Generalgouvernement* is to serve as a “racial dumping ground,” for an endless supply of forced labor (imposed on Jews between the ages 14-60), and ultimately, as a primary site for the mass extermination of European Jewry. With the establishment of the *Generalgouvernement*, Polish elite are also persecuted and murdered.

## November 23

### Jews in Poland are required to wear the Jewish Badge (Star of David)

Throughout occupied Poland, the Germans require Jews over the age of ten to wear white armbands with a blue Star of David. On November 23, Hans Frank, in one of his first edicts as governor-general of the *Generalgouvernement*, orders this practice to begin on December 1, 1939.

Marking Jews with a symbol worn on their clothing originated in the Middle Ages when Jews were forced to identify themselves by wearing a “badge of shame.” This practice was employed for centuries to mark the Jews, often as part of a series of measures designed to segregate and humiliate them.

## December 2

### The Nazis initiate use of gas vans to eliminate German patients with mental disabilities

In October 1939, the Nazis had begun to murder primarily mentally ill patients, patients with hereditary diseases, and people with disabilities as part of the “Euthanasia Project” in Germany. The name given to the project was a euphemism used to disguise the goal of the project. The murders, executed by shooting, gas, or lethal injection, were carried out by several hundred doctors, nurses, and administrators, as per an order from Hitler (which was backdated to September 1, 1939, the beginning of WWII). To prevent pangs of conscience, the murderers were supplied with alcohol, and received generous wages and extra days off.

On December 2, gas vans are introduced, and by the summer of 1941, more than 100,000 people will be murdered. Following public outcry, Hitler will officially order a halt to the murders in the summer of 1941, but they will continue in secret until the end of the war. By the end of the war, over 200,000 people are murdered as part of the “Euthanasia Project.” On December 2, gas vans are introduced, and by the summer of 1941, more than 100,000 people will be murdered. Following public outcry, Hitler will officially order a halt to the murders in the summer of 1941, but they will continue in secret until the end of the war. By the end of the war, over 200,000 people are murdered as part of the “Euthanasia Project.”

# 1940

## January 24

### Jewish property in the *Generalgouvernement* is registered

All large Polish and Jewish-owned businesses in the *Generalgouvernement* are placed under German control. Jews are ordered to register their property with local authorities, thereby steadily dispossessing them of their possessions and sources of livelihood.

## April 9

### Germany invades Denmark and Norway

German forces invade Denmark and Norway by sea, by land, and by air. Although the onslaught takes the Norwegians by total surprise, the Norwegian armed forces inflict heavy losses on the German navy. In Denmark, the invaders meet with almost no resistance. As a result of the successful invasions of these countries, Hitler abandons any hopes of striking a peace settlement with France and Great Britain.

## April 30

### The Lodz ghetto is sealed

A large, hermetically sealed ghetto is established in the Polish city of Lodz in spring 1940. 164,000 Jews are packed into four square kilometers, and eventually over 200,000 people will pass through the Lodz ghetto. Approximately 20 percent of the ghetto's population will die due to overcrowding, hunger, cold weather, and poor sanitation.

## May 10

### Germany invades Belgium and the Netherlands; Winston Churchill becomes Prime Minister of England

Germany invades Belgium and the Netherlands in order to threaten France. Belgium counterattacks fiercely, but with no success. On May 14, German forces will begin crossing from Belgium into France.

Neville Chamberlain, the Prime Minister of the UK, resigns and Winston Churchill takes over. Shortly after, an emergency law is passed to empower Churchill to prepare his country for war.

## May 26

### The Allies evacuate forces to England at Dunkirk

With the Dutch defeated, the Belgian front broken, and Germany's invasion of France underway, Allied forces numbering over 300,000 troops are forced to evacuate to Great Britain from the beaches of Dunkirk, France. Although the majority of the soldiers reach safety in this daring evacuation, a huge amount of weaponry and heavy artillery must be left behind. Churchill addresses the House of Commons, proclaiming: "We shall never surrender."

## June 14

### Germany occupies Paris

On May 14, 1940, the *Wehrmacht* attacked France on the ground. By June 14, the *Wehrmacht* marches into Paris. France will surrender to Nazi Germany on June 22 in the same railroad car in which Germany had surrendered to France 22 years previously in WWI—sweet revenge for Hitler.

## June 14

### The deportation of Polish political prisoners to Auschwitz concentration camp begins

Also on June 14, 1940, the first prisoners arrive at the new concentration camp of Auschwitz I, established near the Polish city of Oswiecim. Construction at Auschwitz had begun earlier in the spring of 1940. The first transport of prisoners consists of 728 Polish political prisoners; among them are 20 Polish Jews. Ultimately, Auschwitz will be the largest of the concentration camps established by the Germans, with three main camps and many sub-camps, including the murder center at Birkenau.

## July 10

### The Vichy France government is formed

France is divided into two main areas: a German-occupied zone (including Paris) and an unoccupied zone in most of the southern half of the country. This zone, known as Vichy, has a government that collaborates with the Germans. The Vichy government persecutes Jews. A small section of southeastern France is taken over by the Italians.

## August 13

### The Battle of Britain begins

After the fall of France, Hitler anticipates that Great Britain will reach for compromise; however, the British – under Churchill’s leadership – do not yield. Thus, the German air force (*Luftwaffe*) is instructed to initiate air raids against major British infrastructure as a prelude to an invasion of Great Britain. Over the next several weeks, the Germans engage against the British air force (RAF) in a bombing campaign that spreads from ports and strategic targets to civilian centers and British cities.

## September 7

### The German “Blitz” on England reaches a climax with massive air raids on British cities

As the German forces continue their ongoing air raids in the Battle of Britain, the British Royal Air Force (RAF) conducts counterattack bombing raids on Berlin, Germany. In retaliation, Hitler orders an intensive bombing campaign focused on London and other major British cities (which will eventually come to be known as the “Blitz”). Beginning September 7, London is hit with nightly attacks for 57 consecutive days, with 300 tons of bombs hitting the city within just this first day. Over 5,000 tons will hit the city within the first month alone.

## October 3

### The Vichy government establishes anti- Jewish legislation, the *Statut des Juifs*

The Vichy government’s support for Germany is expressed by its passing of anti-Jewish laws that identify Jews by a strict racial definition, ban Jews from public life, lead to firings from the civil service and military, and prohibit them from engaging in many professions and other economic activities.

## November 15

### The Warsaw ghetto is sealed

The largest ghetto in Poland is established in the heart of the Jewish quarter of Warsaw, where nearly half a million Jews will eventually be interned. Thousands of Jews are forced to leave their possessions outside the ghetto. The ghetto is terribly cramped with poor sanitation provisions, no greenery, and no trees. According to the Germans’ statistics, some 30 percent of Warsaw’s population is crammed into the 2.4 percent of the city’s area that is reserved for the ghetto.

# 1941

## March 20

### The Krakow ghetto in Poland is sealed

Krakow, a southern Polish city and the capital of the *Generalgouvernement*, saw its Jewish population grow from 56,000 to 70,000 in the first weeks of the war (in 1939). By the beginning of March 1940, a series of expulsions designed to make Krakow free of Jews leaves only about 12,000 Jews remaining in the city, and the German authorities establish a ghetto in the southern part of Krakow. On March 20, the ghetto is sealed with a wall and a barbed-wire fence. The remaining Krakow Jews are forced inside, as are several thousand Jews from nearby communities.

## April 6

### Germany invades Yugoslavia and Greece

Germany invades Yugoslavia and attacks its capital, Belgrade. Several thousand civilians in Belgrade are killed as a result of heavy bombardment during the invasion. Yugoslavia falls within the week, and the German invasion of Greece begins immediately after. The Axis victory over Greece before the end of April will allow for direct German access to the Mediterranean Sea, greater protection of the German-controlled Romanian oil fields, and a protected rear front when the invasion into the USSR begins.

While not originally part of Hitler's plan, Germany takes action in the Balkans largely as a result of two factors: Italy's failed invasion of Greece over the previous winter and the subsequent Greek counteroffensive threatening Italy's hold in the Balkan region; and an anti-German coup in Yugoslavia, causing the country to renege on a newly formed Axis alliance.

## April 24

### The Lublin ghetto is sealed

In the spring of 1941, the Germans order the establishment of a ghetto in Lublin, Poland. In preparation, they thin out the city's Jewish population by deporting about 15,000 Jews to nearby towns. The ghetto is sealed on April 24, housing over 34,000 Jews.

## June 6

### Wehrmacht issues the "Commissar Order"

Hitler considers the invasion of the USSR to be an opportunity to destroy Communism, which he loathes. For this reason, he instructs his military commanders to shoot any Commissars (political officers who accompanied the Red Army) who oppose German troops or are guilty of hostile acts as the troops advance. Others are to be left unharmed. In the rear areas, suspicious Commissars are to be handed over to the Einsatzgruppen or the SD (SS Security Service). This order is often seen as a warrant for killing Jews as well, since in Nazi ideology all Jews are Communists and all are considered hostile.

## June 22

### Operation Barbarossa: The German invasion of the Soviet Union

On June 22, three German armies – with 150 divisions and some three million men – invade the Soviet Union along a 1,800 mile front, taking the Soviets by surprise. Although isolated Soviet units offer stiff resistance, by mid-July the German forces will have advanced 400 miles into the Soviet interior.

## June 23

### The Einsatzgruppen begin mass killings in the Soviet Union

The day after the invasion of the Soviet Union begins, four special killing squads (Einsatzgruppen – A, B, C, and D) begin operating behind the army units that took part in the campaign. The squads are made up of SS, German police, and auxiliaries mobilized from the local population. In the first weeks of the invasion, Jewish men are targeted, but by the middle of August, the scope of the murders will be widened to include

women and children as well. The extension of the murder to all Jews will coincide with a visit by the SS chief, Reichsfuehrer Heinrich Himmler, to the Eastern Front.

## June 28

### The Romanian “Iron Guard” kills 1,500 Jews in Iasi, Romania

Romanian and German soldiers, members of the Romanian Special Intelligence Service, police, and masses of residents all take part in the murder and plunder of the Jews of Iasi, Romania. Thousands are killed in their homes and in the streets; additional thousands are arrested by patrols of Romanian and German soldiers and taken to police headquarters. Approximately 4,000 Jews, rounded up from all parts of town, are packed into freight cars and vans. These “death trains” are sealed and moved back and forth between railway stations. 2,650 Jews die of suffocation or thirst.

## June 30

### Germany occupies Lvov, Poland; 4,000 Jews are killed

Before the 160,000 Jews of Lvov are subjected to the policies of systematic mass murder that will evolve in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union, local Ukrainians (under the supervision of the SS) rampage among them. The locals blame the Jews for atrocities that had been carried out during the Soviet occupation. In a pogrom that occurs between June 29 and July 3, some 4,000 Jews are killed. Some 2,000 more Jews will be murdered in another *pogrom* that will peak in late July, that will come to be known as the “Petliura Days”.

## July 1

### Einsatzgruppe D begins operating in Bessarabia (Romania); 160,000 Jews are murdered

Bessarabia (a region in Eastern Europe that today covers parts of Moldova and Ukraine that had earlier been under Romanian rule) is given back to Romania by its German ally following the invasion of the Soviet Union. The Romanian dictator, Ion Antonescu, immediately calls for the “cleansing” of Bessarabia. The deputy Prime Minister, Mihai Antonescu, institutes a special military force to kill Jews. Along with German army units and an Einsatzgruppe unit, this force murders more than 160,000 Jews over the next two months. In August, the Romanian and German authorities will begin setting up ghettos and camps for the remaining Jews of the region.

## July 8

### The systematic murder of the Jews of Vilna (Lithuania) begins at Ponary, south of Vilna

Ponary, a forest located 6.2 miles south of Vilna, becomes a killing ground for some 75,000 people, almost all of them Jews, predominantly from Vilna. The victims are led to pits where they are shot by Germans and Lithuanians. At the end of September 1943, a group of 80 Jewish prisoners will be sent to Ponary as part of a German operation to destroy the evidence by burning the bodies of those who had been murdered.

## July 24

### The Kishinev (Moldova) ghetto is established

Over the course of the next two months, more than 2,000 Jews in the city of Kishinev are murdered, leaving just over 11,000 in the newly established ghetto. By the end of the year, almost all of the Jews will be deported across the Dniester River to a region called Transnistria. Along the route and afterwards, most will be murdered outright or will perish from inhuman conditions.

## July 31

### Hermann Goering orders Heydrich to plan the “Final Solution”

SS General Reinhard Heydrich, Chief of the Reich Security Main Office, is officially appointed by Goering to be in charge of preparing a “Final Solution to the Jewish Question”.

This does not yet signify that a policy of systematic mass murder of all Jews has been formulated, but it means that the Nazis are looking for a definitive “solution to the Jewish question,” and that primarily the SS will be responsible for carrying it out. Sometime in autumn 1941 or early 1942, the policy that will come

to be known as the “Final Solution,” the systematic mass murder of all Jews, will emerge.

## August 1

### 50,000 Jews are confined in the Bialystok (Poland) ghetto

Before World War II, 50,000 Jews lived in Bialystok (a city in northeastern Poland), representing more than half of the city’s population. Once established, the Bialystok ghetto quickly becomes an industrial center where textiles and weapons are manufactured for the German war effort. In August 1943, the Germans will order the final liquidation of the ghetto.

## August 24

### The “Second Phase” of the Euthanasia (T4) Program begins

According to T4 documentation, the “euthanasia” effort claimed the lives of 70,273 institutionalized mentally and physically disabled persons at the six gassing facilities between January 1940 and August 1941. Due to widespread public knowledge of the Euthanasia Program (T4), as well as public and private protests by German clergy, in August 1941 the initial phase of the Euthanasia (T4) Program is officially halted.

However, in August of 1942, German medical professionals will resume the second phase of the Euthanasia program. Decentralized and highly concealed, the program resumes along with cooperation with local authorities. The T4 program expands to include a wide range of victims including foreign laborers, German bombing victims, soldiers wounded, and the elderly. Continuing until the end of the war, in all phases, historians estimate it claimed 250,000 individual lives.

## September 3

### The first experimental gassings are conducted at Auschwitz

The first experimental gassings are conducted on sick prisoners and Russian POWs. Gas chambers in the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex will come to constitute the largest and most efficient extermination method employed by Nazi Germany. Gas chambers are built to look like shower rooms in order to confuse the victims. New arrivals at Birkenau are told that they are being sent to work, but first need to shower and be disinfected. They are led into the shower-like chambers, where they are quickly murdered with the highly poisonous Zyklon B gas.

## September 8

### The siege of Leningrad (Russia) begins

With the Finnish army blocking the north and the German forces surrounding the city to the south and southeast, the last roads into Leningrad (also known as St. Petersburg) are destroyed on this day – effectively blockading the city. The two million plus inhabitants of the city will suffer from severe starvation and German air bombardments for the next 872 days – for nearly two and a half years – in what will become known as one of the most brutal sieges in military history. Over a million people will perish during this siege.

## September 15

### Romanian authorities deport 150,000 Jews to Transnistria; approximately 90,000 die

Soon after Germany gives the newly conquered Transnistria region to its ally, Romania, the Romanian leader deports Jews from Romanian-held regions of Bessarabia and Bukovina to Transnistria. Many deportees die en route, and thousands are jammed into freight trains without food or water, causing many deaths. Others are marched to Transnistria by foot in the severe winter cold, many dying along the way. Those who reach Transnistria suffer from terrible conditions in the ghettos set up by the Romanian regime, leading many more to die.

## September 19

### German Jews are ordered to wear the Jewish Badge

All Jews aged six and over in the Third Reich are ordered to wear a yellow badge, referred to as a “Jewish star” (*Judenstern*) bearing the inscription “Jude.” In addition, persons not employed in enterprises of importance to the state economy are placed under restrictions of movement this month, and will be sent to the East over the next few months.

Jewish badges had already been ordered to be worn in other countries, such as occupied Poland and the occupied areas of the Soviet Union. The *Judenstern* order in the Reich and the areas annexed to it is but one of a series of anti-Jewish decrees, each representing a general escalation in severity of the Jewish policy being applied. Ultimately, the marking of the Jews in Germany will help facilitate the destruction of that community.

## September 29 – 30

### 33,771 Jews are murdered at Babi Yar near Kiev (Ukraine) by members of Einsatzgruppe C

After fierce fighting, German forces captured Kiev, Ukraine, on September 19. In house-to-house combat, many German soldiers were killed or wounded from booby traps. The placement of the traps is blamed on the Jews, so on September 28, the Jews are ordered to assemble the next morning—told it is for resettlement. Instead, they are marched to a ravine and, as they reach the site, are forced to surrender any valuables. They are then made to take off their clothes and move towards the edge of the ravine in groups of ten. As they reach the edge, they are shot by the Einsatzgruppen and German and Ukrainian police. After two days of shooting, 33,771 Jews are dead.

## October 1

### The first transport (of prisoners of war) reaches Majdanek (Poland) extermination camp

Between October 1941 and July 1944, some 150,000 people will be incarcerated at Majdanek concentration and extermination camp, located in a suburb of Lublin, Poland. Many prisoners die due to conditions in the camp – disease, starvation, exposure, overwork and exhaustion, or in beatings by camp guards. Others are murdered in mass killing actions – executed by shooting or in gas chambers. Ultimately, an estimated 80,000 prisoners will die or be murdered, among them 60,000 Jews.

## October 15

### Deportation of German and Austrian Jews to ghettos in the East begins

A mass deportation to Lodz, Poland, of 5,000 Austrian Jews and a similar number of Roma from the Burgenland area begins. Afterwards, another 5,000 Jews are banished to the Lodz ghetto and 3,000 to the German-occupied Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

## October 28

### Germans murder thousands of Kovno (Lithuania) Jews

After the German occupation began in late June, thousands of Jews were transferred to locations outside the city. These Jews were brutally abused and then shot by the Lithuanian guards. In all, within the first six weeks of the Germans’ arrival, some 10,000 Jews had already been murdered. Then, on October 28, the Germans stage a mass killing operation, during which over 9,000 Jews are taken to a location outside the city called the Ninth Fort and murdered.

## November 5 - 9

### Roma deported from Germany and Austria

Roma are deported from Germany and Austria to the Lodz ghetto. Along with Jews, they will be among the first to be killed in mobile gas vans at the Chelmno killing center in 1942 in German-occupied Poland.

## November 24

### A ghetto is established in Theresienstadt, near Prague (former Czechoslovakia)

In order to concentrate the Jewish populations from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (both formally part of Czechoslovakia), the Nazi regime builds Theresienstadt (in Czech, Terezin). The ghetto, located outside of Prague, will eventually imprison certain categories of Jews from Germany, Western Europe, Slovakia, and Hungary. Ultimately, the Germans will use Theresienstadt for propaganda purposes, presenting it as a “model ghetto”, all the while deporting Jews from there to be murdered. In actuality, Theresienstadt was a cross between a ghetto and a camp.

The overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and malnourishment led to the spread of diseases among the population of the ghetto. More than 155,000 Jews will pass through Theresienstadt from the time it is established until its liberation on May 8, 1945; 35,440 will perish in the ghetto and 88,000 will be deported to be murdered.

## November 30

### 30,000 Riga (Latvia) Jews are arrested and subsequently shot in the Rumbula Forest

Over the next nine days, some 38,000 Jews are executed at Rumbula (also called Rumbali), a woody area situated near a train station, five miles from Riga, Latvia. The victims include 28,000 Jews from the Riga ghetto and 10,000 from Germany, Austria, and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, who are brought to Riga by train.

## December 7

### The Japanese surprise attack the American Naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, then a US territory

After nearly a decade of worsening political tensions between the two countries, Japan launches a surprise attack on the bulk of the United States’ Pacific Naval force. Over 2,400 military personnel are killed; over half of the US military aircrafts and all of the US Pacific Fleets’ battleships present are disabled or destroyed. Previously-held US public opinion leaning towards isolationism is over – the United States is now compelled to join the war.

## December 7

### The German army issues “Night and Fog” order

This decree allows for resistance fighters captured by the Nazis to be secreted away to Germany where they will be tried by special courts. As an intimidation and fear tactic, those taken away are not heard from again– their families and communities are not to be told their fates. Although an exact number will never be determined, an estimated 7,000 or more will be taken through this order; most will die at concentration camps.

## December 8

### The United States enters World War II

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the “date which will live in infamy” per US President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the US public becomes predominantly unified towards entering the war. The United States declares war on Japan. Four days later, Germany and Italy – Axis allies of Japan – declare war on the United States.

## December 8

### Killing operations begin at Chelmno (Poland) extermination camp

Gassings at Chelmno, the first Nazi extermination camp, begin on this date. Chelmno is the first location outside of the Soviet Union where Jews are slaughtered en masse as part of the “Final Solution.” Chelmno is built to serve as the killing center for Jews in the Lodz ghetto (which is situated just 47 miles east of the camp) as well as those from the entire Warthegau region of occupied Poland. In all, some 170,000 people are murdered at Chelmno.

## December 31

### The Jewish underground in Vilna issues a partisan manifesto calling for resistance

Following the German occupation of Vilna in June of 1941 and a wave of murder operations that results in nearly 58,000 deaths, the Jewish underground there decides that the only response to their situation is active resistance against the Germans. This Jewish underground decides to issue a manifesto calling for resistance. The proclamation is written and delivered on New Year's Eve by Abba Kovner, a young Lithuanian Jew and activist leader. The Jewish underground will come to focus its efforts on creating an underground Jewish fighting force and encouraging other young Jews throughout Eastern Europe to stand up against Nazi Germany.

# 1942

## January 16

### Germans begin deportation of Jews from Lodz to Chelmno

Amidst much terror, the first Jews from the Lodz ghetto are deported and sent to the gas vans of the Chelmno extermination camp. This first wave of deportations begins on January 16 and continues through May of 1942. In this first wave, approximately 55,000 Jews are deported from Lodz to Chelmno. Within two days of their arrival, they are all murdered in gas vans.

Earlier, the German authorities forced the chairman of the Lodz Jewish council, Chaim Rumkowski, to prepare lists of candidates for deportation and to organize the assembly points at the edge of the ghetto. Rumkowski was not aware of the purpose of the deportation at that time. In the autumn of 1941, some 20,000 German Jews— 17,000 young Jews from the area of Lodz, and 5,000 Roma— were forced into the Lodz ghetto. They joined the 164,000 Jews from Lodz, who had been packed into the ghetto when it was sealed on April 30, 1940. At the end of December 1940, the Roma were deported from the ghetto to Chelmno in a prelude to the ensuing wave of deportations that began in mid-January 1942. By the end of these deportations, the Lodz ghetto will be “productivized;” that is, turned into a camp where the only legal inhabitants are forced laborers who manufacture for the Germans.

## January 20

### The Wannsee Conference takes place

A meeting convened by Reinhard Heydrich to coordinate the implementation of the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question” is held in Wannsee, a suburb of Berlin, Germany. Representatives of main branches of the German government, both military and political, attend the conference. The protocols of the meeting include a list of European countries and, according to Nazi racial ideology, the Jewish population of each country. The Wannsee Conference proves that the murder of the Jews is a governmental project of Nazi Germany.

## January 21

### The Jewish military underground is established in Vilna

At the end of 1941, after nearly two-thirds of the Jews of Vilna had been murdered, Zionist youth movement members began discussing an armed revolt and spreading the idea to other ghettos. On January 1, 1942, 150 members of the pioneering youth movements gathered and Abba Kovner, a leader of the Shomer Hatsair youth movement, read a manifesto calling for Jews to take up armed resistance.

As a result, on January 21, the United Partisan Organization (in Yiddish: *Fareynegte Partizaner Organizatsye*, or FPO) is created. The FPO includes Zionist youth and Jewish Communist youth, and its first commander is the Communist Yitzhak Wittenberg. Abba Kovner serves as its political head until the summer of 1943, when Wittenberg is betrayed by a fellow communist outside the ghetto, delivered to the Germans, and commits suicide; at that time, Kovner will become the FPO's commander.

## March 17

### Belzec extermination camp begins functioning

After the main installations of the Belzec extermination camp are constructed and tested, the program for mass extermination is launched. In experimental gassings conducted in late February, Jews from Lubycze Krolewska and the Jewish forced laborers who had built the camp for the Germans were murdered. Antitank trenches on the camp premises are given a new function: mass graves for the Jews who are murdered there. Some 80,000 Jews from Lublin, Lvov, and other ghettos in the vicinity are murdered in Belzec in the camp's first four weeks of operation.

Belzec is the prototype for two other extermination camps: Sobibor and Treblinka, both of which will begin extermination operations in 1942. Until it is dismantled in June 1943, at least half a million Jews will be murdered in the camp.

## May 3

### The first mass killing of Jews in Sobibor extermination camp occurs

Sobibor, an extermination camp named for the village of Sobibor nearby, is located in the Lublin district of Poland. The camp is established in March 1942, as part of Aktion Reinhard, and most of the Jews brought to Sobibor are murdered immediately upon arrival. During its operation, an estimated 250,000 Jews will be killed there.

## May 27

### The Czech underground assassinates Reinhard Heydrich

As head of the Reich Security Central Office, Heydrich oversaw the SS and Gestapo, and in the fall of 1941 was made Reich protector of Bohemia and Moravia. Under instructions of the absentee Czech government operating out of London, Czech agents attack Heydrich as he travels unprotected in a car. Heydrich will die of the injuries he sustains in this attack.

This assassination sets off a brutal and public retaliation by Nazi Germany. Under vague pretenses, the small provincial village of Lidice, Czechoslovakia, with roughly 500 inhabitants, is chosen as the target of vengeance. All 173 men of the village are shot, most of the women are sent to Ravensbruck concentration camp, and most of the children are murdered in the gas chambers of Chelmno. The village itself is razed to the ground; even the church and the cemetery are wiped out of existence.

## June 2

### The BBC announces 700,000 Jews have been killed in Poland

The BBC broadcasts the main contents of a report from the Jewish underground in Poland, including an estimate of 700,000 murdered Jews. However, the broadcast does not stress the conclusion of the report: that the program to murder every European Jew is already being carried out. The Allied governments do not respond to these efforts, but newspapers begin to carry the information with greater frequency.

The preliminary report, containing information about the murder of Jews, had been sent to London on May 11 by the Jewish underground in Poland. The report traced the path of the murder actions: town after town, district after district, month by month. It described the extermination center at Chelmno, including the gas vans, and estimated the number of Jews whom the Germans had murdered in Poland by May 1942 at 700,000 (the figure was much higher). The report stated that, in the absence of substantive actions to halt the murders, no European Jews would be alive at the end of the war. The report was forwarded to the media and to the political echelon, including the Polish government-in-exile in London.

## June 22

### Auschwitz-Birkenau receives the first deportation of Jews from Drancy transit camp

1,000 Jews are transported from the Drancy transit camp in France to Auschwitz-Birkenau. For the next two years, the Drancy camp will be the major deportation site for Jews in France. This is the first of 62 transports that will take deportees from Drancy to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where most of these Jews will be murdered in the gas chambers there. Just a few weeks later, on July 15, the first transport from the three

primary Dutch transit camps will carry approximately 2,000 Jews to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Less than a month later, deportations from Mechelen—the Belgian transit camp—will begin, with roughly 1,000 Jews forced from the camp each week throughout the next four months, also destined for Auschwitz-Birkenau.

## July 19

### Himmler orders elimination of all Jews in the *Generalgouvernement*

Heinrich Himmler issues a deadline for the completion of the “Final Solution” in the *Generalgouvernement* by the end of 1942. This order consigns the Jews of the *Generalgouvernement* to death. According to Himmler’s order, by December 31, 1942, “no persons of Jewish origin shall be present in the *Generalgouvernement*. [...] A total purge is needed and therefore must be carried out.” Every day until the end of 1942, on average 10,000 Jews will be murdered. The murder of the Jews of the *Generalgouvernement* ultimately continues well into 1944.

## July 22

### The mass deportation from the Warsaw ghetto to Treblinka extermination camp begins

The Germans round up residents of the ghetto by force, hunting for those who hide and killing those who try to escape. The first transports of Jews from the Warsaw ghetto reach Treblinka on July 23; from that day until September 21, some 265,000 Jews will be sent from Warsaw to their deaths in Treblinka. After this “Great Deportation,” roughly 60,000 Jews remain in the ghetto.

## July 28

### The Jewish Fighting Organization (Z.O.B.) is founded in Warsaw

The underground Jewish Fighting Organization (*Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa*, Z.O.B.) is established in the Warsaw ghetto soon after deportations to Treblinka begin. The Z.O.B. urges the Jews in the ghetto to resist with arms, but without much success, and does not really coalesce until after the major wave of deportations ends. The Z.O.B.—like most other ghetto undergrounds—does not focus on armed resistance to foster rescue; but rather, offers armed resistance as a sign of human dignity, for revenge, for posterity, and in the hope of perhaps breaking out of the confines of the ghetto to continue fighting.

## August 8

### The US delays information on a plan to annihilate Jews but delays publication to verify sources

Gerhart Riegner, a German-born Jew living in Switzerland and working for the World Jewish Congress during the war, receives trusted intelligence regarding Hitler’s systematic plan to annihilate all European Jewry. Riegner cables this information to contacts in the US and Britain in the hopes that it will spur a rescue operation. At this time, millions of the Jews in Europe are still alive.

Upon receiving the telegram, the US State Department demands verification of Hitler’s systematic plan. The State Department does not forward it onto Riegner’s US contact, Stephen Wise, the leader of the US Jewish World Congress and friend of US political elites, including the President. Thus, it isn’t until three weeks later that Wise receives the information from Riegner’s British recipient of the telegram. Even then, both governments refuse to act on what might only be rumor. Months will pass before this information is disseminated to the public; only in January 1944 will President Roosevelt take any political action (in the form of establishing the War Refugee Board).

## September 12

### The Battle of Stalingrad begins

A crucial aspect of Hitler’s plan to defeat the USSR is the capture of Stalingrad. As the Russian leader’s namesake city and a large industrial and transportation center, capturing Stalingrad would be a huge symbolic and strategic victory for Germany. On this day, the battle for Stalingrad begins; it becomes one of the most critical battles in the war. The eventual defeat of Axis forces at Stalingrad will be a major turning point in the war.

## November 8

### The Allies invade North Africa

The Allies launch Operation Torch, a three-pronged amphibious assault against Italian and German forces in North African territories. For the Allies, opening a second front of attack against the European Axis powers will hopefully ease pressures on the Eastern Front, where Germany's campaign against the USSR is unfolding. Additionally, gaining ground in North Africa gives the Allies access to oil fields and the Mediterranean Sea, and allows Britain to access material and resources from its Asian and African colonies.

## December 17

### The Allies condemn German mass murder

By mid-1942, there were already reports of the extermination process (including by the BBC on June 2). The Polish underground had managed to convey information to the West about what was happening in the extermination camps in Poland, and the Riegner telegram (which emphasized mass murder) had gone out to New York and London in August. On December 17, the Allies issue a joint statement denouncing the murder of the Jews and stating that those responsible will be brought to justice. By this time, the vast majority of Polish Jews are no longer alive. Despite the statement, the rescue of Jews in danger does not become a priority of the Allies.

# 1943

## January 18

### Jews launch an armed resistance to deportations from the Warsaw ghetto

German forces enter the Warsaw ghetto to arrest and deport Jews. To their astonishment, young Jews offer armed resistance and drive the German forces out of the ghetto. Over the next four days, armed resistance continues as the Germans seek to round up Jews. On the fourth day, having only managed to seize between five and six thousand Jews, the Germans withdraw from the ghetto.

## February 2

### The German army surrenders at Stalingrad

After six and a half months of fighting, the remains of the German force sent to take Stalingrad surrender. Throughout the long and brutal winter campaign, Hitler lost roughly 240,000 of his best fighting forces, with as many succumbing to illness, starvation, and freezing temperatures as to the battle itself. This victory of the Soviet armed forces over the Germans in Stalingrad is considered a turning point in World War II. Over the next two years, the Soviet Union will take back lands which were occupied by Germany.

## February 26

### The first transport of Sinti- Roma reaches Auschwitz- Birkenau

A special camp for Sinti-Roma is established in Birkenau. Organized in the form of a family camp, it receives mostly Sinti-Roma from other concentration camps and smaller numbers from elsewhere in the Reich. Among them are veterans of the German *Wehrmacht* (the unified armed forces); some arrive in Auschwitz in uniform and with citations in hand. Some 20,000 Sinti-Roma are interned in the camp; few will survive.

## April 19

### The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising begins

The final liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto begins this day, on the eve of the Jewish holiday of Passover. The deportation does not come as a surprise to the Jews in the ghetto. The main ghetto, with its population of 30,000 Jews, is deserted—most of the Jewish population resists by waiting in bunkers and hiding places. The Germans amass a military force to carry it out, but do not expect to engage in a confrontation that includes street battles. German military forces entering the ghetto encounter armed resistance.

Jewish resistance fighters ambush the Germans and fight them in the streets for three days. Despite their lack of arms, the Jewish resistance fights desperately and heroically. However, their small cache of weapons is no match for the Germans. The Germans then begin to torch the ghetto, street by street. General Jurgen Stroop, who was brought in to suppress the uprising, reported on May 16 that the uprising had been put down. However, small pockets of fighters continue to resist for months afterwards.

This uprising, by a small group of untrained fighters, many in their teens, lasts longer than the battle for Poland fought by the Polish army. It is the first uprising in all of occupied Europe and becomes a symbol of resistance.

## April 19

### The Bermuda Conference convenes

Convened by the United States and Great Britain as a result of public pressure, this conference aims to discuss the issue of wartime refugees. However, its organizers insist that Jewish refugees not be mentioned, and neither government is willing to discuss the “Final Solution.” Nothing is accomplished, and the Bermuda Conference does not save a single Jew.

## July 10

### The Allies invade Sicily

Having successfully pushed German and Italian forces back from North Africa, the Allies launch an invasion on the Italian island of Sicily— as Winston Churchill describes, striking at the “soft underbelly” of Axis- controlled Europe. Two weeks after the invasion of Sicily begins, Mussolini is deposed and arrested by his own people, but later reinstated. Over the next several weeks, the Axis forces lose ground on the island, ultimately executing a withdrawal to the Italian mainland. Germany successfully saves roughly 100,000 troops in the retreat, along with most of its valuable arms and equipment needed to continue the fight on the European mainland.

## August 2

### The uprising at Treblinka begins

An underground resistance that had coalesced at the Treblinka extermination camp begins an uprising on this date. Members of the underground remove and distribute weapons from the German arsenal according to a prearranged plan. However, the plan is disrupted, and the uprising occurs before weapons can be fully distributed. Members of the underground open fire on the SS men and torch most of the camp. Masses of prisoners rush the fences. Guards open fire on them from the watchtowers. Most of the escapees are shot and killed near the fence; others manage to break out but are caught and shot by German reinforcements that have been rushed to the area. Approximately 70 escapees will survive.

## September 1

### The Vilna underground uprising fails

As the German and local forces enter the ghetto to gather Jews for deportation, the FPO (“United Partisan Organization,” the ghetto’s underground resistance) calls for the inhabitants to strike back. The Jewish underground opens fire on the German forces; however, the ghetto inhabitants do not join in. Lacking the manpower for a successful uprising, the FPO evacuates the ghetto, using sewers, and flees to the forests nearby. Here they will be able to join forces with partisans and continue the fight.

Encouraged by news from earlier deportees that they had been sent to labor camps, the leader of the Jewish Council, Jacob Gens, cooperates with the Germans. Nonetheless, on September 14, 1943, Gens will be arrested and executed shortly thereafter. On September 23, 1943, the Germans will begin the liquidation of the Vilna ghetto in retaliation for the uprising.

## September 23

### The Vilna ghetto is liquidated

As a result of the uprising that took place on September 1, the Germans launch a liquidation of the ghetto. Prior to leaving the ghetto, the FPO had urged the inhabitants not to report for deportation and to fight back; the inhabitants ignore the call and the entire quota of Jews that the Germans had demanded for the deportation is delivered. In the final liquidation, the remaining Jews are either transported to concentration camps in Estonia and Latvia, sent to the Sobibor extermination camp (where more than 4,000 children, women, and the elderly will be murdered), or taken to Ponary and murdered there. Groups of fighters from the United Partisan Organization (FPO) escape to the surrounding forests and formed Jewish partisan brigades.

## October 1 - 2

### Danish Jews are rescued

When reports regarding the planned deportation of Danish Jews are leaked, the information evokes a spontaneous response. The Danish resistance warns the Jews, helps them go into hiding, and moves them to the coast where, with the assistance of Danish fishermen, within three weeks, 7,200 Jews and another 700 non-Jewish relatives are taken to neutral Sweden. The Danish police not only refrain from collaborating with the Germans, but help the Jews flee. Nevertheless, about 500 Jewish men, women, and children are captured and deported to Theresienstadt. The Danish population and leadership defend them vigorously, send them food parcels, and have the Danish Foreign Ministry bombard the Germans with warnings. The ministry also puts forward a demand that a Danish delegation be allowed to visit the internees. These Jews are not transported from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz, though some do perish in Theresienstadt due to the living conditions.

## October 14

### The uprising at Sobibor begins

In summer 1943, Jewish prisoners organized an underground group, led by Leon Feldhendler. Their plan was to arrange an uprising and mass escape from Sobibor. At the end of September, Soviet Jewish prisoners of war were brought to Sobibor; among them was Alexander Pechersky. Pechersky was brought into the underground group and made its commander, and Feldhendler his second-in-command. The group's plan was to kill the SS soldiers, take their weapons, and fight their way out of the camp. During the uprising, the prisoners manage to kill eleven SS men and several Ukrainian guards. Approximately 300 prisoners manage to escape, but most of them are chased down and killed. Those prisoners who do not join the escape are also killed. About 50 of the escapees will survive the war.

## November 3

### Germans launch Operation Harvest Festival (*Erntefest*)

After the prisoners' rebellions at Treblinka and Sobibor make the Germans fearful of further uprisings, Heinrich Himmler orders the liquidation of the Lublin ghetto and the Jewish forced labor camps in the Lublin district. *Aktion Erntefest* begins, in which 43,000 Jews are murdered by shooting them into pits at the camps of Majdanek, Poniatowa, and Trawniki. This will come to be counted among the highest one-day death tolls in the Holocaust.

# 1944

## January 26

### The War Refugee Board is established

As a result of a special inquiry initiated by Secretary of the US Treasury Henry Morgenthau, which showed that the State Department had been systematically sabotaging the rescue effort, President Franklin D. Roosevelt decides to create the War Refugee Board. The Board is instructed to act to rescue and assist the victims. Theoretically, it is given significant powers and is promised assistance from all Administration agencies. Practically, however, by the time of its creation most of European Jewry has already been murdered and, given the course of the war, Americans will remain far from the [European Refugee Board](#) for

many months after its creation.

The Board will be put to its first real test when the Nazis invade Hungary in March of 1944, putting the last remaining large Jewish community at risk. It will be instrumental in fostering the rescue activities that develop there.

## March 19

### German troops occupy Hungary

In October of 1940, Hungary joined Germany, Italy, and Japan in the Axis alliance. However, after Hungary's crushing defeat at Voronezh on the Stalingrad line, the Regent of Hungary, Miklos Horthy, began trying to back out of the alliance. In response to this, Hitler sends German troops to invade Hungary, to try to keep the country loyal by force. Hungary is the very last country to be occupied by Nazi Germany. Despite the occupation, Hungarian government institutions will remain intact.

## March 24

### President Roosevelt warns Hungary to refrain from anti-Jewish measures

On this date, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt condemns the Nazis and their accomplices for their despicable crimes during the war, but also warns the Hungarians to refrain from any atrocities against the Jews. Six days later, the British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden will issue a similar warning. Despite these warnings, Hungary will pass anti-Jewish decrees in great haste.

## April 16

### Hungarian government registers Jews and confiscates their property

In cooperation with the Nazis, Hungarian authorities isolate Jewish populations, restricting their movement and confiscating their telephones and radios. Jewish councils are established throughout Hungary, and Jews are forced to wear the Jewish badge for easy identification. Jewish property and businesses are seized, and from mid to late April, the Jews of Hungary are forced into ghettos. These ghettos will be short-lived; after just a few weeks, the Jews of each ghetto will be put on trains and deported.

## May 15

### Mass deportations of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz-Birkenau begin

Over the course of just 56 days, between May 15 and July 9, about 437,000 Hungarian Jews are deported, mainly to Auschwitz. Most are gassed on arrival. Those not gassed are taken into the camp to perform forced labor, and many are then sent from Auschwitz to other labor camps during the following months. Their fate will be that of the last prisoners in Nazi camps—many will be worked to death, others will die during the period of the death marches, and some will survive their inhuman ordeal.

## June 6

### D-Day (Invasion of Normandy)

Over 150,000 Allied soldiers land on the shores of Normandy in northwestern France in the biggest amphibious assault in history. The Allies suffer some 10,000 casualties, and with the help of subsequent landings over the next days, weeks, and months, will begin to retake France and then move onward toward Germany.

## June 23

### The Red Cross visits Theresienstadt

With the deportation of hundreds of Danish Jews to Theresienstadt months before, the leaders of Denmark insisted that Germany allow the Danish and International Red Cross to see the conditions in which they are living. After several months of stalling, the SS finally consents, using the visit as a propaganda tool to deceive the public within the Reich and throughout the world. In the months before the visit, over 7,000 inhabitants of Theresienstadt are sent to Auschwitz to decrease the overpopulated look of the ghetto, while the rest are forced to work to beautify it, building a fake cafe, stores, bank, kindergartens, and school, and

planting flower gardens in an elaborate hoax. SS officials make a propaganda film portraying life in Theresienstadt as idyllic and comfortable. The committee arrives on this date. The visit was a success—the Red Cross committee was completely fooled. After the visit, most who had participated in the film, as well as others, are sent to Auschwitz.

## July 20

### An attempt to assassinate Hitler fails

The Allies' landing in France and the Soviets' rapid progress on the eastern front prompt a group of Germans to conspire against Hitler. The anti-Hitler conspirators recruit Lt.-Col. Count Klaus von Stauffenberg, who plots the coup and attempts to kill Hitler personally, placing a suitcase containing a time bomb under a table during a meeting with Hitler. Though four people are killed and 20 wounded, Hitler is not seriously injured. Several conspirators, including Stauffenberg, are caught and shot at once; the others are given an opportunity to commit suicide and spare their families.

## July 25

### The Soviet Army liberates Majdanek

As the Soviet Army approaches from the east, the Germans remove nearly 1,000 prisoners from Majdanek; half of them are sent to Auschwitz. Before abandoning the camp, the Germans destroy documents and set the crematorium ablaze. However, in their haste to withdraw, the Germans do not murder all the remaining prisoners, and leave the gas chambers and most of the prisoners' barracks intact. Majdanek is the first extermination camp to be liberated by the Allies. Soviet forces find some 2,500 survivors. Shocked by what they find and understanding its propaganda significance, the Soviet forces document the camp. Later, they will conduct a trial against the German staff.

## August 7

### The liquidation of the Lodz ghetto begins

The Germans commence the liquidation of the last ghetto in Eastern Europe, deporting the 74,000 Jews who have survived ghetto conditions and earlier waves of deportations. Some 90% of the deported Jews are murdered. In the former ghetto itself, only a few hundred Jews manage to hide successfully. The head of the Jewish Council in Lodz, Chaim Rumkowski, and his family are not spared—they will be deported to Auschwitz on August 30 and murdered; Lodz will be liberated by the Soviet Army on January 19, 1945.

## September 20

### Churchill announces formation of Jewish Brigade

Though Jewish men had been fighting in the British Army for some time, it isn't until this day that a full Jewish Brigade of several thousand soldiers is allowed to form, flying the Zionist flag as their standard and wearing the yellow star as their insignia—particularly significant since Jews had been forced to wear the yellow star in order to identify, isolate, and shame them. This brigade is composed primarily of Jews from British Mandate Palestine, and it fights in the 1945 Allied spring offensive. In the aftermath of the war, it coordinates efforts to locate, assist, and relocate Holocaust survivors to Palestine.

## October 3

### The Polish uprising in Warsaw is crushed

Beginning in August, the Polish Home Army stages a revolt in Warsaw, fighting in the streets of the Polish capital as the Soviet army draws closer. While the army successfully gains control of the city within the first few days of insurrection, Soviet support never materializes, and the arrival of the German reinforcements forces them back. On this day, after 63 days of fighting, the Polish Home Army surrenders; approximately 166,000 people have been killed throughout the two-month uprising and thousands of Polish citizens are sent to concentration camps.

## October 7

### The *Sonderkommando* uprising at Auschwitz- Birkenau occurs

The *Sonderkommando* was a special unit of Jewish forced laborers that worked in the extermination camps in the crematoria, incinerating the bodies of murder victims. On this date, the *Sonderkommando* in Auschwitz-Birkenau stage a revolt, managing to burn down one of the crematoria and kill some of their German guards. All these prisoners are caught and killed. However, some had authored diaries that are later found in the ruins of the crematoria. The diaries describe the daily anguish of being in constant contact with murder and beg the world to understand how the *Sonderkommando* prisoners had not willingly done their jobs but had been forced by the Nazis to participate in the extermination process.

## November 25

### Himmler orders gassings to stop at Auschwitz- Birkenau

The last gassings in Auschwitz take place in early November. Shortly afterwards, the gassings are halted by direct order of Heinrich Himmler. Over the next few weeks, the gas chambers are dismantled for relocation to the Gross-Rosen camp. Special *Sonderkommando* units are ordered to clean out the outdoor pits where bodies were burned during the spring and summer of 1944, when so many thousands of Hungarian Jews were murdered so quickly that the crematoria were not able to cope. The *Sonderkommando* fill the pits with human ash from the crematoria, cover them up with soil, and plant the area with grass.

## December 16

### The Battle of the Bulge

Having successfully invaded northern France on D-Day earlier this summer, the Allied forces spend the autumn months traversing northern France into Belgium and, ultimately, towards Germany. In a last counteroffensive of the war, on December 16, the German *Wehrmacht* (the unified armed forces) launches an attack against the Allied forces in the Ardennes Forest, successfully driving a wedge 50 miles deep into the US Army's bulging front line. However, after a month of bitter fighting and at great cost, the Germans are forced back, their counteroffensive failed.

# 1945

## January 17

### The Soviets conquer half of Budapest

Once the Germans toppled the Hungarian government in October 1944, they gave power to Ferenc Szalasi and the fascist Arrow Cross Party. The Arrow Cross introduces a reign of terror in Budapest. Some 15,000 Jews were killed in Budapest itself, shot on the banks of the Danube River and then thrown in. Roughly 50,000 others were forced on death marches to the Austrian border. In December, during the Soviet siege of the city, 70,000 Jews were forced into a ghetto, where thousands died of cold, disease, and starvation. About 35,000 other Jews found refuge in what became known as the International Ghetto.

Pest, half of the city of Budapest, is liberated on this date. Buda, the remaining half of the city, is liberated on February 12. There is no accurate data on the number of Jews who survived in the city, but it is estimated that over 100,000 live to see Soviet forces take the city. Prior to the liberation, tens of thousands of Budapest Jews were aided by members of the Relief and Rescue Committee and other Jewish activists, especially Zionist youth movement members, who forged protective identity documents and provided them with food. These Jews worked together with foreign diplomats, such as the Swedish Raoul Wallenberg, who worked through the Swedish government with the newly created War Refugee Board, the Swiss Carl Lutz, and others who provided many Jews with protection.

## January 17

### The Germans begin “Death March” from Auschwitz- Birkenau

With the Soviet forces growing nearer, the Germans opt to abandon the Auschwitz complex, taking close to 60,000 prisoners on a forced march. Those who cannot keep up are killed, and close to 15,000 die during the marches from Auschwitz. The Nazis conduct many such “death marches,” forced marches of prisoners over long distances, in under unbearable conditions, during which the prisoners are abused by their accompanying guards. Most of these death marches occur near the war’s end, taking camp inmates deeper into the German heartland.

## January 27

### The Soviets liberate Auschwitz- Birkenau

Owing to the death marches which began on January 17, soldiers find only 7,650 barely living prisoners throughout the entire camp complex. These inmates, mostly too sick to march toward Germany, were left behind when the camp was abandoned ten days earlier. In all, over 1.1 million people were murdered in Auschwitz, approximately one million of whom were Jews. The Soviets also find storage facilities brimming with 350,000 men’s suits, 837,000 women’s garments, tens of thousands of pairs of shoes, 7.7 tons of human hair, packed and ready for shipment, and many other items.

## April 11

### United States Army liberates Buchenwald

In 1945, the American army, led by General Dwight D. Eisenhower, liberates tens of thousands of prisoners from concentration and forced labor camps. On this date, the army liberates the Buchenwald camp. Eisenhower personally visits several newly liberated camps, and orders that as many American soldiers as possible visit the camps to see the remnants of the Nazis’ crimes with their own eyes. Repeatedly, Eisenhower reiterates to the public his feelings of shock and loathing regarding the Nazis’ genocidal activities.

## April 12

### President Roosevelt dies

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the 32nd president of the United States, dies of a stroke. He is succeeded by his Vice President, Harry Truman. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill eulogizes President Roosevelt as “the greatest American friend we have ever known and the greatest champion of freedom who has ever brought help and comfort from the new world to the old.” In Moscow, the streets fill with sobbing men and women. Goebbels, in contrast, congratulates Hitler in delight.

## April 15

### British forces liberate Bergen-Belsen concentration camp

The British soldiers are horror-stricken at what they find upon liberation. Although some 60,000 prisoners are still alive, most of them are seriously ill. Alongside them are thousands of unburied corpses, strewn in every direction, and vast numbers of emaciated bodies in mass graves and piles. In the following weeks, about 10,000 additional prisoners will die. The British forces begin to treat and rehabilitate the rest of the survivors; they also burn down the camp for fear of the spread of contagious diseases.

## April 28

### Mussolini is shot

At the time of the Allied invasion of Sicily, Mussolini was deposed. Soon thereafter, rescued from prison by his German partners, he is reinstated as head of a puppet regime in northern, German-occupied Italy. As the Allied advance progresses across Italy, and the Germans are forced back throughout 1944 and into early 1945, Mussolini catches word of an assassination attempt being planned against him. He attempts to flee into the mountains, but is recognized, captured, and shot alongside his mistress on April 28, 1945. Their bodies are taken to Milan, where they are put on display for a cheering Italian mob.

## April 30

### Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun commit suicide

Hitler hides in his underground bunker in the Reich Chancellery as the Battle for Berlin rages overhead. On April 29, he marries his lover, Eva Braun, and writes his personal and political will, in which he delivers his last tirade against “international Jewry.” At 3:30 in the afternoon on April 30, about 15 minutes after Eva Braun takes a cyanide capsule, Hitler, dressed in a new Nazi uniform, commits suicide as well. According to prior instructions, the two bodies are set afire by assistants. Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels and his wife also take their own lives after killing their six children.

## May 2

### The Soviets occupy Berlin

For just over two weeks, the Battle of Berlin continues brutally. The Soviets, having arrived first, launch artillery assaults onto the city, which has already suffered brutal bombings throughout the war. Heavy fighting occurs within the city and the surrounding suburbs until, finally, on May 2, the Reichstag building falls to the Soviets. The German army will officially surrender approximately a week later. Roughly 250,000 people are killed in these last weeks of the war.

## May 7

### Germany surrenders to the Allies

The German High Command surrenders to the Allies unconditionally on this date. General Alfred Jodl, representing Germany, signs the letter of surrender in the war room of the Allied headquarters in Reims, France. Two days later, the general surrender will be formally ratified in Berlin, this time with the Soviets, as Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel signs an identical document for General Georgi Zhukov. This marks the official end of Nazi Germany’s war with the Allies.

## May 8

### V-E (Victory in Europe) Day

On this day, the end of the war in Europe is declared by Prime Minister Churchill and President Truman. The celebratory response to this news is eruptions of boundless joy, with people numbering into the tens of thousands flowing into the streets of London and into the boulevards of New York. The following day, Stalin declares the war has ended; for the lands of Eastern Europe, V-E Day is May 9.

Even after the liberation of Europe and the end of World War II, tens of thousands of Jewish survivors will remain in concentration camps and in hiding. For many of the survivors, liberation will prove to be an extremely painful experience. The transition from life under a reign of terror, brutality, and starvation to a new “normal” situation will be frequently traumatic. During the first weeks of liberation, tens of thousands of survivors will die from epidemics, exhaustion, and their inability to digest many foods. During the initial period following liberation, a great number of the survivors will attempt to return to their original homes and communities. The vast majority, however, will not be able to find any survivors from their families, and many will encounter manifestations of hostility and violence.

## July 16

### The Potsdam Conference

The “Big Three”—the USSR, the United States, and Great Britain— meet to decide the fate of the recently defeated Germany. Topics of discussion include the future administration of Germany, determination of borders for recently occupied countries, reparations due, the USSR’s role in Eastern Europe moving forward, and the state of war in Japan. Peace treaties are to be drafted by a Council of Foreign Ministers at a later date. It is here that the Allies demand the unconditional surrender of Japan, the last standing Axis power; Japan refuses to surrender.

## August 6 – 9

### The United States drops atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki

The first atomic bomb ever used against a civilian population is dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, on August 6. The city is chosen because it was a major port and a manufacturing center for aircraft and synthetic fuel. The detonation kills 78,150 people and wounds 64,000. The downtown area is destroyed; tens of thousands are left homeless. On August 9, a second bomb will be dropped on Nagasaki, killing 40,000 and wounding 25,000.

## August 15

### V- J (Victory over Japan) Day

In the wake of the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Imperial Japan announces its surrender, bringing an end to World War II. The Emperor of Japan makes the announcement over public radio, marking the first time in history that the Japanese people hear the Emperor's voice. A formal surrender ceremony will be held aboard the battleship USS *Missouri* on September 2, where the official documents of surrender will be signed.

## September 20

### Paragraph 175 – criminalizing homosexuality - remains in effect

Following the end of the war, the Allied Control Council for post-World War II Germany revokes many Nazi era laws. These laws included any German enactments that could discriminate against any individual based on their race, nationality, religion, or political affiliation. However, the 1935 revision of Paragraph 175—the law criminalizing homosexuality—remains in effect.

Until 1969, some members of the LGBTQ community will be forced to serve out their terms of imprisonment, regardless of the time spent in concentration camps. In 1969, West Germany will decriminalize homosexual relations between men over age 21; however, they will be denied compensation as victims of National Socialism. In 1994, Germany will abolish Paragraph 175 and issue pardons to those convicted under this statute during the Nazi era.

## November 20

### The Nuremberg Trials begin

After the end of WWII and the surrender of Nazi Germany, an International Military Tribunal composed of judges from the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and France put 22 senior Nazis on trial in Nuremberg for crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. Eleven subsequent trials will be held in Nuremberg between 1946 and 1949.

The Nuremberg Trials are the first trials in history meant to administer punishment by means of proper jurisprudence, including adequate defense for the accused, and not by executions or the summary verdicts of lightning trials. The court will declare that the following of superior orders is not justification for the perpetration of a crime. In addition, the tribunal found that participating in a criminal organization, such as the Gestapo or the SS, was a crime against humanity, and thus declared the Nazi Party leadership, the SS, the SA, and the Gestapo to be criminal organizations.

In the rulings, 12 defendants will be sentenced to death.