

🇬🇧Neville Chamberlain



Arthur Neville Chamberlain was born in Birmingham, England, on March 18, 1869.

Neville Chamberlain was Prime Minister of Great Britain in September 1939 at the start of World War II. In May 1940, after the disastrous Norwegian campaign, Chamberlain resigned and Winston Churchill became prime minister.

Why did Chamberlain resign as prime minister?

Members of the House of Commons saw him as an uninspiring war leader. He was blamed for loss of Norway to the Germans. Chamberlain realised that a National Government of all political parties was mandatory. In May 1940 members of the Labour Party and Liberal Party refused to serve in his proposed National Government. Chamberlain resigned realising that a National Government would not be possible as long as he was leader. He was replaced by Winston Churchill.

His business acumen raised him in the eyes of his father, who told a friend that of his two sons, "Neville is really the clever one" and but for his disinterest in politics, "I would back him to be Prime Minister".

Chamberlain's business interests did not completely fill his time, and he indulged his love of natural history and other pursuits. He spent many Sundays working in the gardens and greenhouses at Highbury. He enjoyed long walks in the countryside, and developed a passion for hunting and fishing.

Early days (May 1937 – March 1938)

Chamberlain sought to conciliate Germany, and make it a partner in a stable Europe.^[133] He believed Germany could be satisfied by the restoration of some of her colonies and during the Rhineland crisis of March 1936, had stated that "if we were in sight of an all-round settlement the British Government ought to consider the question [of restoration of colonies]".^[134] The following month, however, he wrote his sisters, "I don't believe myself that we could purchase peace and a lasting settlement by handing over Tanganyika to the Germans, but if I did I would not hesitate for a moment to do so."



Chamberlain (center, hat and umbrella in hands) leaves for home after the Berchtesgaden meeting, 16 September 1938.

Chamberlain flew back to Germany, meeting Hitler in [Bad Godesberg](#) on 22 September.^[174] Chamberlain began the meeting with a lengthy address, telling Hitler how he had secured agreement, and stated that all that needed to be decided was the details of the transfer.^[175] Hitler brushed aside the proposals of the previous meeting, stating "that won't do anymore".^[174] He demanded immediate occupation of the Sudetenland, and that German territorial claims in Poland and Hungary be addressed. Chamberlain objected strenuously, telling Hitler that he had worked to bring the French and Czech into lines with Germany's demands, so much so that he had been accused of giving in to dictators and had been booed on his departure that morning. Hitler was unmoved.^[174]

That evening, Chamberlain told Lord Halifax that the "meeting with Herr Hitler had been most unsatisfactory".^[176] The following day, Hitler kept Chamberlain waiting until mid-afternoon, when he sent a five-page letter, in German, outlining the demands he had spoken of orally the previous day. Chamberlain replied in a conciliatory manner, offering to act as an intermediary with the Czechs, and suggesting that Hitler put his demands in a memorandum which could be circulated to the French and Czechs. Chamberlain sought assurances that there would be no resort to military force whilst the matter was considered.



Unsmiling, Chamberlain (left) and Hitler leave the Bad Godesberg meeting, 23 September 1938.

Winston Churchill



Winston Churchill was born in Blenheim Palace, Woodstock, on 30th November, 1874. Prime Minister of Great Britain during most of the war, from 1940 to 1945, Churchill led Britain to victory.

During the Battle of Britain, Churchill's speeches boosted the British morale during the darkest moments.

Born	30 November 1874 Blenheim, Oxfordshire , United Kingdom
Died	24 January 1965 (aged 90) Hyde Park , London, United Kingdom
Resting place	St Martin's Church, Bladon , United Kingdom
Nationality	British Conservative
Political party	(1900–1904, 1924–1964) Liberal (1904–1924)
Spouse(s)	Clementine Churchill
Relations	Pamela Harriman , daughter-in-law Diana Churchill
Children	Randolph Churchill Sarah Tuchet-Jesson Marigold Churchill Mary Soames

I would say to the House, as I said to those who have joined this Government: **'I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat.'** We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and suffering. **You ask, what is our policy? I can say: It is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us: to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: It is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival.**

Winston Churchill Speeches

- These cruel, wanton, indiscriminate bombings of London are, of course, a part of Hitler's invasion plans. He hopes, by killing large numbers of civilians, and women and children, that he will terrorise and cow the people of this mighty imperial city ... Little does he know the spirit of the British nation, or the tough fibre of the Londoners.
 - Radio broadcast during the London Blitz, September 11, 1940. Quoted by Martin Gilbert in *Churchill: A Life*, Macmillan (1992)

- Here is the answer which I will give to President Roosevelt: Put your confidence in us. ... **We shall not fail or falter; we shall not weaken or tire. Neither the sudden shock of battle, nor the long-drawn trials of vigilance and exertion will wear us down. Give us the tools and we will finish the job.**
 - BBC radio broadcast, February 9, 1941. In *The Churchill War Papers : 1941* (1993)

- **Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.**
 - speech at Lord Mayor's Luncheon, Mansion House, London, [November 10, 1942](#)

Joseph Stalin



Stalin was very brutal Communist dictator of Russia (1928-1953). In the years before World War 2 Stalin murdered or imprisoned almost all of Russia's senior military officers, and millions of other Russian citizens, in a paranoid and unprecedented wave of political terror.

- **Education is a weapon whose effects depend on who holds it in his hands and at whom it is aimed.**
 - [Interview](#) with [H. G. Wells](#) (September 1937)
- Hitlers come and go, but Germany and the German people remain.

["The Order #55 of the National Commissar for the Defense" \(23 February 1942\)](#) Stalin said this when the enemy had reached the gate of Moscow during World War II. He called on the people not to identify all Germans with the Nazis

Ideas are more powerful than guns. We would not let our enemies have guns, why should we let them have ideas?

F D Roosevelt



President of the United States of America (1933-1945). He declared war on Japan after the bombing at Pearl Harbor, but unfortunately he did not live long enough to celebrate the Allies' victory in September of 1945. (Died in 1945, succeeded by Harry S. Truman)

When [Nazi Germany invaded](#) the Soviet Union in June 1941, Roosevelt extended Lend-Lease to the Soviets. During 1941, Roosevelt also agreed that the U.S. Navy would escort Allied convoys as far east as [Great Britain](#) and would fire upon German ships or submarines ([U-boats](#)) of the [Kriegsmarine](#) if they attacked Allied shipping within the U.S. Navy zone. Moreover, by 1941, U.S. Navy [aircraft carriers](#) were secretly ferrying British fighter planes between the UK and the [Mediterranean](#) war zones, and the British [Royal Navy](#) was receiving supply and repair assistance at American naval bases in the United States.

Thus, by mid-1941, Roosevelt had committed the U.S. to the Allied side with a policy of "all aid short of war."^[91] Roosevelt met with [Winston Churchill](#), [Prime Minister of the United Kingdom](#) on August 14, 1941, to develop the [Atlantic Charter](#) in what was to be the first of several [wartime conferences](#). In July 1941, Roosevelt ordered [Henry Stimson](#), [Secretary of War](#) to begin planning for total American military involvement. The resulting "Victory Program," under the direction of [Albert Wedemeyer](#), provided the President with the estimates necessary for the total mobilization of manpower, industry, and logistics to defeat the "potential enemies" of the United States.^[92] The program also planned to dramatically increase aid to the Allied nations and to have ten million men in arms, half of whom would be ready for deployment abroad in 1943. Roosevelt was firmly committed to the Allied cause and these plans had been formulated before the [Attack on Pearl Harbor](#) by the [Empire of Japan](#).

Roosevelt and [Winston Churchill](#) meet at Argentia, Newfoundland aboard [HMS Prince of Wales](#) during their 1941 secret meeting to develop the Atlantic Charter.



After Japan occupied northern [French Indochina](#) in late 1940, he authorized increased aid to the [Republic of China](#). In July 1941, after Japan occupied the remainder of Indo-China, he cut off the sales of oil. Japan thus lost more than 95 percent of its oil supply. Roosevelt continued negotiations with the Japanese government. Meanwhile he started shifting the long-range B-17 bomber force to the [Philippines](#).

On December 4, 1941, [The Chicago Tribune](#) revealed "Rainbow Five," a top-secret war plan drawn up at President [Franklin Roosevelt](#)'s order. "Rainbow Five" called for a 10-million man army invading [Europe](#) in 1943 on the side of Britain and Russia.

On December 6, 1941, President Roosevelt read an intercepted Japanese message and told his assistant [Harry Hopkins](#), "This means war."

Warning was sent to US Army and Naval Commanders in Hawaii, but it was not received in time due to a bureaucratic error. The message was sent via Western Union Telegram to the West Coast and RCA Radio to Honolulu, its contents in a cipher. This was the standard method of communicating with the Hawaiian Islands at the time when atmospheric conditions prevented direct communications, as was happening on that day. But the message was not marked with any urgent notations, so it was placed in the outgoing queue and sent in order received. This was intentional on the part of the Generals in Washington, it was felt that any "urgent" message sent to the commanders in Hawaii might tip off Japanese spies on the West Coast. The plan was to alert the Army and Navy in Hawaii so they could lay a trap for the attacking Japanese. As it was, the message was received at Navy Headquarters from long after the attack had concluded.

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese [attacked the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor](#), destroying or damaging 16 warships, including most of the fleet's [battleships](#), and killing almost 3000 American military personnel and civilians. In the weeks after the attack the Japanese conquered the [Philippines](#) and the British and Dutch colonies in [Southeast Asia](#), taking [Singapore](#) in February 1942 and advancing through [Burma](#) to the borders of [British India](#) by May, cutting off the overland supply route to the Republic of China. Antiwar sentiment in the United States evaporated overnight and the country united behind Roosevelt. It is at this time Roosevelt gave the famous "[Infamy Speech](#)" in which he said this: *"Yesterday, December 7, 1941 — a date which will live in infamy — the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan."*

Despite the wave of anger that swept across the U.S. in the wake of [Pearl Harbor](#), Roosevelt decided from the start that the defeat of [Nazi Germany](#) had to take priority. On December 11, 1941, this strategic [Europe First](#) decision was made easier to implement when Germany and Italy declared war on the United States.^[97] Roosevelt met with Churchill in late December and planned a broad informal alliance between the U.S., the UK, China and the Soviet Union, with the objectives of halting the German advances in the Soviet Union and in North Africa; launching an invasion of western Europe with the aim of crushing Nazi Germany between two fronts; and saving China and defeating Japan.



The "Big Three" Allied leaders (left to right) at [Yalta](#) February, 1945: Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin.



Harry Truman

Became president of the United States in the final year of World War II. He played a major role in the war's outcome by making the decision to use the atomic bomb against Japan.



33rd President of the United States

In office

April 12, 1945 – January 20, 1953

Vice President

None (1945–1949)

[Alben Barkley](#) (1949–1953)

Preceded by

[Franklin D. Roosevelt](#)

Succeeded by

[Dwight D. Eisenhower](#)

Adolf Hitler



Adolf Hitler was born on April 20th 1889 in a small Austrian town called Braunau, near to the German border.

Hitler served in the Bavarian army during World War I and rose to become the leader of Nazi Germany during World War II. Under his leadership, the Nazis sought to make Germany the most powerful empire in the world and exterminate all they viewed as inferior. In pursuit of this, he ordered the extermination of over 11 million people, the majority of them Jewish, but also including Roman Catholics, Roma (gypsies), Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, the physically and mentally handicapped, and any others who did not meet Hitler's standards for "racial purity." This mass killing is known as the **Holocaust**.

As the war was ending, and it became clear that the Germans would not win, Hitler retreated to a bunker with his mistress, Eva Braun. He arranged for their marriage and then it is believed that Eva poisoned herself while Hitler killed himself with a pistol shot on April 30, 1945.

Hitler had long admired Germany, and during the war he had become a passionate German patriot, although he did not become a German citizen until 1932. Hitler found the war to be 'the greatest of all experiences' and afterwards he was praised by a number of his commanding officers for his bravery.^[33] He was shocked by Germany's [capitulation](#) in November 1918 even while the German army still held enemy territory.^[34] Like many other German nationalists, Hitler believed in the *Dolchstoßlegende* ("dagger-stab legend") which claimed that the army, "undefeated in the field," had been "stabbed in the back" by civilian leaders and Marxists back on the [home front](#). These politicians were later dubbed the *November Criminals*.

The [Treaty of Versailles](#) deprived Germany of various territories, [demilitarised](#) the [Rhineland](#) and imposed other economically damaging sanctions. The treaty re-created Poland, which even moderate Germans regarded as an outrage. The treaty also blamed Germany for all the horrors of the war, something which major historians such as [John Keegan](#) now consider at least in part to be [victor's justice](#): most European nations in the run-up to World War I had become increasingly [militarised](#) and were eager to fight. The culpability of Germany was used as a basis to impose [reparations](#) on Germany (the amount was repeatedly revised under the [Dawes Plan](#), the [Young Plan](#), and the [Hoover Moratorium](#)). Germany in turn perceived the treaty and especially, Article 231 the paragraph on the German responsibility for the war as a humiliation. For example, there was a nearly total demilitarisation of the armed forces, allowing Germany only six battleships, no submarines, no air force, an army of 100,000 without conscription and no armoured vehicles. The treaty was an important factor in both the social and political conditions encountered by Hitler and his Nazis as they sought power. Hitler and his party used the signing of the treaty by the "November Criminals" as a reason to build up Germany so that it could never happen again. He also used the "November Criminals" as scapegoats, although at the [Paris peace conference](#), these politicians had had very little choice in the matter.

Emperor Hirohito

Emperor of Japan



The emperor and the imperial stallion Shirayuki

Entering World War II

Prior to [World War II](#), Japan invaded [Manchuria](#) in 1931 and the rest of [China](#) in 1937 (the [Second Sino-Japanese War](#)). The primary sources reveal that Emperor Shōwa never really had any objection to the invasion of China in 1937^[8], which was recommended to him by his chiefs of staff and prime minister [Fumimaro Konoe](#). His main concern seems to have been the possibility of an attack by the Soviets in the north. His questions to his chief of staff, [Prince Kan'in](#), and minister of the army, [Hajime Sugiyama](#), were mostly about the time it could take to crush the Chinese resistance.

According to Akira Fujiwara, the Emperor personally ratified the proposal by the Japanese Army to remove the constraints of international law on the treatment of Chinese prisoners on August 5.^[9] Moreover, the works of [Yoshiaki Yoshimi](#) and Seiya Matsuno show that the Emperor authorized, by specific orders (rinsanmei), the use of chemical weapons against the Chinese.^[10] During the invasion of [Wuhan](#), from August to October 1938, the emperor authorized the use of toxic gas on 375 separate occasions,^[11] despite the resolution adopted by the [League of Nations](#) on May 14 condemning the use of toxic gas by the Japanese Army.

During [World War II](#), ostensibly under Emperor Shōwa's leadership, Japan formed [alliances](#) with [Nazi Germany](#) and [Fascist Italy](#), forming the [Axis Powers](#). In July 1939, the Emperor quarreled with one of his brothers, [Prince Chichibu](#), who was visiting him three times a week to support the treaty, and reprimanded the army minister [Seishiro Itagaki](#).^[12] However, after the success of the [Wehrmacht](#) in Europe, the Emperor consented to the alliance.

On September 4, 1941, the Japanese Cabinet met to consider war plans prepared by Imperial General Headquarters, and decided that:

“ Our Empire, for the purpose of self-defense and self-preservation, will complete preparations for war ... [and is] ... resolved to go to war with the [United States](#), [Great Britain](#) and the [Netherlands](#) if necessary. Our Empire will concurrently take all possible diplomatic measures vis-à-vis the United States and Great Britain, and thereby endeavor to obtain our objectives ... In the event that there is no prospect of our demands being met by the first ten days of October through the diplomatic negotiations mentioned above, we will immediately decide to commence hostilities against the United States, Britain and the Netherlands. ”

Benito Mussolini



Prime minister of Italy (1922-1943). He joined forces with Adolph Hitler to fight the Allied powers. Eventually, he was sacked as prime minister and executed by his own people.



Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler

As World War II began, Ciano and [Viscount Halifax](#) were holding secret phone conversations. The British wanted Italy on their side against Germany as it had been in [World War I](#).^[53] French government opinion was more geared towards action against Italy; they were itching to attack Italy in [Libya](#). However, in September 1939, France swung to the opposite extreme, offering to discuss issues with Italy, but as the French were unwilling to discuss [Corsica](#), [Nice](#) and [Savoy](#), Mussolini did not answer.

Convinced that the war would soon be over, with a German victory looking likely at that point, Mussolini decided to enter the war on the Axis side. Accordingly, Italy declared war on Britain and France on 10 June 1940.^[54] Italy joined the Germans in the [Battle of France](#), fighting the fortified [Alpine Line](#) at the border. Just eleven days later, France surrendered to the [Axis powers](#). Included in [Italian-controlled France](#) was most of [Nice](#) and other southeastern counties.^[54] Meanwhile in Africa, Mussolini's [Italian East Africa](#) forces attacked the British in their [Sudan](#), [Kenya](#) and [British Somaliland](#) colonies, in what would become known as the [East African Campaign](#).^[55] British Somaliland was conquered and became part of Italian East Africa on 3 August 1940, and there were Italian advances in Sudan and Kenya.^[56]

Just over a month later, the [Italian Tenth Army](#) commanded by General [Rodolfo Graziani](#) crossed from [Italian Libya](#) into [Egypt](#) where British forces were located; this would become the [Western Desert Campaign](#). Advances were successful, but the Italians stopped at [Sidi Barrani](#) waiting for [logistic](#) supplies to catch up. During 25 October 1940, Mussolini sent the [Italian Air Corps](#) to [Belgium](#), where the air force took part in the [Battle of Britain](#) for around two months.^[57] In October, Mussolini also sent Italian forces into [Greece](#) starting the [Greco-Italian War](#). After initial success, this backfired as the Greek counterattack proved relentless, resulting in Italy losing one quarter of Albania. Germany soon committed forces to the [Balkans](#) to fight the gathering [Allies](#).



The [Italian Empire](#) in 1939

William King

Prime minister of Canada joined World War 2 beside Great Britain when the war started.

Michael Savage

Prime minister of New Zealand joined World War 2 beside Great Britain when the war started.

Robert Menzies

Prime minister of Australia, joined World War 2 beside Great Britain when the war started.

Charles de Gaulle



A French general who led the French in their fight against Germany. After World War II, he became president of France.