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GCSE



LIVING UNDER NAZI RULE

1933–1945

RICHARD
KENNETT

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Germany in war

What was the impact of the Second World War on the German people?

On Friday 1 September 1939, people all over Germany woke up and turned on the radio to listen to music. Instead, they heard the voice of Adolf Hitler. The *Führer* informed the German people that at four o'clock in the morning German troops had invaded Poland. One boy later recalled, 'With that our worst fears are realised: it is war'.

Around ten o'clock that morning, Hitler was driven the short distance from the Reich Chancellery to the Kroll Opera House where the German Parliament had met since the Reichstag fire in 1933. Inside, the Reichstag deputies were seated in the stalls and tiers of the opera house. As you can see in the photograph below, the wings of an enormous Nazi eagle stretched across what had been the stage. Rays of sun radiated from the swastika in the eagle's claws.

From his high-backed seat in front of the eagle, Goering, the Reichstag President, gave a brief introduction, and Hitler then addressed the Reichstag deputies. He revealed what most people already knew: that Germany was at war with Poland. Hitler gave a justification for the war and went on to explain that huge sacrifices would now be required from the German people. At the end, there was the usual chorus of *Sieg Heils* and Hitler left the Kroll Opera House. As he returned to the Reich Chancellery, Hitler was met by a small and subdued crowd. There was none of the usual cheering. Some people silently raised their right arm in a Nazi salute. One eye witness later recalled hearing the sound of women weeping.

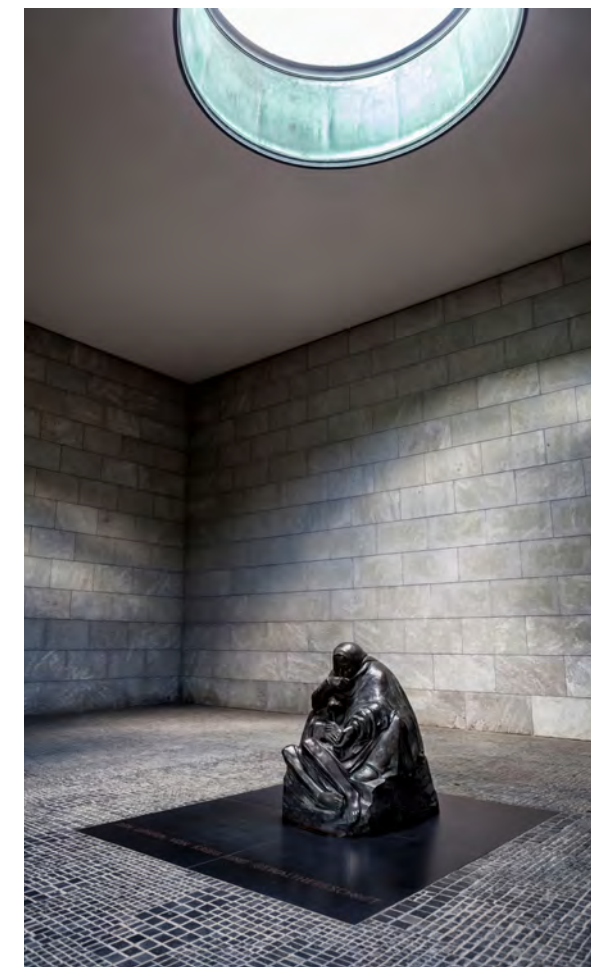
▼ Hitler announcing the invasion of Poland at the Reichstag, 1 September 1939



German people reacted to the news of the outbreak of war with a mixture of emotions. Most Germans, particularly those who remembered the horrors of the 1914–18 conflict, had no desire for another war. Some people showed little concern, assuming that German forces would quickly defeat the Poles. Others were more fearful. One seventeen-year-old schoolgirl recalled the mood on a Berlin train the morning war was announced: 'I remember that we all sat there with these frightfully serious faces. We were depressed. We had the feeling that something terrible was coming'.

And something terrible did come. In the autumn of 1939 the invasion of Poland escalated into a war across Europe. By the end of 1941 it had spread to other parts of the world. During six years of war, from the invasion of Poland in 1939 to the final defeat and surrender of Germany in May 1945, the lives of people around the world would be transformed. The war would lead to unimaginable suffering and to the deaths of millions, including hundreds of thousands of German civilians killed in allied bombing raids.

Today, Germany remembers the war and its impact on the German people at Neue Wache, the national memorial in Berlin. Inside, the entire space is empty except for a single large bronze statue in the centre. Käthe Kollwitz's 'Mother with her Dead Son' depicts a German mother weeping over the body of her child. Above the statue, an open circle in the roof allows light, rain and snow to fall on the figures below. Underneath are the words, *Den Opfern von Krieg und Gewaltherrschaft* (for the victims of war and tyranny). The statue is a powerful symbol of the loss and suffering endured by the German people during the Second World War.



▲ Käthe Kollwitz's 'Mother with her Dead Son' at the Neue Wache, Berlin

The Enquiry

our challenge in this enquiry is to plan a new one-hour TV documentary about the impact of the Second World War on the German people. The programme will be divided into three parts:

1. The changing lives of the German people, 1939–42
2. Opposition to the Nazis during the war years
3. The move to 'total war' in the period 1943–45

For each part of the programme you will need to:

- decide on the content (events, developments and people) which you think should be included
- give the programme researchers some ideas about the possible sources (film clips, photographs, documents, buildings) which you would like them to search for.

For each part of the programme you should complete a planning sheet like the one below:

Content	Sources

The impact of the war on German civilians, 1939–42

The first winter of the war was the coldest in living memory. In January 1940, daytime temperatures across northern Germany rarely rose above –5 °C. Freezing temperatures and heavy snowfall made travel almost impossible. Railway points froze and the waterways were blocked by ice. In these conditions, the most immediate difficulty people faced was a lack of coal. All factories not engaged in war production were told that they would receive no coal. Many businesses, schools, beer halls and cafés were forced to close. The inhabitants of German towns and cities struggled to heat their homes. People foraged for firewood in the parks and forests. Some people had no heating at all and simply wore their outdoor winter clothes indoors.



▲ This poster from 1942 says ‘Hamster, shame on you!’ Hamsters hoard items of food and this poster was designed to encourage people not to hoard

Shortages

In the spring of 1940 Germany began to thaw, but the war economy led to serious shortages of food and other products throughout the war years. The Nazis immediately realised that they could not rely on imports and that their own agricultural production would be greatly reduced with so many men in the armed forces. Rationing was therefore introduced from the outset.

The supply of most foods, clothing, shoes and coal was strictly controlled. The German system of rationing was extremely complicated and often caused confusion. People were allocated points according to their age and occupation, and were given colour-coded ration cards for different products. These were re-issued every month so that the authorities could revise the allocation according to supply. The ration cards of German Jews were marked with a red ‘J’. Jews were given a much lower allocation and could only shop at certain times, usually half an hour before stores closed, when most goods had been sold.

The German system of rationing ensured that most people were adequately fed during the war, but German civilians spent much time queuing and the quality of products was much reduced. Complaining could be dangerous. When a Berlin woman described skimmed milk as ‘slop’ she was reported to the authorities. Her punishment was to report to the police station every day for three months and repeat aloud in front of officials and police officers: ‘There is no skimmed milk. There is only de-creamed fresh milk.’

Women

The Nazi leadership was divided over the role of women in the war effort. Speer wanted them to work in the factories to boost production but Hitler and others still believed they should remain at home to continue their role as wives and mothers. This disagreement meant women were never conscripted into factories as they were in Britain. Despite this, the perception of women did shift during this period, particularly for young women, and they began to be seen as more than wives and mothers. The restrictions on women in education from the early Nazi period were lifted during the war. From 1939, women aged under 25 had to complete six months Labour Service before being allowed to enter full employment. Most women worked their six months in agricultural jobs.

With the restrictions on marriage loans (see page 49) lifted for people in work, more women entered the workforce.

In 1939, 760,000 women worked in war industries and this had risen to 1.5 million by 1941. However, the total number of women aged 15 to 65 was nearly 30 million. With men away at war it seemed that most women preferred to stay at home.

Bombing and evacuation

As the German armies marched across northern France in the spring of 1940, the RAF began a bombing campaign against industrial areas in the north and west of Germany. On 28 August, British planes made a first devastating attack on Berlin. During the autumn of 1940, people in many cities were faced with air raids three or four nights each week. The German government introduced a massive programme to build air raid shelters and to improve air defences in the cities. Night after night, people sought protection in the air raid shelters, but they were not always safe. For example, at the end of October, fifteen Berliners were killed when their air raid shelter collapsed.

In September 1940, the Nazis became increasingly concerned about the safety of German children in the cities. They therefore introduced a programme of evacuation known as *Kinderlandverschickung* – KLV. This system of voluntary evacuation to the countryside was first applied to the cities of Hamburg and Berlin, which were considered to be most at risk from attack. All children below the age of fourteen were eligible for a six-month stay in a rural area. Those below the age of ten were placed in families and could be accompanied by their mothers. Older children were placed in ‘camps’, which were run by the Hitler Youth.

Conditions in the camps varied enormously. The buildings could be hotels, country houses, monasteries or youth hostels. The camps were often run to a rigid daily timetable and discipline could be very strict.



▲ Women in a German arms factory, 1942

By removing children from their parents for long periods of time, the KLV programme allowed the Nazis to extend their indoctrination of German children during the war years. For this reason, many parents were reluctant to let their children go. Of the 260,000 eligible children in Berlin, only 40,000 participated.

Record

Write a planning sheet for the first part of your documentary programme ‘The changing lives of the German people, 1939–42’ like the one below. A first suggestion has been included to get you started:

The changing lives of the German people, 1939–42	
Content	Sources
Immediate impact: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• fear of aerial bombing (blackout, sandbags, children sent to country)• rationing	Photographs of people on streets of German cities, 1939 (e.g. queuing for food, painting kerbstones) Interview with someone who remembers the range of people’s reactions to Hitler’s announcement of war

▼ Ten- and eleven-year-old boys at a home of the Hitler Youth, during the preparatory service for the admission to the German Youth, April 1941



Berlin and the end of the Third Reich, April 1945



▲ A Russian tank amid the ruins of Berlin, May 1945

At the beginning of 1942 the Third Reich stretched from the outskirts of Moscow to the western coast of France. Three years later, in April 1945, all that remained was the once great city of Berlin. The Nazis were defeated by the Soviets in the east and the Allies in the west, but Berlin fought on.

On 20 April it was Hitler's birthday. He emerged from the underground bunker in the centre of the city that had become his home since January. Hitler made awards to members of the Hitler Youth for their bravery, still believing that Germany could triumph. He was deluded. The Soviet Red Army had already encircled Berlin in what would become the last great offensive of the Second World War in Europe. That evening, the Soviets began a shelling campaign that lasted for two weeks. Already devastated by British, American and French bombs during the previous four years, Berlin took a final hammering. In the final days of the war, over 2 million shells landed on the city.

Berlin faced 1.5 million Soviet soldiers and was defended by only 80,000 men. This was not the well-polished *Wehrmacht* of earlier victories but a hastily-put-together group of those who were left. Half were made up of the *Volkssturm*, with little training and few effective weapons. The other half were regular soldiers, many of whom were tired and broken from six years of war. It is not surprising that they were crushed by the Soviets.

While German troops fought on the streets of the city, the citizens of Berlin hid in cellars or bunkers, often with no toilet facilities and limited food supplies. Those who were brave enough to venture outside found a scene of devastation and danger. One Berliner, Ruth Andreas-Friedrich, wrote:

No express trains are moving in or out. All transportation is at a standstill. Postal and telegraph services have ceased. We are cut off from the world, for better or worse, at the mercy of the oncoming catastrophe.

The people of Berlin were in great fear of what would happen when the city finally fell to Soviet forces. Thousands of people took their own lives.

On 30 April Hitler faced the reality that he had refused to accept in the previous weeks: this was the end. A few hours after marrying his partner Eva Braun, they both committed suicide by swallowing cyanide capsules and then shooting themselves with pistols. The Third Reich was over. By 2 May, the Reichstag had been captured by Soviet troops and the fighting had ended. On 9 May, victory was claimed by the Allies and a peace was signed in the outskirts of Berlin.

For the people of Berlin the nightmare was not over. Four years of bombing and two weeks of intensive shelling meant that hundreds of thousands of families had lost their homes and were reduced to living in the rubble of the city. Food supplies were dangerously low and people feared starvation. Some even butchered the dead animals in the street to survive. It was the women of Berlin who had most to fear from the Soviet invasion. Hospital records reveal that between 90,000 and 130,000 women were raped in the weeks after the surrender. Many other rapes went unregistered. The horror of these last few weeks of the war would never be forgotten by the people of Berlin.



▲ Members of the *Volkssturm* with bazookas, ready to defend the city, Berlin, 1945



▼ Berliners butchering a dead horse on the street, 1945

Preparing for the examination

The World depth study forms the second half of Paper 3: World History. It is worth 20 per cent of your GCSE. To succeed in the examination, you will need to think clearly about different aspects of Living under Nazi Rule, 1933–1945 and support your ideas with accurate knowledge. This section suggests some revision strategies you might like to try and explains the types of examination questions that you can expect.

Summaries of the five key issues

Your study of Living under Nazi Rule, 1933–1945, has covered five important issues:

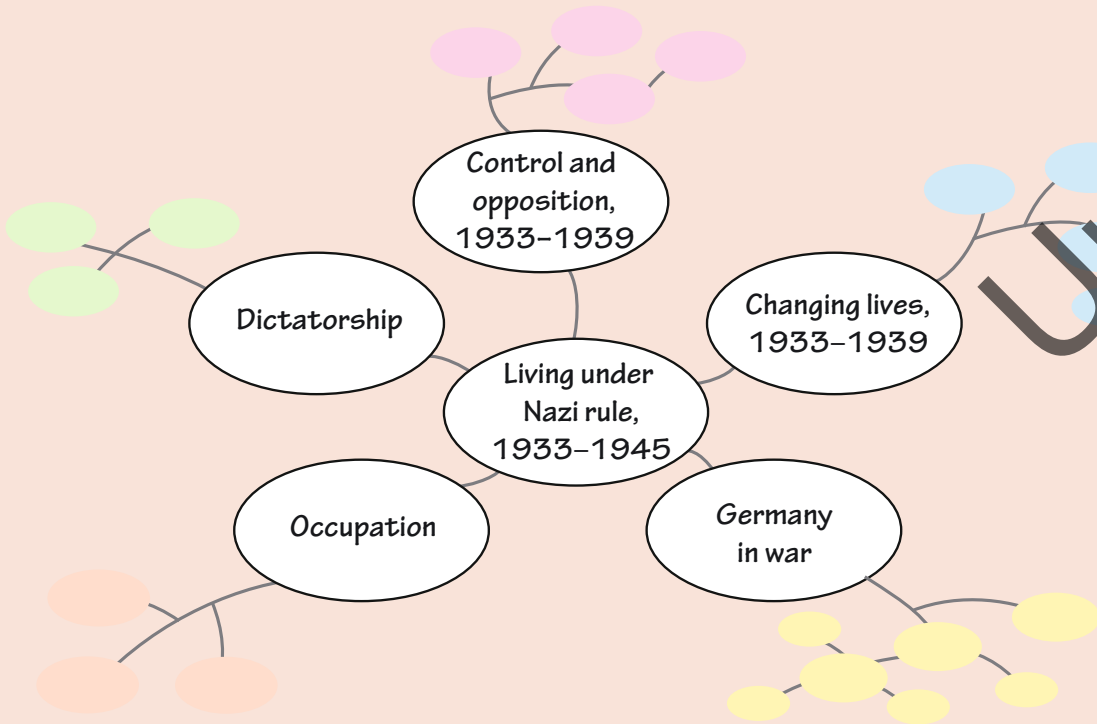
1. Dictatorship
2. Control and opposition, 1933–1939
3. Changing lives, 1933–1939
4. Germany in war
5. Occupation

In the specification for your GCSE course, each of the five issues is divided into three sections. We divided each enquiry in this book into three stages

to match these sections and to help you build your knowledge and understanding step by step. Now you can use your knowledge and understanding to produce a detailed and accurate summary for each of the five issues. You will also need to be clear about how the five issues are connected. Here are four suggestions for structuring your revision notes and showing the connections between the issues. Choose the one that is best for you, or use a variety if you prefer.

I. Mind maps

A mind map on A3 paper (or even larger) is a good way to summarise the important points about a particular issue. It allows you to show connections between different points.



2. Charts

If you find it easier to learn from lists, a summary chart for each issue you have studied might be best for you. You can use the format shown below or design your own. Just make sure that you include clear summary points for each of the three sections in each enquiry you studied.

Issue : Control and opposition		
Issue : Changing lives		
Issue : Germany in war		
Issue : Occupation		
Issue : Dictatorship		
Hitler and the Nazi Party	Establishing the dictatorship	Achieving total power
•	•	•
•	•	•
•	•	•
•	•	•
•	•	•
•	•	•
•	•	•
•	•	•
•	•	•

3. Small cards

Small cards are a flexible way to make revision notes. You could create a set of revision cards for each of the five main issues / enquiries you have studied. It would be a good idea to use a different colour for each set of cards.

