**MAJOR BATTLE OF WORLD WAR II**

Axis Powers Make Early Gains: 1939-1941

Two days after Adolf Hitler ordered his armies into Poland, Great Britain, and France declared war on Germany. The British and French thereby ended their policy of appeasement, which for five years had enabled Hitler to seize territory in Eastern Europe without opposition. But before the British and French could send help to Poland, the German “blitzkrieg” overran the country with tanks, infantrymen, dive bombers, and other aircraft.

After the fall of Poland, the German war machine swept through northern and western Europe. Denmark and Norway surrendered, then Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. Allied forces in France found themselves in a desperate situation. With German armies closing in, the Allies retreated to Dunkirk, a port city along the northern coast of France. From there, more than 300,000 British, French, and Belgian troops managed to escape