

Timeline of World War II: 1931–1941 ^[1]

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Prelude to war: 1931–1938

Historians consider World War II to have begun when Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. But events in the 1930s in Europe, Africa, and Asia — including several smaller wars and military actions — paved the way. (You may also want to read again about the [Treaty of Versailles](#) ^[2] that ended the First World War but set the stage for the Second.)

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The war begins: 1939

[In 1939](#) ^[11], German aggressions in Europe finally sparked open war.

German advances, 1940–1941 ^[12]

[In 1940](#) ^[13], Germany quickly occupied most of Europe and invaded the Soviet Union. Only Britain held out in the West, and the United States was gradually drawn into the conflict.

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