

The Netherlands in World War 2

The leader of Germany's military in 1939 was Adolf Hitler. He blamed Jews for Germany having lost the 1st World War. This gave people an enemy to blame which is why so many supported the war against the Jews. These people were called Nazis. Nazis believed that Jews were not people.

After losing the 1st World War, Germany wanted more land, so they invaded Austria and Czechoslovakia and no one said anything or tried to stop them. When it became clear they were going to invade Poland, the Prime Minister of Britain, Neville Chamberlain, told the Germans that doing so would be a declaration of war. Germany sent 1.5 million troops into Poland overnight, and Britain and France declared war against Germany on 3 September 1939.

Hitler wanted more living space for Germans and wanted to make the Slavs - the people of Poland - slaves.

Nazi's invaded the Netherlands in May 1940, even though they had opted to remain neutral, hoping to avoid the war. On 14 May 1940 Rotterdam was completely destroyed in a bombing raid and the Netherlands surrendered. The Dutch government and Royal family escaped to London.

During the 4-day campaign, 2300 Dutch soldiers were killed and 7,000 wounded, while over 3,000 civilians also died. Even so, 7,000 German soldiers were wounded, 2,200 died and 1,300 sent to Britain as Prisoners of War.

Hitler was very interested in the Netherlands because it would be a good place to have an airport from which to launch air attacks on Britain.

Dutch civilians were forced to "volunteer" to build airports to work in factories, which were often bombed by Britain. They began building 10 military airports, complete with decoy airfields and plywood planes. Their attack strategy became defensive pretty quickly and over 5 years, they lost 20,000 airmen and 6,000 planes went down over their country.

The Netherlands had a slow but useful resistance force. They would raid distribution centres where ration books were kept, so that they could get them to those in hiding so they could get their food. Different resistance groups did different things. Some spied for British Forces, some produced fake ration cards and money, some sabotaged railroads and phone lines and others shared food with those in hiding.

Due to the lack of wilderness and the density of people it was hard to do anything too secretly, so one of the most dangerous activities was hiding refugees like Anne Frank and Corrie ten Boom.

"Onderduikers" were the people who hid Jews, enemies of the Nazi's, even an entire hospital floor.

By 1940 Germany had occupied Norway, France and the Low Countries - Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. By 1941 they occupied all of Poland, killing nearly 3,000,000 Polish Jews and another 3,000,000 Poles.

In February 1941 the Nazis' sent a small group of Jews to Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp. The only protest against persecution of Jews happened in Amsterdam. The Dutch reacted with the February Strike, and while it didn't achieve much and its leaders were executed, it did set back the plan to get the Dutch people on side. The strike lasted 2 days and on Feb 26th, 300,000 people joined, before the 3 organisers were shot and 12 sent to prison.

Most of the Dutch Jews were sent to concentration camps with the help of the Dutch people. About 70% of the Dutch Jews were killed.

The winter of 1944 - 1945 was very harsh and led to about 30,000 casualties from starvation, exhaustion, cold and disease. The Germans had cut off food and fuel shipments to the 4.5 million people in the Western Provinces.

In May 1945, Canadian forces entered The Netherlands from the east, liberating the east and north but the west had to wait longer. After the war, people seen to have been collaborators with the Germans were shamed in public and women who had had relationships with German men had their heads shaved and painted orange.

By the end of the war 201,901 Dutch men and women had died due to the war. 107,00 were holocaust victims. Many who joined the German army were used to clear minefields, and between 1946 - 1948 all German passport holders (3691) had to leave The Netherlands. In retaliation 100,000 Dutch passport holders were forced to leave Germany.

In 1948 this stopped and even though the war had ended in 1945, The Netherlands state of war with Germany only officially ended in 1951.

The Dutch commemorate those who died during the war on "Dodenherdenking" or National Remembrance Day.



Adolf Hitler	Nazis	Declaration of War
London	airport	resistance force
fake ration cards	starvation	orange
	1951	Remembrance

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