

Lesson 10: Battle of Berlin and Defense of the Reich



Essential Questions:

- Why was the Battle of Berlin so important to ending WW2?
- How did the lives of Germans civilians change during the last months of WW2?

Overview: The Battle of Berlin was the final major battle of World War II in Europe, fought in April-May 1945. It saw the Soviet Union's Red Army and Polish forces, aided by Western Allied units, attack and capture the German capital city of Berlin, which was defended by the German Army and the remnants of the German-allied forces. The battle ended with the fall of Berlin and the surrender of the remaining German forces, leading to the end of the war in Europe. The battle resulted in heavy losses on both sides, with an estimated 300,000 Soviet soldiers and tens of thousands of German soldiers killed. The fall of Berlin also marked the end of Nazi rule in Germany.

The Defense of the Reich was the strategic defensive campaign of the Luftwaffe (German Air Force) during World War II to protect the airspace of Germany and the Axis-occupied territories from Allied air attacks. The campaign was launched in response to the Allied strategic bombing campaign against German industrial, military, and civilian targets, which began in 1940 and intensified as the war progressed. The Defense of the Reich was primarily carried out by the Luftwaffe's fighter forces, but also involved anti-aircraft artillery, radar, and other ground-based defense systems. Despite the efforts of the Luftwaffe and the other branches of the German military, the Defense of the Reich ultimately proved unsuccessful in stopping the Allied bombing campaign, which severely damaged Germany's industrial capabilities and military infrastructure.

Materials:

Reader Boards

Messerschmitt Me-109 G-14

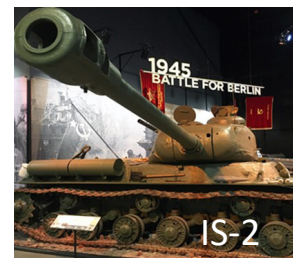
IS2

8.8 Flak 36

Kommandogerat 40



Me 109



IS-2



8.8 Flak



K.40

Procedures:

Show students images of the Me-109 G14 and ask them to describe what they see.

As a class, create a list of the key features of the aircraft, such as its engine type, wing design, and armament.

Share the list of the Me-109 G14's specifications with the class and discuss any notable or interesting points.

This artifact is painted to represent Major Erich Hartmann, was a German fighter pilot during World War II and is considered one of the most successful fighter pilots in history. He flew more than 1,400 combat missions and is credited with shooting down 352 Allied aircraft, making him the highest scoring fighter pilot of all time. Hartmann was a member of the elite Jagdgeschwader 52 unit and was known for his skill and bravery in combat. He was captured by the Soviets at the end of the war and spent ten years in a Soviet prison before being released and returning to West Germany.

Have students work in pairs or small groups to research one aspect of the Me-109 G14 in more detail. For example, one group could research the aircraft's performance and another group could focus on its role in World War II. Have each group present their findings to the class.



IS-2 Josef Stalin

With this artifact we do know a little more history of the vehicle, which a snippet can be found on the reader board. It did serve in the Soviet 50th Guards battalion, which did serve in the Battle of Berlin.

The IS-2 Josef Stalin tank was a Soviet heavy tank that was used extensively during World War II. It was designed to be a breakthrough tank, capable of penetrating enemy defenses and opening up gaps in their lines for other Soviet units to exploit. The IS-2 was armed with a 122mm gun and had thick armor, making it a formidable opponent on the battlefield. It saw extensive use on the Eastern Front, where it was used to great effect against German forces.

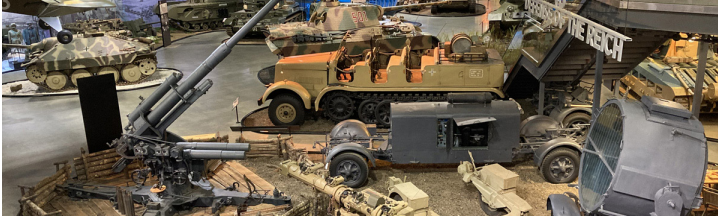
Explain the context leading up to the Battle of Berlin, including the Allied powers' efforts to defeat Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union's push towards Berlin.

Discuss the role of the IS-2 tank in the Soviet offensive, including its use in breaching enemy defenses and supporting other Soviet units.

Have students read the reader board for the IS-2 and with a docent's assistance pass around the dummy round.

Have students work in pairs or small groups to research and present on one aspect of the IS-2 tank, such as its design, capabilities, or deployment in the Battle of Berlin.

Encourage students to use online resources to gather information and present their findings to the class.



8.8cm Flak 36(FlugAbwehrKanone 36)

The German 8.8cm Flak 36, or simply referred to as the “88” by the Allies, was a powerful anti-aircraft gun that was used extensively by the German military during World War II. It was designed to engage enemy aircraft at high altitudes and was also effective against ground targets. The 8.8cm Flak 36 was mounted on a variety of platforms, including trucks, trains, and naval vessels, and was used in a variety of roles, including air defense, artillery support, and coastal defense. The 8.8cm Flak 36 was highly regarded by the Germans for its effectiveness and was used on all fronts during the war.

Explain the military and political situation facing Germany at the end of World War II.

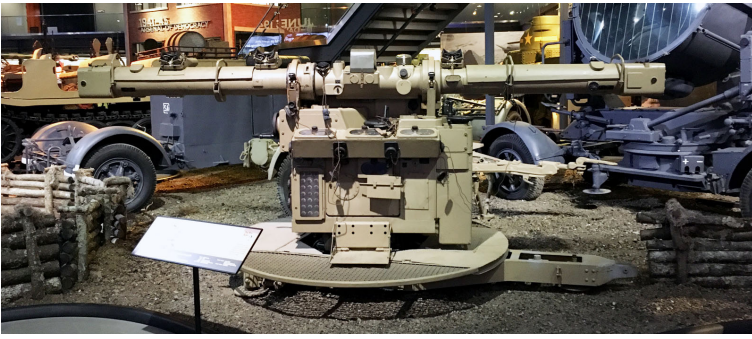
Explain in the final weeks of the war, the elderly and children from ages 10-16 (both genders) were used to help defend Germany and were sometimes used to crew guns like these against Allied aircraft and ground troops. On the Eastern front and in defense of Berlin these children were viewed as combatants and were treated as such.

Read this to the students:

Throughout the duration of the war, Germany’s youth groups transitioned from gender-divided clubs that secured Germany’s future strength to back-up armies composed of miniature recruits and, ultimately, gun fodder. Whereas once German youth represented the longevity and strength of the Reich, each child quickly became disposable when all future hopes were dashed by impending defeat. Dr. Emma Butcher

Ask the students to reflect on this and compare it to what they saw in War Clouds as to the view of the youth in Germany from Hitler’s rise to power to 1945.

Discuss their responses.



Kommandogerät 40

It was of a stereoscopic design and had a four-meter optical tube. It was designed to work with heavy FlaK 18s and Flak 40s. In order to operate effectively, the Kommandogerät 40 required at least a crew of five men. Inside were two telescopic lenses, operator lenses, and adjustable mirrors.

By calculating the length of the tube and the angle at which the lenses were positioned, the crew could pinpoint where the target aircraft was. The optics used in the design were high quality like most made in Germany at the time. Furthermore, the Kommandogerät 40 was a crucial part of any FlaK defense and was met by praise from many a fire-control team.

Discuss the importance of devices such as this to the defense of Germany from Allied bombings. Explain 29% of Germany's war budget was for air defense compared to the Luftwaffe's 6%. Explain with the increased success of Allied daylight bombing missions over enemy strategic targets such as oil refineries and factories that keeping the Luftwaffe fueled and supplied was becoming difficult.

Have students use maps on the story board to trace the progression of the Allied advance into Germany.

Ask students to brainstorm a list of the challenges that Germany faced at the end of World War II.

As a class, discuss the effectiveness of these strategies and tactics. Were they successful in slowing the Allied advance? Why or why not?