# Ukraine

Formerly a republic located in the southwestern Soviet Union and today an independent country. In 1920 most of the Ukraine was incorporated into the Soviet Union, while portions of western Ukraine were annexed to Poland (Volhynia and Eastern Galicia) and Romania (Bukovina). On the eve of World War II, there were 1.5 million Jews living in the Soviet Ukraine.

When war broke out in September 1939, the Soviet Union annexed western (Polish) Ukraine, according to the terms of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. In June 1940 the Soviet Union took control of Bukovina and Bessarabia annexing them to the Soviet Ukraine. With its new, wider borders, the Ukraine now housed 2.4 million Jews.

In June 1941, Germany attacked its former ally, the Soviet Union. By October of that year the German army had occupied almost all of the Ukraine. Many Ukrainian citizens, who were extremely antisemitic and had viewed the Soviet authorities as unlawful occupiers, happily welcomed their German "saviors," whom they believed would grant them full independence. Many Ukrainians volunteered to join the German army and police, and a Ukrainian SS division was created as part of the *Waffen*-SS. However, the Germans never had any intention of allowing the Ukraine to become an independent country. The Nazis placed most of the Ukraine under a civil administration called *Reichskommissariat* Ukraine, and the remainder under a military administration. Eastern Galicia was added to the German administration in central Poland, known as the *Generalgouvernement*; the Jews there shared the fate of the Polish Jewish community. Bukovina and Bessarabia were turned over to Romania, which was allied with Germany. Many of the Jews in those areas were deported to the Ukrainian region of Transnistria, where tens of thousands died of disease, malnourishment, exposure, ill treatment, or were murdered.

In mid-1941, as German troops reached the Ukraine, persecution of Jews commenced immediately. In Bukovina and western Ukraine, the local Ukrainians, led by the Ukrainian Auxiliary Police, launched pogroms in which

thousands of Jews were massacred and much Jewish property was either destroyed or looted. The Germans were more than happy to take advantage of Ukrainian antisemitism, and encouraged the Ukrainian savagery.

 Additionally, along with the German army, arrived *Einsatzgruppen*---mobile killing units whose main task was to annihilate Jews and Communists. In the region that had been the Soviet Ukraine prior to the war, the *Einsatzgruppen* initiated a pattern of events, leading up to the extermination of the Jews: following the German arrival in each city or town, the Jews living there were ordered to don the Jewish badge (see also Badge, Jewish), a *Judenrat* was established, Jews were confined to certain streets or a ghetto, and some were sent to forced labor. After a short time, executions began: Jews were rounded up by German and Ukrainian police - sometimes also by German army units - and taken to empty quarries, ravines, or antitank ditches. Upon arrival, they were shot by the *Einsatzgruppen.* Those Jews who attempted to escape on the way were murdered on the spot, as were Jews who could not keep up with the rest. In some cases, the Germans used Gas Vans to murder the Jews in the Ukraine. The largest murder operation carried out by the *Einsatzgruppen* took place in a ravine called Babi Yar, outside of the city of Kiev. In two days at the end of September 1941, 33,371 Jews were shot to death. In many communities Jews offered resistance or fled to the forests and swamps where they engaged in Partisan activities.

  The liberation of the Ukraine by the Soviet army began when the German forces were defeated in the Battle of Stalingrad, and was completed in August 1944 with the liberation of the western Ukraine.