



Chapter 7

The Gordian Knot of War

1939 - 1945



A state of war was declared by England and France against Germany on September 3, 1939.

That evening, Hitler sent a dispatch to Mussolini which read, you kindly assured me recently that you believe you can help me in some fields. I accept this in advance with sincere thanks. But I also believe that, even if we now march down separate paths, destiny will bind us one to another. If National Socialist Germany were to be destroyed by the western democracies, Fascist Italy would also face a hard future. I personally was always aware that the futures of our two regimes were bound up, and I know that you, Duce, are of exactly the same opinion. Please accept once more my thanks, Duce, for all the support you have given me in the past, and which I ask you not to refuse me in the future.

No one felt this declaration and the fear of its consequences for mankind more than Benito Mussolini. As an insider to the affairs of these nations, he knew of the devastation and chaos which would likely follow unless these leaders realized the agony and suffering these actions would bring, not to the military alone, but to millions living in their cities. He knew warfare first-hand from his trench wounds experienced in 1917 and strained every faculty of his personality and intelligence in an effort to avoid this onslaught of death and destruction.

Italy remained neutral for nine months, although Mussolini was pressured daily from his own party, the western nations and the Germans to commit his country and his military to this conflict.

He knew Hitler was right in his communique when he said that if Germany was defeated, the Western Democracies would indeed bring an end to the Fascist government in Italy. He also knew from Italian intelligence sources that President Roosevelt in America was looking and planning for an entry into this conflict raging in Europe against Germany. He had promised Churchill that the United States would find a way. They did.