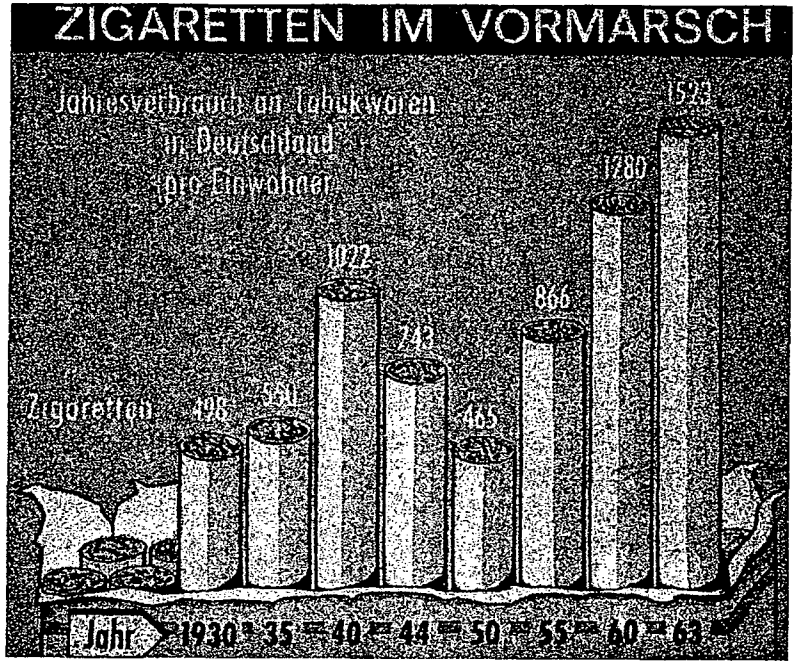

FIG. 6.24. German cigarette consumption declined by about half from 1940 to 1950, primarily as a result of wartime deprivations. Source: *Der Spiegel*, January 22, 1964, p. 61.

Postwar poverty further cut consumption. According to official statistics, German tobacco use did not reach prewar levels again until the mid-1950s. The collapse is dramatic: German consumption dropped by half from 1940 to 1950; American consumption in this same period nearly doubled (see fig. 6.24 and, again, table 6.1).

It is important to recognize, of course, the possible sources of bias in such figures. In both the German and the American case, the numbers indicated are domestic sales recorded for taxation purposes (both therefore exclude production for export). In the German case, there are several reasons official records may have underestimated actual tobacco use in the immediate postwar period. For one thing, official statistics could not take into account the flourishing black-market trade in foreign tobacco. American cigarettes were highly prized in the postwar period. American brands ("Amis") were commonly used as currency, and elderly Germans today recall a single American cigarette's selling for as much as five or even seven marks (versus several pfennigs for German brands). Tobacco smuggling was rampant: in 1949, an estimated 400 million American cigarettes found their way into Germany every month. As late as 1954 two billion Swiss cigarettes—a quarter of that country's production—were estimated to have been smuggled into Germany and Italy.[218]

Smuggling was fostered by the fact that German cigarette manufacturing had sunk to only about 10 percent of prewar levels, mainly owing to the industry's inability to secure raw tobacco from outside Germany.[219] Shortages remained so severe that American authorities decided to ship tobacco, free of charge, into Germany as part of the Marshall Plan. Twenty-four thousand tons were shipped in 1948, followed by another sixty-nine thousand tons in 1949. The net cost to the U.S. government was on the order of seventy million dollars; the benefit, at least for American tobacco firms, was a gradual shift in German tobacco tastes from the traditionally favored black tobacco to the milder, blond-Virginia blend (the latter was also purportedly more popular among women). American tobacco companies were understandably pleased with the arrangement.[220]

Two other factors can be mentioned, both of which indicate that tobacco consumption may have been higher than is recorded in official figures. The first is that, by contrast with later years, cigarettes in the immediate postwar period were often smoked down to the very end. Discarded cigarette butts were gathered and smoked, and one has to conclude that the amount of tar, nicotine, and ash inhaled per cigarette produced or smuggled was significantly higher than in less desperate years (cigarette butts contain disproportionately high concentrations of harmful substances). Such factors can be important in calculating the cancer consequences of the tobacco habit. In the 1950s, for example, Richard Doll and others figured that American smokers had a significantly lower cancer risk per cigarette smoked, in consequence of the fact