

Peace In Our Time

SFX: bluster and hubbub from inside the House of Commons at Westminster

'We have suffered a total and unmitigated defeat'.

SFX: uproar; men's voices shout incoherently

Winston Churchill spoke these words to a House of Commons jubilant that war had been avoided. The resultant howls of outrage so engulfed the chamber that it was some time before he could continue.

SFX: voices die down

Churchill – a politician who had shown so much promise and won early influence – was now out of power and out of favour. His old-fashioned views about Empire made him seem a figure that fortune had passed by.

The date was 5 October 1938, and he was denouncing the Munich Agreement, which Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain had signed a few days earlier. The agreement ceded the Sudetenland to Nazi Germany. This was a region of Czechoslovakia with the country's best military defences and industrial wealth, and key railway junctions.

SFX: House of Commons returns

In one of his most powerful speeches, Churchill summed up:

I do not grudge our loyal, brave people who were ready to do their duty no matter what cost, who never flinched under the strain of last week – I do not grudge them the natural, spontaneous outburst of joy and relief when they learned that the hard ordeal would no longer be required of them at the moment; but they should know the truth. They should know that we have sustained a defeat without a war, the consequences of which will travel far

with us along our road; they should know that we have passed an awful milestone in our history, when the whole equilibrium of Europe has been deranged, and that the terrible words have for the time being been pronounced against the Western democracies: 'Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting.' And do not suppose that this is the end. This is only the beginning of the reckoning. This is only the first sip, the first foretaste of a bitter cup which will be proffered to us year by year unless by a supreme recovery of moral health and martial vigour, we arise again and take our stand for freedom as in the olden time.

Outraged Chamberlain supporters lobbied to remove Churchill from Parliament. He avoided being disowned by his own local party branch by a single vote.

What Churchill did not say, and what Chamberlain also knew, was that by signing the Munich agreement Chamberlain had prevented the leaders of the German Army instigating a coup against Hitler and his Nazi regime.

MX in - theme

This is *Treason*, the remarkable story of Claus von Stauffenberg and the plot to assassinate Hitler.

Episode three, "Peace In Our Time".

MX fade

Let's go back to the start of 1938, the year when so much changed for Europe.

MX1 in - low drones

Germany's relations with Austria were strained. There had been political union immediately following the First World War, but the victorious powers had required separation of the two nations. In 1934, the Nazis had staged a coup in Austria that failed, in the course of which they assassinated the Austrian chancellor, Engelbert

Dolfuss. Hitler publicly disowned this embarrassing failure, but his supporters kept stirring up trouble.

SFX - trouble on the streets; distant explosions, gunshots, tear-gas cannisters; people angry and frantic

By the end of 1937, Nazi underground terror was in full swing in Austria.

Telephone booths exploded, tear-gas bombs were thrown, and the Nazis arranged mass demonstrations. When the police intervened, Berlin protested that the Nazis were being persecuted.

SFX - The German countryside

Hitler invited Austrian chancellor Kurt von Schuschnigg to his private estate and southern headquarters, the Berghof.

For the first two hours of the official meeting, Hitler harangued his guest with his version of Austrian history. 'The whole history of Austria,' he said, 'is just one uninterrupted act of high treason.'

MX2 in - tense strings

Hitler peppered his diatribe with threats: 'I am going to solve the Austrian problem one way or the other.' Later he said: 'You don't seriously believe you could stop me or delay me for even half an hour, do you? Who knows? Perhaps you will wake up one morning in Vienna to find us there – just like a spring storm.'

Schuschnigg responded calmly and quietly to each accusation and taunt.

After a strained lunch, at which Hitler declaimed at length about himself, Joachim von Ribbentrop, the new German Foreign Minister, presented Schuschnigg with the German demands. Amongst other claims, Austria must appoint a Nazi as Minister for National Security, with complete control over the police force. Nazis would be

permitted to develop their 'activities'. All Nazis in custody were to be freed within three days. This expressly included the Nazis who had assassinated the previous Austrian chancellor.

It was an intolerable intrusion into Austria's national affairs. When Schuschnigg refused, Hitler lost control. Schuschnigg and his entourage expected to be arrested at any moment.

Eventually, confronted with blustering threats of immediate military attack, Schuschnigg signed the agreement which Hitler placed before him.

MX out

After he returned to Vienna, Schuschnigg desperately sought to enlist support from Italy, France and Britain. None would sustain what they had required less than two decades earlier – the independence of Austria.

To show the world that he had internal support for an independent Austria, Schuschnigg called for a national plebiscite on the nation's future.

Hitler was furious about this 'dirty trick'. The last thing he wanted was a popular expression of support for Austrian independence. Despite the lack of any plan for attack, Hitler sent tanks and troops rolling towards the border.

SFX - tanks

The Austrian nation hung by a thread. Within the country the Nazi plague was loosed. At the border the German Army manoeuvred like a pacing predator.

Hitler delivered an ultimatum: postpone the plebiscite for three weeks, or the Wehrmacht will invade. Early that afternoon, the Austrians agreed.

Then the Germans sent a further ultimatum demanding the resignation of Schuschnigg and his entire government, and the appointment of the Nazi Arthur

Seyss-Inquart as Federal Chancellor, otherwise the German Wehrmacht would march in that very evening.

Shortly after four in the afternoon, the Austrian government resigned.

SFX - a ringing phone; it's answered

But President Miklas did not wish to appoint a Nazi as Chancellor. Göring bellowed at Seyss-Inquart over the telephone to go with the German military attache and threaten Miklas with immediate invasion by the troops massing along the border. German radio delivered a stream of hysterical propaganda - a bloody Communist revolt with hundreds of casualties, while the Austrian government had lost all control.

MX3 in - quiet Bavarian music

In reality everything was quiet, save for Nazis beginning to show themselves.

Shortly before midnight, President Miklas appointed Seyss-Inquart chancellor.

Göring now told Seyss-Inquart to request the assistance of German troops to restore order in Austria. Seyss-Inquart, still not aware of the part he was required to play, protested: 'Well, that's one thing I need not do because everything is quiet here in Austria, so far.' The only threat to peace and quiet on the streets were the Nazis themselves.

The Germans ignored him, announcing that he had invited German troops to enter the country.

At dawn on 12 March 1938, at many points along the frontier, German troops crossed into Austria.

SFX - a military parade

Newsreel1: "Tonight the world trembles, torn between conflicting forces..."

Newsreel2: "The shadow of the goose step falls on Austrian soil..."

Newsreel3: “A centuries-old boundary has been obliterated, and anxieties shift to a new region...”

Newsreel4: “As German troops swarm across frontiers in their first offensive since 1914...”

Newsreel5: “There were scenes of enthusiasm. And from the balcony, Dr. Seyss-Inquart, the man appointed by Hitler, saluted in answer to the greetings of the crowd...”

Newsreel6: “Even small children have learned the Nazi salute...”

Seyss-Inquart was chancellor of Austria for less than two days. The new Austrian government passed a law that made Austria ‘a province of the German Reich’. The SS arrested Schuschnigg - who would not be freed for more than seven years. Hitler made his triumphant entry into Vienna.

Even as the celebrations took place, the new regime began its mass arrests, and the former Austrian Minister for War was assassinated.

With Austria incorporated into the Reich, Hitler immediately turned his gaze on Czechoslovakia.

MX4 in - low drones

It was a new country in 1938, carved out of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire that was dismembered after the Great War. France was treaty-bound to support her, and Britain to support France. Although the Western Powers had weakened the moral strength of their position by abandoning the Rhineland and Austria, few thought that they would let Hitler have his way with Czechoslovakia.

Hitler railed against the treatment of the German-speaking residents of the Sudetenland – the area of Czechoslovakia bordering Germany. A new world war seemed possible.

On 28 May, Hitler announced to the assembled leaders of the Wehrmacht, including Chief of Staff, Colonel General Ludwig Beck, his 'unalterable decision to destroy Czechoslovakia by military action within a foreseeable time.'

The officers received the news with great disquiet. The following day Beck sent a strongly-worded memorandum to his Commander-in-Chief, firmly emphasising the military dangers of the proposed action.

Beck had been a soldier for forty years. He was highly cultured, a considered person, and a devout Christian. He was intelligent, well-connected, and a military thinker of some standing. His personal opinion, expressed on a number of occasions to others and with some prescience, was that the war was unwinnable.

SFX - small plane

In July 1938, Hitler's personal aide traveled to London to sound out the British for his master.

The British Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, warned that the solution of the Sudeten question by force would not be calmly accepted by the British people.

When this warning brought no change to Hitler's instructions to prepare for invasion, Beck made a life-changing decision.

MX in - Beck's theme

He gave orders to his subordinates to prepare plans for a coup. He made contact with senior military and police figures making preliminary arrangements with them for concerted action against the Nazi government.

However, a coup was a last resort for Beck, and he continued to agitate and push for action. He suggested a meeting of all commanders-in-chief and commanding generals with Hitler, at which they should unanimously advise that the proposed

attack doomed Germany. They should force Hitler to cease his war preparations. If he would not, they should resign as a body.

While the generals were unanimous that Beck was right, the idea of mass resignation was downplayed.

Hitler convened a meeting of his generals. When two of his commanders pointed out the weakness in the west, the Führer began screaming at them. He was determined to solve the Sudeten question that autumn.

General Beck had had enough. He was being asked to oversee preparations for a war which he regarded as immoral and which he believed would doom Germany. He tendered his resignation.

Beck probably hoped that others would resign, but no one did. When his resignation was accepted a few days later, Hitler asked that it be kept secret 'for foreign policy reasons'. Naïvely, Beck complied, robbing his gesture of any public impact.

With war preparations in full swing, the resistance sent an emissary to London. The man chosen was Count Ewald von Kleist-Schmenzin.

Kleist was a conservative Pomeranian landowner – and an early and implacable foe of the Nazis. For this he was on a list to be assassinated on 'The Night of the Long Knives'. Forewarned, he escaped.

In London, Kleist made a powerful impression with his covert and risky visit. He urged Britain to say 'no' to Hitler. He asked for some proof that Britain and France were not bluffing – if possible a public speech by a leading British statesman appealing to all Germans who do not want war.

The next day Chamberlain received the report of his visit, and said that some form of compromise with Hitler should be compared with the course Kleist proposed. He opined that Kleist was clearly anxious to stir up his friends in Germany to an attempt to overthrow Hitler. Therefore, Chamberlain thought, he was prejudiced and a good

deal of what he said should be discounted. The most Chamberlain would do was to summon Sir Nevile Henderson, the calamitous British ambassador in Berlin, to London for discussions on the Sudeten question.

Kleist went on to see Churchill – then out of office, but still a person of some influence. Churchill agreed to write a letter warning that Britain would fight, and the democracies of the world with her, if Germany touched the Sudetenland. To protect the identity of the recipient, Churchill addressed it simply 'My dear sir'. The letter did reach Hitler, but made no impression. Kleist and the other resistance members regarded his journey as another failure.

In late August, Hitler appointed General Franz Halder as Beck's successor as German Chief of Staff..

Halder was a correct but intense officer of the German General Staff. He lacked the high-mindedness of Beck, but he was a man of action who, like Beck, was horrified at the prospect of a general war, and had a majority of the senior officers behind him.

With the possibility of war hardening into probability, pressure mounted for the generals to depose Hitler. Senior figures in the civilian and military resistance took Beck's plans and began plotting joint action against the Nazis.

MX in - Resistance theme (intro)

The group included Halder, Colonel Hans Oster, Chief of Staff of the *Abwehr* - military counter intelligence – General Witzleben, and Major-General Hoepner, commander of the division later renamed Sixth Panzer Division, among many others. This group were not outsiders – but rather a glittering array of respected and strategically-placed figures.

The plotters proposed to have Hitler arrested and placed on trial, where he would be declared insane by a panel of psychiatrists. But not just Hitler – Himmler, Göring, Goebbels and Ribbentrop would all be arrested. Borrowing from Nazis' propaganda

for the Night of the Long Knives, the conspirators agreed to announce that they had uncovered a plot by Himmler and Göring to seize power.

To escort General Witzleben when he arrested Hitler, a raiding party, or assault squad, was formed under Captain Friedrich Heinz, who assembled several-dozen men. He armed them, and secreted them in safe houses in Berlin, where they waited for the order to move.

But Heinz had a different – and more realistic – plan which he did not disclose to the senior commanders. Heinz and the younger men around him, in a plot within the plot, did not want the arrest and public trial of the Führer – they wanted assassination. ‘Hitler alive has more weight than all the troops at our disposal’ Heinz said. He was determined that when they entered the Reich chancellery, they would provoke an incident and shoot Hitler. No senior officer was to know in advance.

MX out

From July to September 1938 the German resistance tirelessly pressed on the British the need to stand firm against Hitler’s demands. They used all manner of connections at very senior levels. Their messages reached Chamberlain repeatedly.

SFX - back gate opening and closing; foot steps over cobblestones; Big Ben rings out in the distance

Their efforts culminated on 7 September, when a man went through the rear garden gate and into No 10 Downing Street. He was London-based German diplomat, Theo Kordt. He had come by arrangement to meet Lord Halifax, British Foreign Secretary, to deliver a detailed message from Berlin.

Kordt told Lord Halifax that he was the delegate of an influential group in German military and political circles who wished to prevent the war with Czechoslovakia planned by Hitler, and who, subject to certain conditions, had the power to do so. If the British delivered firm resistance to German demands, ‘the leaders of the German

Army' would mount a coup and put an end to Hitler once and for all. They wanted the British to make clear that war with Czechoslovakia would mean war with Britain.

The message concluded, 'if the desired statement is made, the leaders of the Army are ready to proceed against Hitler by force of arms.'

Even if the coup failed, the prospects were that Germany would be left in disarray and unable to offer a credible military threat.

Halifax passed the message on to Chamberlain.

At last the British government acted. On 9 September the government issued a warning message in unmistakable language:

SFX - morse code message

Should force be used to solve the Sudeten question and should France, at Czech request, fulfil her duties as ally, a general conflict must ensue, from which Great Britain could not stand aloof.

The message was sent to the British ambassador in Berlin, Sir Nevile Henderson. He was instructed to give this message to Ribbentrop – the German foreign minister, and ask the minister to pass it forthwith to Hitler.

Henderson demurred. He urged that the message not be delivered to Hitler, as it might drive him to 'ill-considered measures'. Halifax and Chamberlain wavered.

The message was never delivered.

MX in - Resistance theme (instrument1)

Resistance members met at Halder's apartment to discuss arrangements for the coup. Halder told them that the plans were such that he would have 48 hours' notice of the order to march on Czechoslovakia. Once that order was given, he would

launch the coup. But tying the coup to this order made their action dependent on someone else's timetable.

In a speech at a party-day rally in Nuremberg, Hitler threatened to invade Czechoslovakia and enforce his demands 'by hook or by crook':

I am a National Socialist, and as such I am accustomed at every attack to strike back immediately.

This was the signal for an uprising in the Sudetenland. Nazis began shooting and several people were killed. However, the Czech government rapidly restored order.

But it was too late.

Newsreel: "The Prime Minister has sent the German Fuhrer and chancellor the following message: 'In view of increasingly critical situation, I propose to come over at once to see you, with a view to trying to find a peaceful solution...'"

Hitler later confessed he was 'thunderstruck' by Chamberlain's action. The French Premier Édouard Daladier had difficulty believing the news, telephoning Chamberlain to find out if it was true.

President Franklin D Roosevelt observed to those around him that Chamberlain was for 'peace at any price'. He predicted that France and Britain would abandon Czechoslovakia and 'wash the blood from their Judas Iscariot hands'.

The Czechs were astonished.

The news left the conspirators upset and in disarray. If the British backed down there was no need for an attack on Czechoslovakia – the coup would not proceed and they could not replace Hitler.

But many were optimistic, preferring to think that Chamberlain was coming to Germany to make clear in no uncertain terms that an attack on Czechoslovakia would mean war.

Newsreel: “And so we still say honour to Mr. Chamberlain through all the doubts and aspersions of these latter days...”

Chamberlain: “European peace is what I am aiming at. And I hope this journey may open the way to get it.”

SFX - plane landing; fanfare at the aerodrome

And so, on 15 September 1938, at the age of 69, Chamberlain took his first flight, and journeyed to see the German chancellor. Hitler did not even go to meet him at the aerodrome. He arranged Chamberlain’s reception by an SS guard of honour, composed of the tallest men that could be found.

SFX - German countryside

At the Berghof, in a staged gesture, Hitler waited at the top of the steps and reached down to shake Chamberlain’s hand.

After Hitler delivered the usual tirade about the Czechs, and the need for Germany to secure its rights by force, Chamberlain acknowledged the justice of Germany’s claim to the Sudetenland. He asked Hitler to consider the peaceful cession of the Sudetenland. He requested no precipitate action before a reply. Hitler appeared to consider this, then – knowing there was no proposal to invade for another fortnight – magnanimously agreed to wait for an answer.

On 18 September the British and French forwarded a joint communiqué to the Czechs, urging them to accept that the Sudetenland would need to be ceded to keep the rest of the country safe.

President Edvard Beneš of Czechoslovakia was disgusted. Czechs across the country denounced the proposal. The Czech government formally gave its reply to the Anglo-French note, refusing to cede the Sudetenland.

Chamberlain was furious. At 2 o'clock in the morning of 21 September, he sent a message to President Beneš.

The Anglo-French proposal, Chamberlain wrote, was the only way to avoid war, and the Czech reply placed the full responsibility for the war on them. Britain would not fight and France would not come to the aid of her ally.

The Czechs now knew they stood alone against Germany. They could fight a hopeless war and see many of their people killed and their nation overrun, or they could cede the Sudetenland. Hoping to save something of his country, President Beneš capitulated to the Anglo-French proposal.

Jubilant, Chamberlain flew to Germany again on 22 September – this time to Bad Godesberg on the Rhine.

Chamberlain called on Hitler and presented the proposed solution to him.

Hitler now had exactly what he had demanded, and Chamberlain expected hearty acceptance. But this was not a normal negotiation, and Chamberlain did not understand the man he was dealing with.

MX in - Nazi theme (ep3 alternate)

After a pause, and speaking quietly, Hitler said: 'I'm exceedingly sorry, but after the events of the past few days this solution is no longer of any use.' It seemed that what Hitler really wanted was war.

As Chamberlain conferred with him, messengers (probably staged) came in reporting the deaths of further Sudeten Germans. Hitler worked himself into a fury. He demanded occupation of the Sudetenland by the German Army at once.

Chamberlain went back to his hotel. All the next day the two leaders exchanged notes, but negotiations were deadlocked. Chamberlain prepared to leave.

At the last moment, Hitler invited Chamberlain to a final meeting at 10:30 at night. But there was no modification in Hitler's demands. Instead, he proposed a new timetable – the Czechs were to leave Sudetenland by 26 September (in just two days) and German troops were to occupy on 28 September.

As they conferred, Ribbentrop brought in the news that the Czechs had ordered mobilisation.

After angry exchanges between the two leaders, Hitler changed his mood. He generously offered to alter the dates so that the occupation would occur on 1 October. Chamberlain agreed to submit the terms to the British and Czech governments.

Chamberlain: After my visit to Germany, I realised vividly how Herr Hitler feels that he must champion other Germans. He told me privately that after this Sudeten German question is settled, that is the end of Germany's territorial claims in Europe.

MX in - neutral drones

It is remarkable that throughout these negotiations Chamberlain was aware that as soon as Hitler gave the order to attack Czechoslovakia the Army would launch a coup against him. He also knew that Hitler must be ignorant of his peril. The knowledge gave Chamberlain an immense strategic advantage in the negotiations – for all Hitler's bluster, Chamberlain knew that he would not be able to carry out his threat.

Perhaps Chamberlain didn't believe the intelligence he had been given. But a senior diplomat had delivered the message in extraordinary circumstances, and it capped a series of messages from highly respected Germans who were members of the resistance. Perhaps he had some scruples about a move against the legal head of state. His thinking remains obscure, but in negotiations of such far-reaching significance – with the whole peace and order of Europe at stake – the weapon he held was potentially decisive.

Chamberlain lived with the legacy of his father, Joseph Chamberlain, having fomented the Boer War, and his half brother, Austen Chamberlain, having been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. He seems to have been transfixed by the vision of himself bringing peace to a divided world.

On 24 September Chamberlain flew back to London. Hitler returned to Berlin. For the conspirators it was important to have Hitler in Berlin, for that was where they were able to act against him. There was renewed hope amongst the resistance that Hitler would order an attack, and they would depose him.

The next day the British cabinet refused Hitler's new terms.

The Czechs also refused. The British government gave France assurances of support if she became involved in war as a result of fulfilling her treaty obligations with Czechoslovakia. Preparations for war in Britain and France were expedited.

On 26 September the British government issued a press release, at last displaying the firm attitude the emissaries from the resistance had repeatedly urged. It promised action should Czechoslovakia be attacked.

In meetings with British emissaries, Hitler insisted on his previous terms, and said he must have an affirmative reply by two o'clock in two days' time.

Britain and France partially mobilised.

[Hitler: \(speech in German\)](#)

Hitler spoke at the *Sportspalast* in Berlin,

With regard to the problem of the Sudeten Germans, my patience is now at an end. I have made Herr Beneš an offer which is nothing but the execution of what he himself has promised. The decision now lies in his hands: peace or war. He will either accept this offer and now at last give the Germans their freedom, or we will go and fetch this freedom for ourselves. The world must

take note that in four and a half years of war, and in the long years of my political life, there is one thing which no one could ever cast in my teeth: I have never been called a coward. Now I go before my people as its first soldier, and behind me – this the world should know – there marches a different people from that of 1918. We are determined! Now let Herr Beneš make his choice!

SFX - parade fanfare; it melds into boos and jeers

The next day, a mechanised division paraded through Berlin and past Hitler who stood on the balcony of the Reich chancellery. The parade was a chance for the people to show their support for the troops and for the war – and for the Führer. But the crowd would not cheer. Many bystanders turned their backs. There were hardly any Hitler salutes. The mood against war was unmistakable.

Chamberlain: How horrible, fantastic, incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas masks because of a quarrel in a far away country between people of whom we know nothing.

On September 28, 1938, Hitler's deadline was to expire at two o'clock. His order to attack Czechoslovakia seemed inevitable. Preparations for war proceeded apace in Germany, France, Britain and Czechoslovakia.

Across Berlin and beyond, the rebels stood ready to carry out their insurrection.

MX in - The Resistance theme (tension)

The conspirators had obtained plans of the Reich chancellery. That day Erich Kordt (brother of Theo) arranged for the large double doors behind the sentry at the entrance to be opened to facilitate the raid. Incredibly, there was no sign of any extraordinary security measures surrounding the Führer.

Heinz's raiding party, sixty to eighty men with weapons ready, waited in nearby houses for the word to attack.

Halder was at his headquarters in the Bendlerstrasse, confident in his plans and his officers.

One division assigned an important task was the 1st Light Division of Wuppertal. Halder arranged with its commander, Major General Erich Hoepner, to manoeuvre the division so as to bar the SS from the approach roads to Berlin.

Newly appointed to Hoepner's Division was 30-year-old Captain Claus von Stauffenberg. Officers senior to him in the division did not know of the plot, but Claus was very well connected. He may well have known before they did. He certainly knew of it the following January.

Witzleben was on duty at his headquarters, ready to move troops to surround the Reich chancellery, arrest Hitler, and take over the city.

Never again would the conspirators have a better chance of success. They had ample troops at their disposal under the command of determined and very senior officers. They had an excellent pretext for making the coup. They were likely to receive support from a community which did not want war. Hitler suspected nothing. In the Reich chancellery he was at the Army's mercy.

As General Halder later wrote: 'There was no possibility of a hitch. All that was needed for a completely successful coup was Hitler's presence in Berlin.'

MX out

Then, the resistance heard astonishing news: Chamberlain had asked Mussolini to intervene. In response, the Duce had asked Hitler for a delay of 24 hours in the deadline. Less than an hour before the deadline, Hitler agreed to delay the attack, provided there was a conference in Munich the following day with the British, French, Italian and German leaders.

Then, to the dismay of the conspirators, Hitler drove out of the Reich chancellery to travel to Munich.

SFX - Hitler's car drives away into the distance; heavy gates close

He was beyond their reach.

The next day Mussolini, Chamberlain, Daladier and Hitler met in Munich to discuss the future of Czechoslovakia. The Czechs were not invited.

After midnight, in the early hours of 30 September, the assembled powers signed the Munich agreement, under which they ceded the Sudetenland – with Czechoslovakia's best military defences and industrial wealth, and with key railway junctions – to the German Reich. The Germans and Italians left the British and French to tell the Czechs of the manner in which their country was broken up.

At the conclusion of the conference, Chamberlain handed Hitler a declaration he had drafted which stated 'We regard the Agreement signed last night ... as symbolic of the desire of our two peoples never to go to war with one another again.' Without discussion, or serious consideration, Hitler signed.

Chamberlain's return to Britain was the occasion of triumph. Cheering crowds met him at Croydon Aerodrome where he waved the declaration he and Hitler had signed.

Chamberlain: "This morning, I had another talk with the German chancellor Herr Hitler. And here is the paper which bears his name upon it as well as mine..."

Later, outside No 10 Downing Street, he was met with more jubilation. 'My good friends, this is the second time in our history that there has come back from Germany to Downing Street peace with honour. I believe it is peace for our time.'

Opinion makers rushed to praise him: 'No conqueror returning from a victory on the battlefield has come adorned with nobler laurels,' eulogised *The Times*.

One of the few who condemned the agreement was Churchill, leading to his speech in the House of Commons.

SFX - guffaws and hubbub from the House of Commons

On 1 October 1938, the day after the Munich agreement, German troops marched unopposed into the Sudetenland. Claus von Stauffenberg's division crossed the border a few days later.

Some Czechs cheered. Many were deeply distressed.

For Hitler, it was a propaganda triumph. Yet again he had won a great victory without war. Now he seemed invincible.

MX in - dark drones

The conspirators knew they had lost their chance to mount a successful coup. Hitler was untouchable. A few days later the dispirited plotters met in Witzleben's home, where they gloomily burnt their plans and maps. Without the oxygen of confidence in success, an insurrection suffocates.

MX - drones continue with a thematic melody

The British ambassador to Germany, Sir Neville Henderson, wrote to Lord Halifax on 6 October 'by keeping the peace, we have saved Hitler and his regime'.

Hitler did not stand still. On 21 October he secretly issued orders to prepare 'to eliminate the rest of Czechoslovakia'.

MX fade - drones end to signal end of chapter

SFX - bricks smashing glass; screaming; general mayhem

On 9 November, in what has become known as *Kristallnacht* ('night of broken glass') organised Nazi gangs smashed and burnt Jewish synagogues, businesses and homes across Germany, hunting, beating and killing the fleeing owners. At least 91 Jews were murdered in this organised pogrom. For the first time, Jews were arrested on a mass scale and sent to concentration camps. Some 30,000 Jews were sent to Buchenwald, Dachau and Sachsenhausen. Hundreds died within weeks of arrival.

The Western Powers had failed to restrain Hitler. *Kristallnacht* quickly proved the real nature of his regime – and provided a foretaste of what was to come.

SFX - mayhem fades into German countryside and footsteps over pine needles

In January 1939, Claus von Stauffenberg was strolling in the forest with a friend. He expressed great concern about 'the situation'. Claus mentioned the 1938 attempt at a coup, and said any further plans would have to coalesce around Beck.

He said of Hitler: 'That fool is bent on war ... and is prepared to squander the flower of Germany's manhood twice in the same generation.'

Meanwhile, Hitler stepped up his rhetoric against the remnants of Czechoslovakia, manoeuvring to split the Slovaks away from the Czechs, so he could gobble up each in turn. On 14 March 1939, a year to the day after Hitler's triumphant entry into Vienna, the Slovak Diet declared independence from the Czechs. President Emil Hácha, the elderly nonentity who had taken over the vacant Czech presidency after the Munich agreement, came to see Hitler. He was kept waiting until one in the morning before he was received. Hácha pleaded for the independence of the Czechs. Hitler responded with characteristic brutality, coldly stating that his troops were already standing by to invade.

When Göring threatened to destroy Prague by bombing, the tired old man collapsed in a faint. Hitler's physician revived him with an injection. Hitler received Hácha again at four in the morning, watching as his wretched victim accepted that resistance was hopeless, and signed away his country.

Next morning, German forces marched into the rump of Czechoslovakia.

MX in - downbeat German music (public domain)

Once again the Allies refused to fight. It seemed they were determined never to do so – the Rhineland, Austria, the Sudetenland, and now all of Czechoslovakia.

Chamberlain told the House of Commons that the British guarantee of Czech borders

remained the position until yesterday. But the position has been altered since the Slovak Diet declared the independence of Slovakia. The effect of this declaration is to put an end by internal disruption to the State whose borders we had proposed to guarantee, and His Majesty's Government cannot accordingly hold themselves bound by this obligation.

Hitler drove in triumph into Prague.

MX out

In several private conversations, Claus von Stauffenberg condemned Hitler's move. In Claus' view, Hitler had broken his word and violated the nationality principle.

Again breaking his promise to make no further territorial claims, Hitler soon after confronted the government of Lithuania, demanding the return of Memelland, on Poland's eastern border. The Lithuanians smartly submitted. A week after his entry into Prague, Hitler traveled to Memel to welcome the latest addition to the Reich. Things were looking very uncomfortable for Poland.

On 31 March 1939, Chamberlain, now exposed as having completely misread Hitler and his plans for Czechoslovakia, announced to the House of Commons that Britain was prepared to support Poland in the event of a German invasion. The French gave a similar guarantee.

Hitler did not believe it. He flew into a rage when he heard the news, and, as if to illustrate his contempt, three days later issued a secret directive to the armed forces to prepare for the invasion of Poland.

Although Hitler's designs on Czechoslovakia had been deeply unpopular in Germany, this was not true of Poland. Few aspects of the Treaty of Versailles stung the Germans more than the loss of large swathes of territory to this 'new' nation. Hitler knew that recovering those lands would be popular. This was a war he could sell.

MX in - Resistance theme (instrument3)

For the German resistance, the popularity of Hitler's cause made their position more difficult. Recruiting conspirators for treason against an admired ruler was harrowing. Senior army commanders were understandably reluctant to take the ultimate step against Hitler.

The German resistance again sent a series of emissaries to London. Diplomat Adam von Trott, met with Halifax and Chamberlain to urge greater opposition to Hitler. He found Chamberlain's response 'icy'. Fabian von Schlabrendorff, an active opponent of the regime, visited Churchill and senior figures in the foreign office. And there were others, each of them urging Britain to make clear she would fight, but they could no longer guarantee any sort of coup, let alone a successful one.

General Hammerstein repeatedly invited Hitler to inspect his fortified command on the French border, where he intended to have the Führer meet with a 'fatal accident'. Hitler would not be lured there.

The relentless slide into war continued in a nightmare of futile meetings, pointless telegrams, and hopeless diplomatic communiqués.

Newsreel1: "Attention of the world is focussed on Europe and the events which are transpiring there."

Newsreel3: “While the talking stage has not been completely abandoned, the grim preparations for the worst goes on...”

Czech ambassador: “If Hitler attempts another bloodless victory for vulgar gangsterism and the world including the United States of America let him get away with it, I have no illusions about the future of the European civilisation. And what’s more we all deserve what is coming to us.”

On the evening of 31 August 1939 an SS squad dressed in Polish army uniforms. They staged an ‘attack’ on German frontier posts from the Polish side. To add verisimilitude, the SS took a dozen or so men from concentration camps and clothed them in Polish uniforms. In SS communications they were referred to as ‘canned meat’. The SS then administered fatal injections before shooting the prisoners. They dumped the bodies on the German side of the Polish border. At eight o’clock an SS officer seized a German radio station, broadcast a proclamation in Polish, fired shots, and left one of the uniformed bodies. Members of the press were invited to view this evidence of a Polish ‘incursion’.

SFX - a peaceful night ruined by the distant sound of tanks on the move

Meanwhile, division after division of German troops, artillery and tanks moved through the beautiful clear night to the Polish frontier.

At dawn, on Friday 1 September, German troops attacked. The Second World War had commenced.

Newsreel1: “This is the national program from London. These are today’s main events: Germany has invaded Poland, and has bombed many towns. We hope to give the first part of Mr. Chamberlain’s statement later in this news.”

Even now the British and French, like rabbits transfixed by an oncoming headlight, hesitated to respond. Finally, on Sunday 3 September, they declared war on Germany.

Chamberlain: "I am speaking to you from the cabinet room at 10 Downing St. This morning, the British ambassador in Berlin handed the German government a final note stating that unless we heard from them by 11 o'clock, that they were prepared at once to withdraw their troops from Poland, a state of war would exist between us. I have to tell you now that no such undertaking has been received, and that consequently this country is at war with Germany."

MX in - Claus' theme

Claus von Stauffenberg's division waited by the frontier on 1 September. The following day it moved forward to pursue retreating Polish forces. When the news of the British and French declaration of war reached them, it depressed the officers in his unit. It looked like it might be a long war.

On 4 September an officer of Claus's division, without investigation, had two Polish women shot on suspicion of giving signals to Polish artillery batteries. Claus had been friendly with the officer, but did not rest until he was court-martialled.

Claus's division moved on, encircling, engaging, until it reached the outskirts of Warsaw. The Germans had learned the military lessons of their defeat in the First World War. Concentration of military force is no new principle, but mechanization of warfare gave further dimensions to the principle. Tanks and infantry sprinted forward, closely supported by artillery and dive-bombing aircraft. The co-ordinated manoeuvres produced devastating results, encircling and dividing opponents before they had time to react. In its account of the Polish campaign in September 1939, *Time* magazine coined the term 'blitzkrieg' (lightning war).

SFX - chaotic and furious warfare; thunder and lightning in background

The Western Powers had declared war pursuant to their guarantee of Polish borders, but they took no practical steps to support Poland. Hitler had left only a light screen of troops in the west, gambling that the French would not act. The French did launch a half-hearted attack in the Saar region, meeting almost no opposition. They thought they might mount a major offensive for 17 September.

[MX in - Polish polka \(public domain\)](#)

But on that day, with the Polish army having ceased to exist as an effective fighting force, the Soviets hurried forward from the east. In accordance with the secret clauses of the German-Soviet non-aggression pact signed in August - occupied their share of the country – as well as the three Baltic States. The French concluded their offensive could not save Poland, and quietly called it off.

On 27 September, Warsaw capitulated.

[MX distorts and slows down](#)

[Poland's final message \(in Polish\)](#)

[MX in - show theme](#)

Hitler did not stand still. He was encouraged by his comprehensive defeat of the Poles and by the bovine inactivity of France and Britain. On 9 October he announced to his Commanders-in-Chief his intention to mount an invasion in the west by mid-November. His aim – the destruction of their western enemies.

On 1 November Claus von Stauffenberg, elated with the military success of the German fighting machine, was permanently appointed to the General Staff – part of a widely respected elite. Broad crimson stripes down the seams of his trousers denoted the General Staff officer. He was to serve as quartermaster to the Sixth Panzer Division.

While he continued to serve his country with distinction, his personal feelings for the Nazi regime and the SS festered. He believed in sacred Germany, but was becoming increasingly doubtful and resentful of the totalitarian regime he was serving, and the megalomaniac who was its leader.

Treason is written and narrated by me, Brian Walters. Script editing, original music, sound design and editing is by Sam Loy.

You can learn more about Claus von Stauffenberg and German Resistance with the book, *Treason*. Available through Apple Books or the website brianwalters.com You can find a link in the episode's show notes.

All the very best, and may you find the inspiration you need in your life.